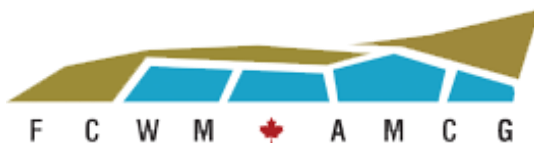


World War I  
**Day-by-Day**  
1914 – 1918

# May 1917

# Mai 1917

La première guerre mondiale  
**De jour en jour**  
1914 – 1918



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# 1 May 1917

## The Crisis of Military Manpower in Canada

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In mid-1915, Ottawa had set the Canadian Expeditionary Force at 150,000. Faced with large casualties and the realization that there would be no quick end to the fighting, Prime Minister Borden expanded Canada's commitment to 200,000 in October and to 500,000 at the end of 1915, which was not sustainable on a population base of less than eight million, when the CEF required 75,000 replacements each year to even its losses.

The 1911 Census counted 1.5 million men aged 20 to 45 with 402,000 unmarried males aged 20 to 32. Of the 1.5 million men, 200,000 worked in the munitions industry and 917,000 were on farms.

By the end of 1916, recruitment had plunged, especially for the infantry. Borden returned from Europe well aware that a massive political problem loomed.

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Further information: Tim Cook, [Warlords: Borden, Mackenzie King and Canada's World Wars](#)



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## 2 May 1917

### Smuts' Report to the Imperial War Cabinet

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**Lieutenant General Jan Smuts**, Commander-in-Chief in Africa until January 1917, was the South African representative at the Imperial War Cabinet in London.

After the bloody campaigns of April, the Imperial War Cabinet turned to Smuts for his opinion regarding war strategy, including the situation on the Western Front.

Smuts' report was discussed on **2 May 1917**.

Lloyd George had anticipated a recommendation against another big offensive, at least until the United States Army arrived in 1918.

Although Smuts considered Haig's optimism that he could break the Germans in another offensive to be unrealistic, Smuts concluded that standing on the defensive would be fatal; it was essential to keep pounding the German defences.

Smuts also saw potential in another “sideshow” in Palestine, provided that it was fully supported. However, when offered command in Palestine, Smuts declined.

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Further information: David Woodward, “The Imperial Strategist: Jan Christiaan Smuts & British Military Policy 1917-18,” *Military History Journal*, December 1981.



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## 2 May 1917

### The Drayton-Acworth Report

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Canada's railway industry is in financial crisis. Overexpansion in the early 20th century has created debt problems for the railway companies.

When Canada enters the war, they are unable to handle the economic effects. Labour shortages, high wage demands, immigration restrictions, limited resources, and a decline in foreign investment take their toll.

Both the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern can no longer sustain themselves without government support.

Prime Minister Borden is forced to find a permanent solution. He sets up a royal commission in 1916, appointing Chief Railway Commissioner, **H. L. Drayton**, British railway economist, **W. M. Acworth**, and New York Central Railway President, **A.M. Smith**, to investigate the problem.

**On 2 May, 1917**, their findings are submitted to Parliament. **The Drayton-Acworth Report** recommends amalgamation of the railway companies under one national railway corporation, while Smith's minority report calls for continued privatization. Parliament agrees with nationalization.

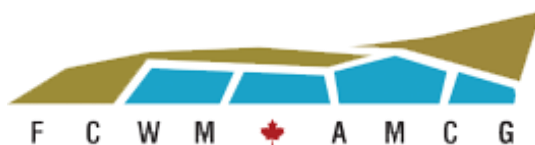
This creates the **Canadian National Railway Company**, now known as the CN.

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Sources: Report of the Royal Commission, 1917. <[https://archive.org/details/1917v52i12p20g\\_1279](https://archive.org/details/1917v52i12p20g_1279)

Canada Transportation Agency, *100 Years at the Heart of Transportation* <https://www.otc-cta.gc.ca/eng/publication/100-years-heart-transportation-historical-perspective?wbdisable=true>

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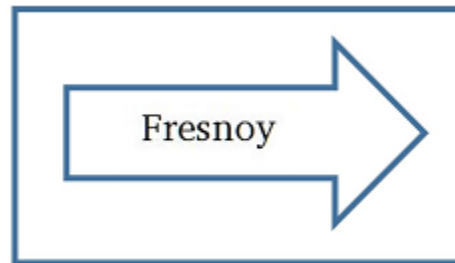
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## 3 May 1917

### Third Battle of the Scarpe, 3-4 May 1917

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The limited successes of the Second Battle of the Scarpe (23-24 April) do not deter Field Marshal Haig from pushing again on the east of Arras. Nine days to repair is all what you can hope for...

**On 3 May 1917**, Third Army surges forward again, seeking to reach and penetrate the Quéant-Droncourt Switch, the line that the German have established to protect the French railroad network that they use for their logistics in the area they occupy since 1914.

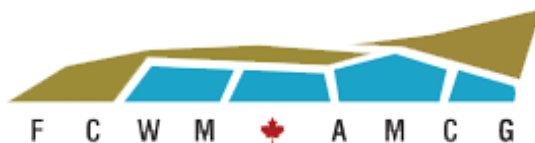
This battle is short-lived. All along the front, the advance is stopped in its tracks by the defences. There are only two locations where some success is noted: in the Canadian area at **Fresnoy**, to the east of Vimy, and at **Bellecourt**, south of the Scarpe, by the Australians.

This battle is seen by many as a Black Day for the British Army. Increasingly, notice is being made that the Dominions are doing better than the British. Many attribute this to the sense of initiative that the Dominion soldiers show. They do not wait for their officers to direct them to take action and their sense of confidence makes them better improvisors when the plan has to be ditched.

There is also a sense that the failure of the French in the south is making free-spirited soldiers more critical of same-same tactics that do not produce results. If the French, from this day, are showing serious signs of demoralization, the Dominion troops sense that their instincts are not wrong...

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McKee, Vimy, p. 231-3.



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## 4 mai 1917

### Une Conférence à Paris pour évaluer les dommages

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**Le 4 mai 1917**, les autorités politiques et militaires de la France et de la Grande-Bretagne se réunissent à Paris pour parler de stratégie.

Le point le plus important de cette conférence est que le leadership français est considérablement ébranlé par l'échec de l'offensive de Nivelle, qui a choqué l'opinion publique et miné la crédibilité d'un gouvernement récemment formé.

Il est devenu clair, mais encore peu reconnu, que des manquements

disciplinaires ont commencé à surgir dans certaines divisions de l'Armée française. Des protestataires en uniforme énoncent des exigences quant aux conditions auxquelles les soldats sont soumis. Ils exigent des considérations de leurs officiers supérieurs.

