

December 1st, 1916

Good Fun for the Boys

«The Byng Boys are Here» and there...

Now that the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Verdun have come to an end, the terrible year 1916 is drawing to a close.

Hundreds of thousand soldiers can now take some leave as little action is expected during the winter months. The ground is too wet for any sensible movement of heavy equipment.

One type of entertainment that draws soldiers on leave is the reviews of London, where humour is cheap and dished out in heavy dollops.

One hot show that is being recommended by word of mouth of returning revellers is at the Alhambra Theatre. « **The Byng Boys Are Here** » is a comedy built around three odd characters from Binghampton visiting London for the first time and leaving nothing the same after.

Many Canadians saw the review, begun in April 1916, which continued for more than 1000 performances in three variants.

It was not long, now that the four Canadian divisions are all together in the Canadian Corps under **Sir The Honorable Major General Julian Byng**, that the name «**Byng's Boys**» was coined to everyone's delight. It was a good way to transport some of that London humour to the trenches.



Robey (left), Violet Loraine and Alfred Lester in a publicity shot for the show

• *The Byng Boys Are Here*, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bing_Boys_Are_Here



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December 2nd, 1916

Cracking at the Head



Major political crisis in Great Britain

The lack of success in consideration of the great losses in life and treasure in 1916 have created immense tensions in the British and French governments.

The British Secretary for War, David Lloyd George, a man of immense energy, is very upset with the decision-making process in Cabinet. Government is not going where it wants to go.

On 2 December 1916, he proposes that a new War Cabinet be created by Government with only three ministers to sit in permanence

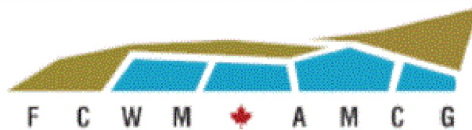
with all the necessary powers to deal immediately with the problems as they come. This War Cabinet would call on Departments and military staffs as needed from hour to hour for briefings and recommendations, and issue decisions without further delay.

What is more challenging, Lloyd George's proposition excludes the **Prime Minister, Henry Asquith** from that group. For the Secretary of War, the Prime Minister should look after larger matters of State and monitor the decision-making from a distance with a veto.

Of course the issue at the bottom is style. Asquith is a peace-time leader who retains his instincts to consult and consider. Lloyd George is a firebrand who wants a war government with a burning focus.

This crisis in government is not going away. These two animals cannot remain in the same cage...

●Hankey, Supreme Command, II, 566.



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December 3rd, 1916

Beavering Away

Max Aitken in the thin of it

Max Aitken is in London as the 'Canadian Eyewitness' for the Government of Canada, meaning that he looks after Canadian interests in a semi-official capacity.

His responsibilities are many and varied, and the lines of communications to the new Canadian Minister of Overseas Forces are blurred. His job is basically to be a propagandist for Canada without calling it such, something he is very good at.

But Max is also interested in British politics and has made intimate ties with the Leader of the Conservatives, fellow-Canadian Andrew Bonar Law.

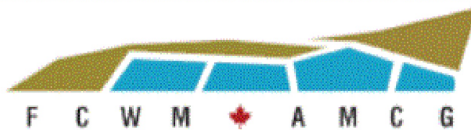
With the unbridgeable controversy between Prime Minister Asquith and Secretary for War Lloyd George, Bonar Law's role as key member of the Liberal coalition becomes crucial to the outcome. The weight of the Conservative support will tip the scale in favor of one man or the other, to remain or become prime minister of a second Liberal coalition.

Beaverbrook is not a fan of Asquith. He does not like his liberalism and the off-hand way in which he runs the war. But Bonar Law does not have the votes to become prime minister himself.

Beaverbrook gets moving with his propagandist abilities to discredit Asquith and connect Bonar Law with Lloyd George.

Of course Max will later exaggerate his influence in this affair, but it took so little to tip the scale...

A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook, (Hamish Hamilton, 1972; Penguin, 1974).



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Le 4 décembre, 1916 Des Pertes Inouïes



Le million de Morts de Guerre de France

Après les batailles de 1914: soit l'invasion allemande de l'été; la bataille de la Marne, en septembre, pour repousser l'envahisseur de Paris; la course à la mer en octobre; et la première bataille d'Ypres, en novembre-décembre;

Après celles de 1915: la Deuxième de Ypres, puis en Artois et en Champagne; enfin, après celles de 1916: de Verdun et de la Somme; les Français ont perdu à date **950,000 morts**, sans compter blessés, portés disparus et prisonniers.

Le but d'affaiblir l'ennemi par des opérations incessantes se solde par une saignée mutuelle.