Du côté britannique, l'effet est contraire. Le premier ministre Lloyd George et son Cabinet, qui avaient mis leur confiance sur Nivelle au point de forcer Haig à se plier aux directives du général français, réparent maintenant les brèches de confiance par des aveux réciproques.

Dorénavant Haig pourra compter sur son gouvernement pour appuyer ses recommandations militaires.

Celui-ci ne tarde donc pas à retourner à ses ambitions en Flandre, où il désire aller pousser jusqu'aux ports belges.

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Hankey, Supreme Command, II: 629-31.



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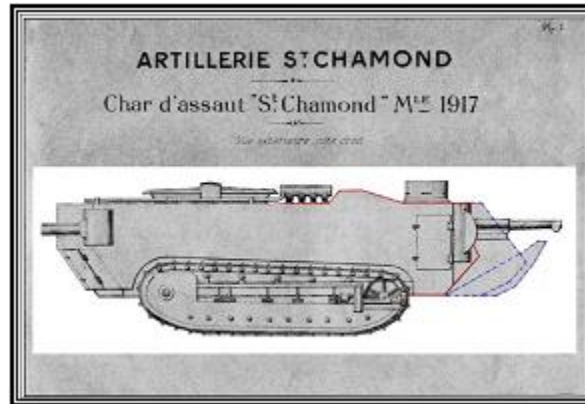
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# 5 mai 1917

## Les Chars français font une trouée

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**Le 5 mai 1917**, des chars Schneider et Saint-Chamond sont engagés à l'assaut du plateau de Laffaux (Aisne) où ils permettront de conquérir et détruire efficacement tranchées et nids de mitrailleuses.

C'est au cours de cette attaque que les chars français participeront à leur deuxième bataille. Quarante-huit chars seront engagés : 32 Schneider mais aussi 16 nouveaux chars Saint-Chamond. D'un poids de 23 t, ce dernier est équipé d'un moteur de 90 chevaux, armé d'un canon de 75 et de quatre mitrailleuses. Il est servi par 9 hommes d'équipage.

L'opération est déclenchée à 04h45. Les chars accompagnent les marsouins<sup>1</sup> de la 3<sup>ème</sup> Division d'Infanterie. Leur participation est une réussite : ils nettoient les tranchées et détruisent les nids de mitrailleuses. A l'issue de deux jours de lutte acharnée, 12 blindés seront perdus et 55 hommes hors de combat (3 tués).

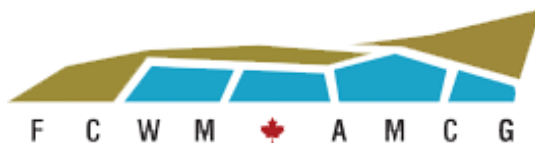
— Une issue plus favorable qu'à la première bataille de Berry-au-Bac.

---

**Marsouins** : appellation triviale des militaires servant dans l'infanterie de marine des troupes de marine française.

Sources : <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/le-moulin-de-laffaux>

Pour en savoir plus : [http://rbmn.free.fr/Saint-chamond\\_1917.html](http://rbmn.free.fr/Saint-chamond_1917.html)



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## 6 mai 1917

### Albert Ball: Dernière victoire

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**Le 6 mai 1917, le capitaine Albert Ball**, premier grand as britannique, signe sa dernière victoire.

Né à Nottingham le 14 août 1896, Albert Ball a construit sa légende en à peine un an: il abat son premier avion allemand le 16 mai 1916.

Entre cette date et sa mort à 20 ans, le 7 mai 1917, il comptabilise 44 victoires.

Il meurt à Annœullin (près de Lille), après que son avion se soit écrasé dans des circonstances troubles après une escarmouche avec une unité allemande conduite par le frère du « Baron Rouge » (Lothar von Richthofen).

À cause du manque de visibilité (a-t-il été abattu ou a-t-il été victime d'une panne ?), Albert et Lothar se seraient touchés accidentellement. Lothar parvient à se poser et s'en tire avec une blessure à la hanche.

Albert a moins de chance : il percute le sol et, quand on le sort des débris de son appareil, il expire dans les bras d'une jeune fermière.

Situé à mi-distance entre Lille et Lens, le collège Albert Ball d'Annœullin est le seul collège en France qui porte le nom d'un as de l'aviation britannique.

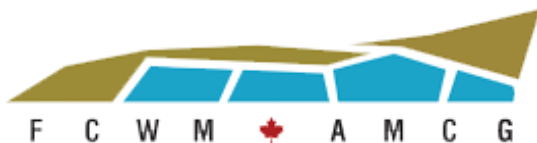
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Sources:

Sweetman, *Cavalry of the Clouds*, p. 118-20.

<http://www.ville-annoeuillin.fr/albert-ball,fr,3,67.cfm>

Pour en savoir plus : <http://fandavion.free.fr/Ball.htm>



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## 7 May 1917

### Falkenhayn's Strategic Discussions in Constantinople

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Although Ottoman forces have repulsed two British attacks in Palestine, Turkey's strategic position is weakening.

Ottoman armies were defeated at Baghdad and they have lost control of the Hejaz.  
Turkey badly needs a success.

**On 7 May 1917, General Erich von Falkenhayn**, the former Chief of the German General Imperial Staff, arrives in Constantinople to explore the feasibility of a German-supported offensive to recapture Baghdad.

He tours Turkish forces in Syria and Iraq, and concludes that such a Baghdad venture is, in principle, feasible.

It is thus decided to proceed with the *Yilderim* (Lightning) offensive, requiring two Turkish army corps, plus a German "Asia Corps," a special composite unit numbering 6,500.

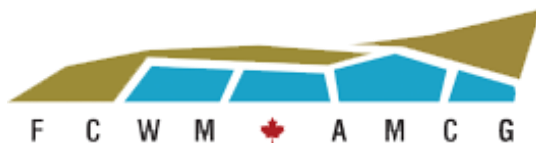


But the key to success in Mesopotamia is to maintain the stand-off in Palestine. Defeat there would open the road to Jerusalem, loss of which would be a massive blow to Ottoman prestige.

Jerusalem is indeed the hub of many wheels!

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Further information: Anthony Bruce, [The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War](#)

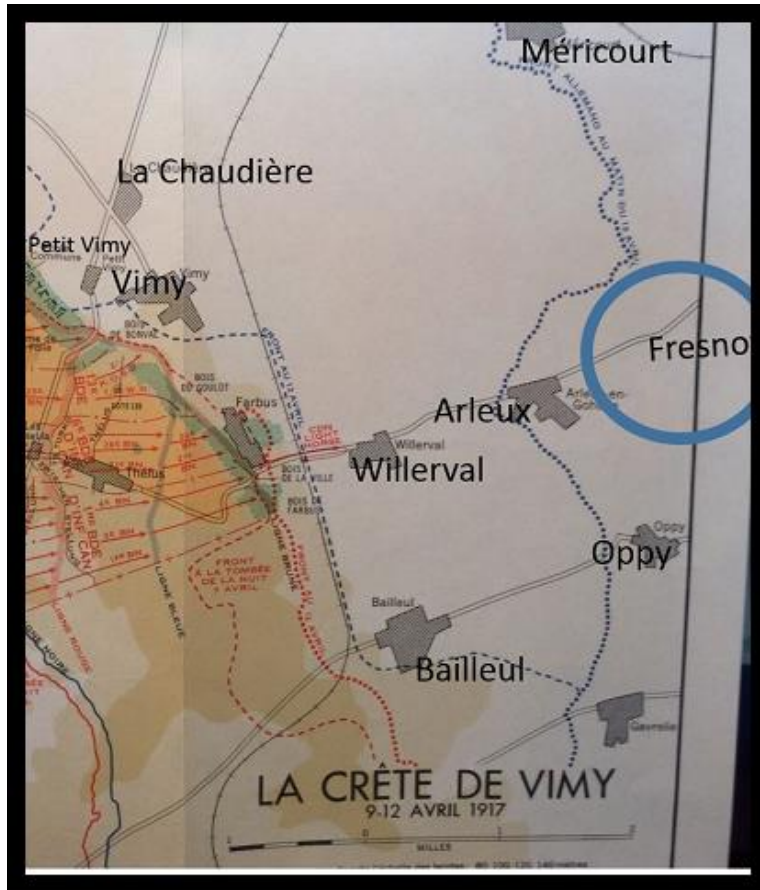


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# 8 mai 1917

## Fresnoy Perdu



Les combats qui ont suivi la bataille de Vimy ont été durs et coûteux.

L'avance dans la Plaine de Douai, et en particulier les attaques des villages à l'est de la crête, à partir du 12 avril, ont impliqué les deux divisions les moins réduites lors de l'assaut de Vimy, la 1ère et 2ème Divisions canadiennes.

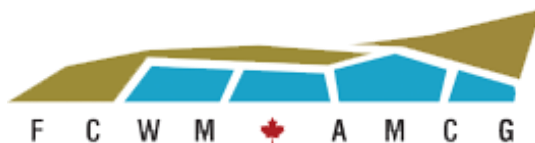
Les pertes totales de ces opérations ont été comparables à celles subies lors de la bataille de Vimy.

La prise de Fresnoy et d'Arleux a été particulièrement remarquée comme un succès coûteux mais important.

La 1ère Division canadienne a ensuite été envoyée en réserve de corps, pour à son tour refaire ses rangs.

**Le 8 mai 1917**, Fresnoy est toutefois retombé aux mains des Allemands lorsque les troupes de relève n'ont pas su conserver le village pourtant si bien acquis.

Nicholson, *Le Corps expéditionnaire canadien*, p. 293-304.



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## 9 mai 1917

### Fin de la Bataille de l'Aisne (16 avril - 9 mai 1917)



La Bataille de l'Aisne a duré 23 jours. C'est en effet le 16 avril que les armées françaises se sont lancées contre les défenses le long de la rivière Aisne, entre Soissons et Reims. Le Chemin des Dames, leur premier objectif, a donné le nom à cette bataille.

La bataille de l'Aisne a constitué le second mouvement de l'Offensive Nivelle, conçue par le général Robert Nivelle.

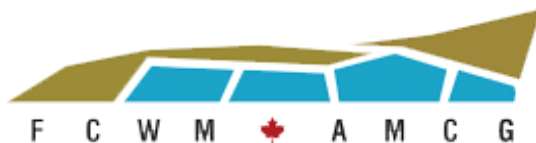
Le premier mouvement de cette offensive a été la Bataille d'Arras, du côté anglais, au nord, le 9 avril, où notamment les Canadiens ont combattu à Vimy.

**Le 9 mai 1917**, la Bataille de l'Aisne prend fin, mettant un terme à l'Offensive de Nivelle.

Cette offensive a fait certains gains sur le terrain, mais la percée stratégique anticipée par Nivelle ne s'est jamais produite.

Résultat: Les Britanniques au cours du mois d'avril 1917 ont perdu 120,000 hommes (morts, blessés, disparus ou prisonniers), et les Français ont perdu, dans l'Aisne, 25,000 tués, 25,000 disparus et 90,000 blessés – au bas mot!

1914-18, mars 2007, p. 63.



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# 10 May 1917

## The Austrian Thalerhof internment camp

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At the beginning of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian government grew distrustful of certain ethnic groups, suspecting them of being Russian sympathizers.

Amid war, fear and security were emphasized over humanitarian concerns.

Between 1914 and 1916 fourteen thousand prisoners passed through Thalerhof.

The Ukrainian populations of Galicia and Bukovina, made up the largest portion of the prisoners.

The camp became notorious for its starvation, harsh conditions, and dysentery: a third of the prisoners died of typhus.

**On 10 May 1917**, Thalerhof internment camp closed its doors on an order of Emperor Charles I of Austria.

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Sources : Paul Robert Magocsi, [With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns](#) (Central European University Press, 2015).

<http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CT%5CH%5CThalerhof.htm>

Image Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suleak-rusiny-5.jpg>

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# 11 May 1917

## Wave of strikes in France

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Starting on **10 May 1917** and for a period of two months, waves of strikes happen in France in industries and shops.

These strikes are due largely to the fact that men in the Army do not have leave and are separated too long from their families.

Reports in the press of recent military operations are so critical of the government and high command that they create a great deal of anxiety throughout society.

Such anxiety and fatigue are also rampant among the troops. Incidents happen of indiscipline and rowdiness among the soldiers at the front. Slogans such as «Peace without annexations, without conquest, without indemnities», suggested by President Wilson's speeches of January 1917, are used in new songs that circulate rapidly. Incidents happen most often in train stations, where deserting soldiers, attempting to go back to their women and families, are apprehended.

The word «mutiny» however, is yet too strong for this type of disturbance. Civilians and soldiers go on strike, but do not revolt with violence. Officers are very seldom personally molested.

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Denis Rolland, «Dossier: Les Mutineries de 1917», 1914-18, No. 37, mai/juin/juillet 2007.