En décembre 1916, le gouvernement du premier ministre français Aristide Briand est sous attaque, tout comme celui du premier ministre Asquith en Angleterre. Les Oppositions exigent des changements dans la direction de la guerre. Elles veulent que des responsables soient remplacés par des gens avec des idées neuves.

— Mais personnes n'a d'idées neuves.



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December 5, 1916

Austrian Overture in B Minor



Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma

Austria's Secret Peace Initiative

Although allied with Germany, the Austrian leadership fears that its interests will be subsumed to those of Germany, with freedom of action and independence threatened.

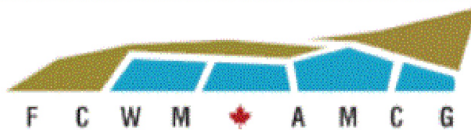
With the accession of Charles I, in November, his desire for peace takes an indirect approach through his brother-in-law, **Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma**, who is serving in the Belgian Army.

The prince is already convinced that the war will inevitably destroy Austria. His approach to the French government argues that the survival of Austria advances French interests, including splitting the Germanic powers from one another.

When semi-officially and secretly conveyed, on **5 December, 1916**, the terms are somewhat vague, but the Austrian initiative does specifically mention the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France.

Paris grasps the importance of the initiative but does not yet wish to take action, and so awaits further developments.

Further information: *Austria's Peace Offer 1916-1917*, accessed at archive.org



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December 6, 1916

Open City



Bucharest Falls

For a month, now, the Rumanian Army has been battling three enemies: General Falkenhayn in the north, General Mackensen in the south, and approaching General Winter with his dreaded snow and cold.

A last attempt to repulse Falkenhayn in the north-west has shifted the weight away from Mackensen in the south east, who caught the bridge of Cernavoda over the thousand-meter-wide Danube, giving him ready access to the railroad to Bucharest.

On 6 December 1916, at the moment when Mackensen is

going to smash the fortress of Bucharest, – a famous construction by renowned architect Brialmont, the Rumanians decide to open the city and prevent its destruction.

This now means that central Rumania is being invaded from the south and west, leaving one exit to the retreating Rumanians, in the north east, seeking the protection of the Russians.

But the Russians have already decided that they will not stage an counter-offensive toward Rumania. They are content to sit in defence of Odessa, on the Black Sea.

Rumania is all but done, now, with German, Bulgarian and Turkish troops entering the capital city and seizing what remains of the food and stocks that were not destroyed by the Rumanian armies themselves before leaving.

●Crutwell, Great War, p. 291-9.



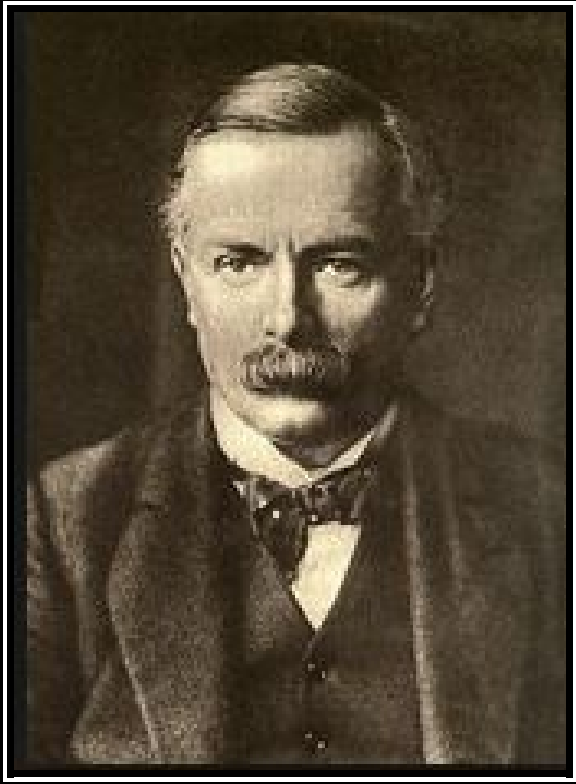
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December 6, 1916

Topped by his Secretary



A New British Prime Minister

The challenge by Lloyd George to the Prime minister was not for the prime ministership. It was for a more dynamic conduct of the War at the level of an effective and sharp War Cabinet in which the Prime Minister would not be a permanent sitting member.

Despite the prerogatives left to PM Asquith to intervene, which included many mechanisms to direct decision-making from the next room, Asquith refused. «If I am not fit to run the War Cabinet» he declared, «I am not fit to be Prime Minister.»