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## 12 May 1917

### Allies Cool Towards Austrian Initiative for Separate Peace

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Emperor Karl of Austria-Hungary continues to seek a separate peace with France, offering recognition of the French claim on Alsace-Lorraine.

On May 9, he sent another message to France but Prime Minister Briand who was sympathetic to the initiative, has now been replaced by **Alexandre Ribot**, who is very skeptical.

Ribot, on **12 May 1917**, communicates the latest Austrian offer to Lloyd George, with a negative assessment.

Although Lloyd George is shocked that internal French politics condemn an opportunity to disrupt the Central Powers coalition, neither France nor Britain want to pressure their Italian ally who demands maximum Austrian concessions in the South Tyrol as a condition of acceptance.



Emperor Karl's initiative is fast losing all momentum. The initiative reinforces the German generals' assessment that Germany is “chained to a corpse.”

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Further information: [War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Volume 4](#)



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13 May 1917

## Kaiser Wilhelm's War Aims

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With their Austrian ally wavering, Russia defeated, and the United States now a belligerent, German generals and high officials continue to debate Germany's evolving war aims.

The April success of the U-boat campaign stimulates an optimistic outlook. On **13 May 1917**, **Kaiser Wilhelm II** sends a memorandum to Foreign Secretary Zimmerman outlining his grandiose vision for the outcome of the war.

France will cede the Longwy-Briey industrial region; both Belgium and Poland will be vassal states; Britain will co-exist but on condition that it quit the Mediterranean in favour of Germany and Turkey, which will gain Egypt, Mesopotamia and Cyprus.

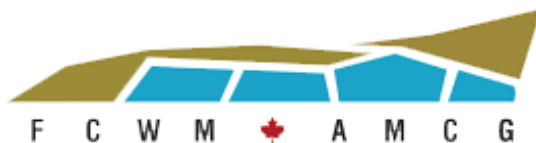
He also insists on the restoration of German colonies in Africa and Asia, and billions of Pounds, Franks, Liras and dollars to be paid in indemnities by the Entente powers and America.

Austria will be given a dominant role in the Balkans but under German economic hegemony.

— These lustful ambitions will be of great interest to the allies in the post-war settlements.

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Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, Chap 12, «Maintenance of Germany's War Aims Programme», p. 342-63.



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# 14 May 1917

## The Joffre-Baker Accord

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The French Mission to America in May 1917 is led by former French Prime Minister René Viviani and **Field Marshal Joseph Joffre**.

Joffre is there to negotiate arrangements for the integration of the United States forces into the Western Front.

On **14 May 1917**, he signs the **Joffre-Baker Accord** with **Newton D. Baker**, the American Secretary of State for War, on exchange of instructors and loan of equipment.

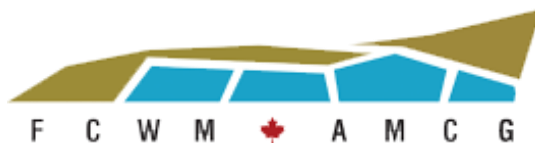
Three days later, the United States Congress votes the Army Draft Law which creates the selective draft system imposed on all males between the ages of 21 and 30 years of age.

This Conscription law comes only 41 days after the United States declared war, and before any soldier is involved in combat. It opens the way for the President to draft National Guard units into National Service, raise up to 1 million men through the draft system, and create up to four infantry divisions of volunteers.

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The United States at War, Chap 194, «The United States at War», p. 1-36, photo p. 27.

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15 mai 1917

## La Bataille du détroit d'Otrante.



Ce détroit, situé entre Corfou et le talon de la péninsule italienne, permet de passer de l'Adriatique en Méditerranée.

Dans l'antiquité, après la chute de Rome, Otrante jouait déjà, avec son port, un rôle de pont entre Orient et l'Occident.

Les alliés cherchent à barrer le détroit pour empêcher la marine austro-hongroise d'accéder à la Méditerranée et d'y perturber son trafic.

Le barrage est constitué de champs de mines, de patrouilles de chalutiers armés, ainsi que de forces de surface.

Il est loin d'être hermétique et vise surtout à rendre difficile le passage des sous-marins austro-hongrois.

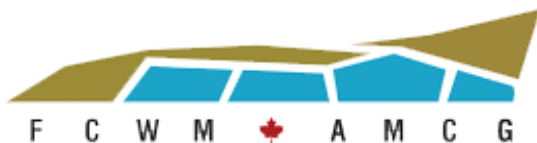
Les forces de la Triplice visent à détruire ce barrage des alliés.

Le combat se solde par une victoire de l'Allemagne et de l'Autriche-Hongrie sans que cela ait de conséquences notables sur la guerre elle-même.

Sources : [http://www.lzdream.org/marine/adriatique\\_index.php](http://www.lzdream.org/marine/adriatique_index.php)

Pour en savoir plus :

<http://dictionnaire.sensagent.leparisien.fr/Bataille%20du%20d%C3%A9troit%20d'Otrante/fr-fr/>



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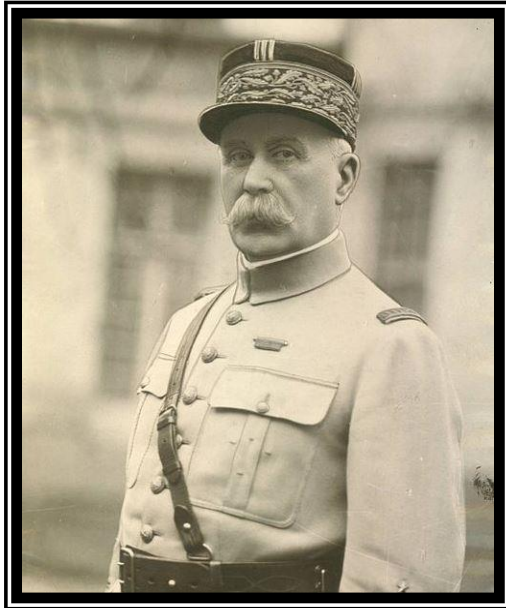
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**16 mai 1917**

## **Pétain nommé Commandant-en-Chef des Armées françaises**

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Le général **Philippe Pétain** a été connu comme commandant de la Deuxième Armée, l'Armée de Verdun, pour avoir retenu l'attaque allemande entre le 21 février 1916 et la Bataille de la Somme.

Il s'est avéré un général particulièrement habile en défense.

Robert Nivelle l'a remplacé à la Deuxième Armée alors que Pétain est devenu Chef du Groupe d'Armées.

C'est Nivelle qui s'est alors révélé habile sur l'offensive, lorsque le territoire perdu de Verdun a été repris en octobre et novembre.

Lorsque Nivelle a été sur-promu, à la suite d'un succès retentissant, Commandant-en-chef des armées, il a dépassé tous les chefs de groupes d'armées, incluant Pétain.

Pourtant, le gouvernement a placé Pétain dans le poste de Chef de l'État-major général des armées, comme conseiller, alors que la confiance en Nivelle n'était partagée ni dans le gouvernement, ni parmi les généraux.

À la suite de l'échec de Nivelle dans l'offensive du printemps, c'est Pétain que l'on choisit, le **15 mai 1917** pour reconstruire l'Armée française.

Une tâche encore complètement sous-estimée.



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# 17 May 1917

## Canadians go in Reserve

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Since 9 April, the start of the Nivelle offensive, the Canadian Corps has fought gallantly in the three successive battles of Arras.

The engagements in Vimy, Arleux and Fresnoy were among the most successful on the Western Front.

The number of prisoners taken by the Canadian Corps in that period is particularly impressive. The Corps is now taken out to be in army reserve. It will be reconstructing for two months. 2<sup>nd</sup> Div is sent to VI Imperial Corps, in Neuville Vitasse, south of the Scarpe, until 1 July, when it will then be replaced by 3<sup>rd</sup> Div.

The Canadian Corps has acquired an excellent reputation the Spring 1917.

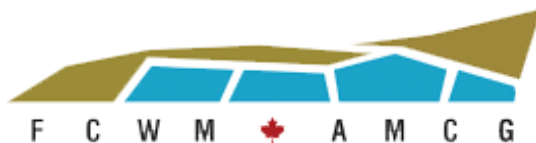
Its actions in Vimy and in the Douai Plain, to the east of Vimy, have showed it to be an energetic outfit, always intent on outwitting the enemy.

It has also become clear that one of its division commanders is a brilliant man. Arthur Currie of 1<sup>st</sup> Div, although a 'civilian general,' has somewhat impressed the British by his ability to learn and to plan.

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Nicholson, CEF, Chap 9.

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# 18 May 1917

## Conscription in Canada: necessary?

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When Canada entered the First World War in 1914, the Government promised citizens that all those who would serve in armed services would do so on a voluntary basis.

By 1916, however, high casualties suffered by Canadian forces during key battles such as Ypres and the Somme, coupled with declining recruitment, had begun to take their toll. New recruitment methods became necessary.

At first the Government introduced a National Registration Law to identify available manpower. When very few of the potential recruits volunteered, the National Service Law tried to direct recruits to serve within Canada so as to replace those who would serve overseas in their home posts. That did not work.

**Prime Minister Robert Borden** then reluctantly decided that he must go back on his word. His trip to Europe, last month, convinced him that it was necessary.

On **18 May 1917**, he announces that the government will be introducing a Bill for compulsory military service to be known as the **Military Service Act**.

The leader of the opposition, **Sir Wilfred Laurier**, strongly opposes the measure, which he foresees will exacerbate the already strained relationships between English and French Canada.

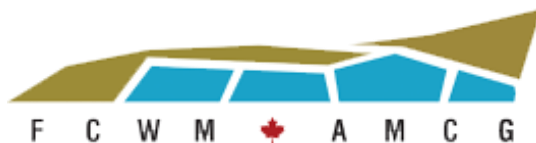
—The Conscription Debate is now out in the open, burning with emotions.

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Further information:

Granatstein & Hitsman, Broken Promises (1977);

Armstrong, Le Québec et la Conscription (1974).



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**19 mai 1917**

**La Directive No. 1 du Général Pétain à ses commandants d'armées et de groupes d'armées.**

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**Le 19 mai 1917**, le Général Philippe Pétain, récemment nommé Commandant-en-Chef des armées françaises en remplacement du général Nivelle, fait parvenir à ses généraux supérieurs une directive dans laquelle il entreprend de changer la culture de l'Armée.

Premièrement, il ne croit pas à l'obéissance aveugle. Il désire que ceux qui ont des doutes les expriment à leurs supérieurs.

Pétain croit aussi que maintenant que les Américains ont déclaré leurs intentions de se joindre à la guerre en France, il faut demeurer en défense jusqu'à ce qu'ils arrivent et se préparer à alors atteindre l'efficacité ultime.

Deux autres directives, le 20 juin et le 4 juillet, imposeront des changements importants à la doctrine et à l'entraînement qui auront des conséquences importantes en 1918.

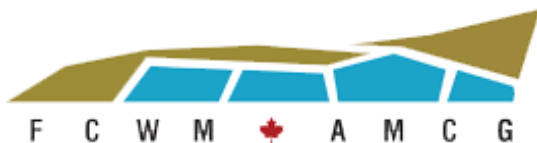
D'ici là, Pétain doit s'adresser aux manquements disciplinaires graves qui se manifestent, remonter le moral des troupes, et voir à la refonte des principes premiers et leur adoption dans toute l'Armée française.

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Corelli Barnett, *The Swordbearers*, Chap 10.

Photo: <http://dimanchedefiancaille.zeblog.com/>

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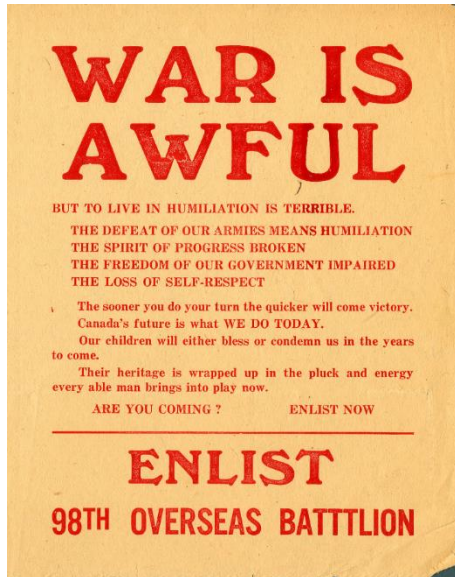
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20 May 1917

## The extreme views of Conscriptionists in regard to Quebec opposition

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For English-speaking Canadians closely tied to the British Empire, especially those who have members of their family who joined the services as volunteers, and for those who have lost loved ones on the battlefields, the matter of reinforcements from Canada can become one of high emotions.

To ask Canadians to fight on behalf of the country but to leave them without the reinforcements to reconstruct the ranks in the depleted units is viewed as a crime. To them, conscription stands as a moral obligation.

In a letter from Hume Wrong (son of hist. Prof. George Wrong, U of T, and daughter of Edward Blake), serving in the army, to his brother Murray (the two having lost a

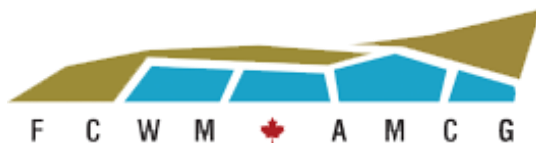
brother on 1 July 1916 in the Somme), the serviceman unfolds his wrath::

**« It really looks now as though there was going to be something approaching a rebellion in Quebec. In any case, there is bound to be bloodshed, in rioting if not in organized revolt. I would welcome a little military activity in Quebec.**

**« My C.O. and I have arranged a little punitive expedition to consist of a string of cars armoured with boiler plate and armed with Lewis guns. It would be the greatest sport in the world to fight against an enemy which was without artillery or machine-guns. And I should delight in catching Lavergne or Bourassa.»<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in John English, «Political Leadership in the First World War», in MacKenzie, David, ed., *Canada and the First World War – Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 76-95. p. 85.



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**21 May 1917**

**The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)**



is commemorating its centenary anniversary in 2017.

The Commission was established by Royal Charter on **21 May 1917**.

Its duties are to mark and maintain the graves of the forces of the Commonwealth who died in the two world wars in 154 countries worldwide, to build and maintain memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown, and to keep records and registers.

The Commission's Canadian Agency and the Canadian War Museum are organizing a reception to be held at the Museum on 13 June 2017 at 1730.

**21 mai 1917**

**La Commission des Sépultures de Guerre du Commonwealth (CSGC)**

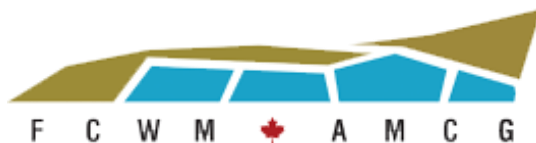


commémore en 2017 son centième anniversaire.

Elle fut créée par Charte royale le **21 mai 1917**.

Ses devoirs sont de marquer et maintenir les tombes des membres des forces du Commonwealth qui sont morts dans deux guerres mondiales et 154 pays; de construire et entretenir des mémoriaux pour les morts qui n'ont pas de lieu de sépulture connus, et de garder des registres et dossiers.

L'Agence canadienne de la Commission et le Musée canadien de la Guerre organisent une réception au Musée le 13 juin 2017, à 1730 heures.



Friends of the Canadian War Museum – Les Amis du Musée canadien de la guerre

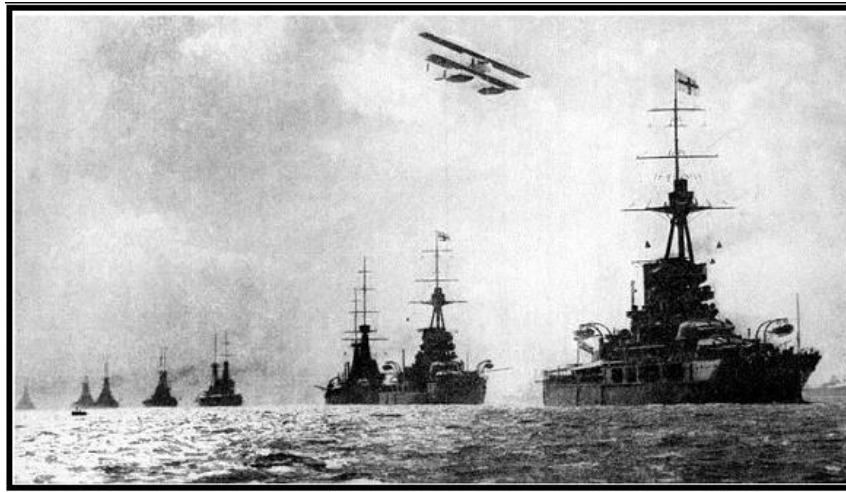
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## 22 May 1917

### The Convoy system on trial

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The convoy system was highly controversial because counter-intuitive. Grouping merchant ships together and sailing them as a group under escort was believed to be more dangerous than crossing singly.

But mathematical probabilities said otherwise, and called for a trial.

The first experimental convoy sailed from Gibraltar and arrived safely at Downs on **22 May 1917**.

The first transatlantic convoy will depart from Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 24 May, escorted by the British armoured cruiser HMS *Roxburg*.

Managing the convoy system became the task of the newly formed Convoy Section in the Admiralty.

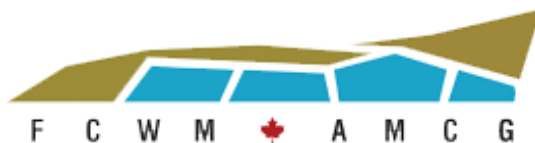
During the later months of 1917, the partial use of convoys caused an abrupt fall in the sinkings by U-boats: 500,000 tons in May, 300,200t in September, and only about 200,600t in November.

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William L. Hosch, World War I: People, Politics, and Power, (The Rosen Publishing Group, 2009), p. 129.

Spencer C. Tucker, World War I: The Definitive Encyclopedia and Document Collection, (ABC-CLIO, 2014), p. 411.

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23 May 1917

## Conscription crisis: to serve or not to serve?

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Henri Bourassa (1868-1952)

The announcement by Sir Robert Borden's government that a Military Service Bill will be introduced in the House of Commons leads to anti-conscription demonstrations, some quite violent, mainly in Montreal and Hull, Québec.

The opposition to mandatory service is led by **Henri Bourassa**, a member of a prominent Quebec family, founder of the influential newspaper *Le Devoir*, and the ideological father of the nationalist movement in Quebec.

Bourassa, a top notch public speaker and writer, both in English and French, is a staunch defender of the French language and culture not only in Quebec but also in Ontario. His recent opposition to the French school education ban in Ontario, the famous Regulation 17, was nothing short of rabid.

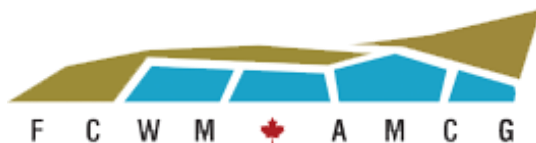
Ironically, while these somewhat anti-imperialist demonstrations are going on, on **23 May 1917**, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, arrives in Canada after having led the Balfour Mission to the United States. He meets and discusses with Prime Minister Borden Canada's continuing contribution to the war effort.

—Bourassa has always been an admirer of the British Empire, but he sees no Canadian role in the war.

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Further information:

Colonel C.P. Stacey, (ed.), Historical Documents of Canada. Vol. 5: The Arts of War and Peace 1914-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), Doc #223 – «Henri Bourassa on the Military Service Bill Debate».



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24 May 1917

## The Canadian Defence Force Stops Recruiting

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The Canadian Defence Force stops recruiting on **24 May 1917** after having failed to draw any substantial numbers.

This was the ultimate attempt to get Militia personnel and new recruits to join a Home Defence Force, and once there, to volunteer for Overseas Service when presented with advantages.

This did not work. It did not attract recruits, mostly because recruits knew that they would be targeted for relentless recruiting pressure.

Of the Chief of the General Staff Gwatkin's three options offered to Government (excluding compulsion) to try to get more volunteers, none of them proved good...

The Canadian Defence Force will be officially disbanded on 31 July 1917.

The real political purpose of the CDF was in fact to prove that Conscription was needed and nothing else would work...

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Granatstein and Hitsman, Broken Promises, 53.



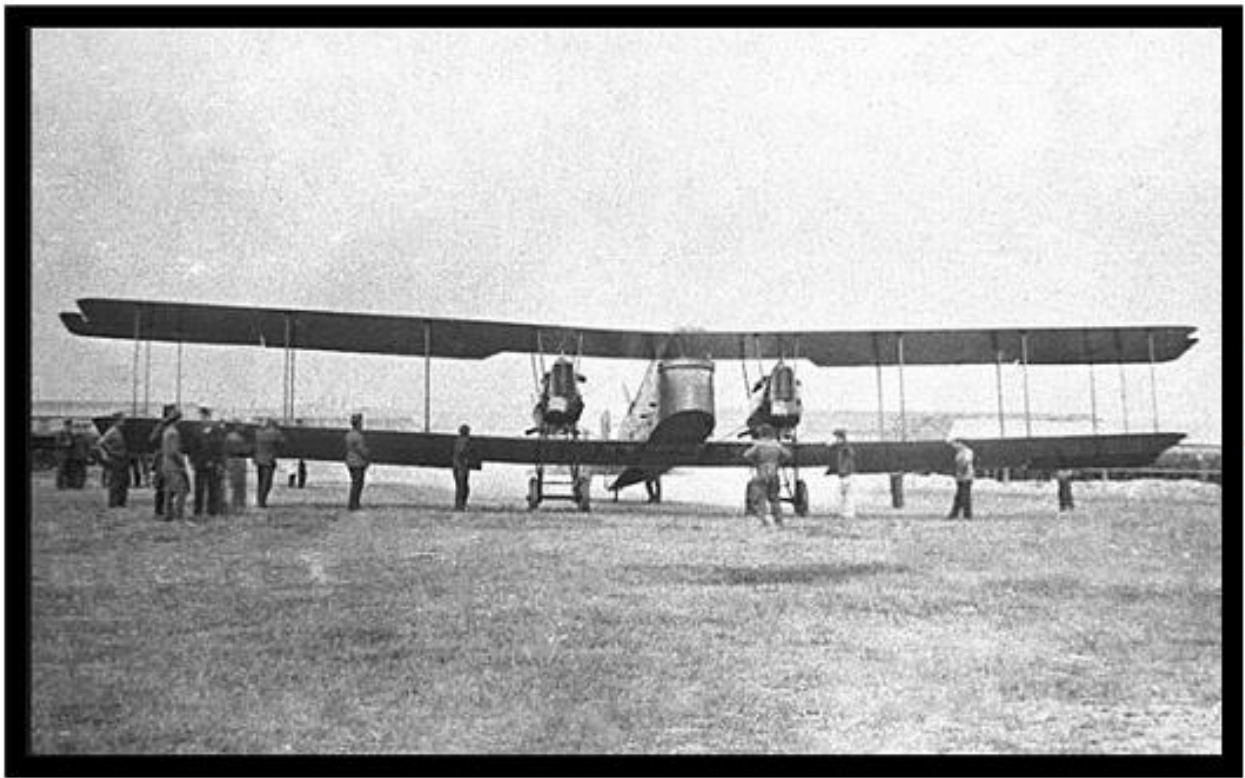
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**25 mai 1917**

**Canadiens tués dans un raid aérien**



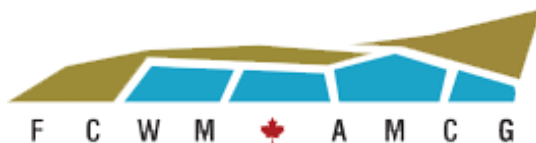
**Le 25 mai 1917**, un escadron de 21 bombardiers allemands de type Gotha bi-moteurs frappe la côte anglaise.

Dix-sept Canadiens dans les camps de Folkstone-Shorncliffe sont tués et 93 sont blessés.

Les Gothas géants s'avèrent maintenant plus efficaces au bombardement que les dirigeables Zeppelin.

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Nicholson, Corps Expéditionnaire Canadien, 303-4.



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# 26 May 1917

## Haig's ambitions in Flanders

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Field Marshal Haig now sees that the British Army must finish the war in the north, and not count on the French to do their part. He also is against waiting for the Americans, whom he does not trust, to finish the job.

**«For the last two years most of us soldiers have realized that [267/268] Great Britain must take the necessary steps to win the war by herself.»<sup>1</sup>**

For him, the only way to push the Germans back to Germany is to force them through Belgium, along the coast, with the help of the British Navy, to attack the Channel ports from both sides and use them for logistics.

**«There seem little doubt, however, that victory on the Western Front means victory everywhere and a lasting peace. And I have further no doubt that the British Army in France is capable of doing it, given adequate draft and guns...»<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Barnett, *The Swordbearers*, 267-8; quoted from Haig's diary in Blake, 233-4;

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.;

Picture from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/inside-first-world-war/part-two/10352633/first-world-war-generals.html>



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27 mai 1917

## Pourquoi dit-on « week-end » en France ?

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Le mouvement des ouvrières parisiennes de la couture n'est pas le premier depuis le début de la guerre, mais c'est celui qui ira le plus loin.

Dans les ateliers de couture parisienne, les "midinettes" (midi et dînette, repas pris sur le pouce), travaillent dix heures par jour pour les grandes dames de la société.

Celles de l'atelier *Jenny*, sur les Champs-Élysées viennent d'apprendre que leur semaine sera amputée du samedi après-midi, faute de commandes: la guerre ralentit l'activité, perdant ainsi une demi-journée de salaire.

Inacceptable, d'autant qu'en Grande-Bretagne, les ouvrières bénéficient de leur samedi après-midi, avec maintien de la rémunération : c'est la « **semaine anglaise** ».

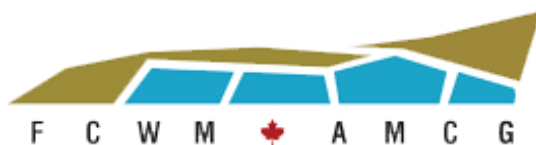
Les ouvrières de chez *Jenny* bénéficieront, contrairement aux ouvrières de l'armement, de la bienveillance des autorités.

Les députés ne tarderont pas à mettre la 'semaine anglaise' à l'agenda de l'Assemblée.

— C'est l'ébauche de ce qui deviendra le fameux «*week-end*».

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Sources : [http://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/france-info-y-etait/14-mai-1917-quand-des-midinettes-en-greve-font-changer-la-loi\\_1754237.html](http://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/france-info-y-etait/14-mai-1917-quand-des-midinettes-en-greve-font-changer-la-loi_1754237.html)



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28 May 1917

## With Ink and Spit

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Since his return from the Front, Prime Minister Borden has made it clear that he believes that the soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force deserve to have reinforcement to replace those who fell in their ranks. He also is convinced that victory in Europe will not happen if more resources and men are not sent to the Front. He has made it clear to the people of Canada that his Conservative Government intends to enact a law by which citizens will be drafted for compulsory service overseas.

Starting on **28 May 1917**, the newspaper *Le Devoir*, in Montreal, starts an anti-Conscription campaign to prevent the Government from enacting its *Military Service Law*.

Henri Bourassa is adamant that Canada does not have to —and should not, vote for Conscription. He sees the war as a European war in which Canada should not be involved. Let volunteers go if they want, but unwanted citizens should not be pushed by law!

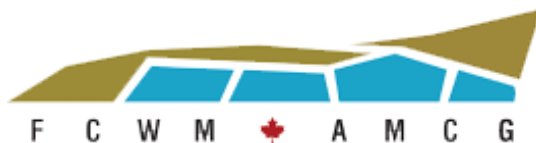
This newspaper campaign will start the most vicious debate in the history of Canada.

—The Conscription debate in the First World War will use rivers of ink...and spit...

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Granatstein and Hitsman, Broken Promises;

Armstrong, Le Québec et la Crise de la Conscription; Béatrice Richard, CMR, 7:4, 77.



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## 29 May 1917

### Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Tough Choice

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Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden met twice with Liberal Leader of the Opposition, **Sir Wilfrid Laurier**, on 25 May and on **29 May 1917**, on the question of Conscription.

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, Borden asked Laurier to join a Coalition government, offering his party an equal number of positions in cabinet.

At the meeting of **May 29<sup>th</sup>**, Borden goes further: he offers Laurier to hold off Conscription until after an election for a Union Government, in which Laurier could emerge as leader.

Borden feels that a Union Government would ease the difficulties that will arise with Conscription.<sup>1</sup>

But Laurier has even more concerns with Coalition than with Conscription<sup>2</sup>: he feels that if he does not lead the Loyal Opposition in the House of Commons, Henry Bourassa and the Nationalists will become the unchallenged leaders of anti-government and anti-war in Quebec.<sup>3</sup>

Laurier, instead, favours a referendum or a contested election between Tories and Grits to decide on Conscription, so that Parliamentary Opposition remain throughout. To this Borden cannot agree. Too much is at stake for him. Having seen the war with his own eyes, he cannot fail on this question.

— The last word has not been said on this...

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<sup>1</sup>Granatstein, «To Win at Any Cost», in Delaney and Durflinger (Eds), Capturing Hill 70 (UBC Press, 2016), page 209.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Schull, Laurier, Chap 27;

<sup>3</sup> Granatstein, Ibid.



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## 30 May 1917

### Concentration of Shipping on the North Atlantic

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On 30 May 1917, the British War Cabinet took an important decision on convoy organisation, based on the statistical analysis of shipping routes, losses to enemy action and sourcing of essential war materials and goods.

The analysis was performed by **Sir Leo Chiozza Money**, an innovative Italian economist who had been a key supporter of Lloyd George as Chancellor in 1908. When Lloyd George became Minister of Munitions in 1915, he appointed Money as his Principal Private Secretary and when he became PM, Money was appointed Parliamentary Secretary for shipping, despite opposition from the Minister for Shipping, a shipowner of traditional views.

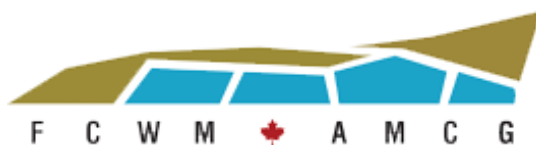
The shipping studies performed by Money (in effect, a pioneering example of Operations Research) demonstrated that most of Britain's requirements could be sourced in Canada and the US.

He recommended that merchant shipping be concentrated on the North Atlantic, rather than on longer supply lines. This would reduce transit times, enhance the ability of the convoy escorts to protect shipping and, overall, increase tonnages delivered to Britain.

— Money's scheme proved successful, especially when US Navy destroyers were added to the escort squadrons.

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Further information: [TIMES History of the War](#), XI: 82, 98; Wikipedia, «Leo Chiozza Money».



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# 31 May 1917

## Lawrence in burning Arabian sand

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**British Captain T.E. Lawrence** has left the city of Wejh, on the Hejaz side of the Red Sea, on May 9<sup>th</sup>, to proceed on an expedition against the city of Akaba, held by the Turks, at the head of the Red Sea.

The tough leaders of the Arab army that he accompanies are **Sherif Nasir** and tribal leader **Auda abu Tayi** of the Howeitat.

Their trip north by a circuitous inland road to Bair exposes them to the inhuman heat of the northern Hejaz. Despite being parched by the desert sun and sickeningly troubled by his

untenable position, after having been secretly informed of the Sykes-Picot agreement, Lawrence proves a brave camel cavalry leader, respected by his fellow travellers.

He has refused to report the daring Arab operation to his Cairo HQ, knowing that it would be vetoed. He wants the Arabs to prove themselves, to lay claim to Aqaba, to provide protection on General Murray's Egyptian Expeditionary Force's right flank in Gaza, and to be there when the Palestine operations re-starts.

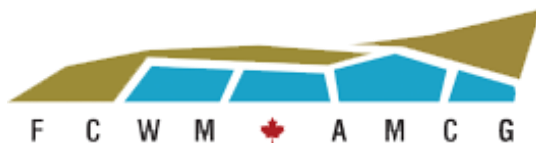
This is a very risky business for Captain Lawrence.

On **31 May 1917**, he is active in recruiting local Arabs around Bair to go on and take Aqaba, 100 miles further, at the end of June.

— He is not quite sure if a victory will be celebrated or if he will be court-martialed...

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Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, Chap 19: «'A Useful Diversion'», p. 395-417.  
<http://telawrence.com/page/3>



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