David Lloyd George then submitted his resignation as Secretary for War, so as to not disturb the unity of Government, adding: «Unity without action is nothing but futile carnage.»

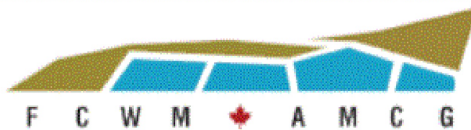
But Asquith could not go on without Lloyd George. If many «Asquith Liberals» sided with him, «Lloyd George Liberals» and Conservatives insisted on Lloyd George taking the lead.

With the Liberal Party broken for good, Conservative Leader Bonar Law became the kingmaker of the Second War Coalition.

The King anoints Lloyd George as Prime Minister on **7 December 1916**.

He will sit at the head of the War Cabinet until the end of the War.

•David Lloyd George's Memoirs, Chap. 34 and 35, « The Cabinet of Indecision», 973-8, and « The Crisis: December 1916», 979-1005.



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December 7, 1916

Supporting the Canadian War Museum

En appui du Musée canadien de la Guerre



Les Amis du
Musée canadien de la Guerre
Publient une note de recherche
quotidienne sur:

Ce qui s'est produit
Dans la Première Guerre
mondiale,
De jour en jour, il y a cent ans.

The Friends of
The Canadian War Museum
Are producing a daily note on:

What happened in the First
World War
From Day to Day,
One hundred Years Ago.



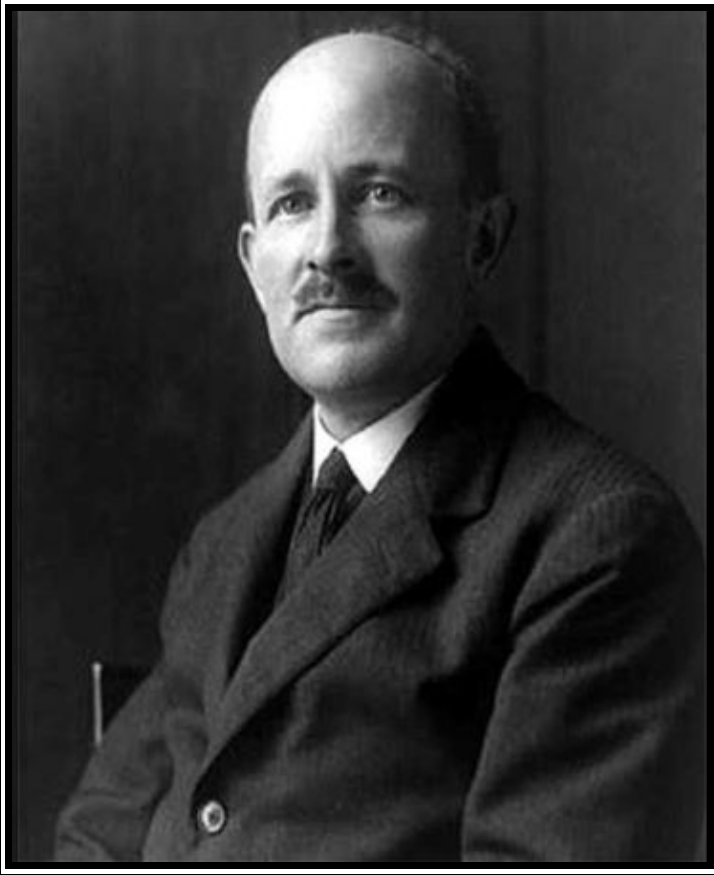
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December 8, 1916

They Also Serve Who Write



The Marathon Civil Servant

The new Prime Minister of Great Britain swept the table of all previous decision-making arrangements.

David Lloyd George had long advocated that during the time of war, the Cabinet should be composed only of three to five men who would not have Departments to run, and would sit full-time at the Cabinet table to address problems from hour-to-hour.

His first gesture is therefore to ask the secretary of the defunct War Committee of the Cabinet to be the secretary of the new War Cabinet. **Maurice Hankey's** first assignment is therefore to prepare a report surveying all aspects of the War to be used as a startpoint for deliberations.

Hankey launches himself on **Wednesday 7 December 1916** to prepare such a Memorandum for a Cabinet meeting on Saturday 9th December, comprising the PM, Bonar Law, Milner, Curzon and Handerson, with General Robertson and Admiral Jellicoe in invited attendance.

Hankey produced in 24 hours a marathon of labour in a 30-page document that stands as one of the most clear-sighted strategic overviews of the War.

Someone said of him: «If St.Peter is as well served, there will be no error on Judgment Day.»

•Roskill, Hankey, Man of Secrets, p. 334 ff.



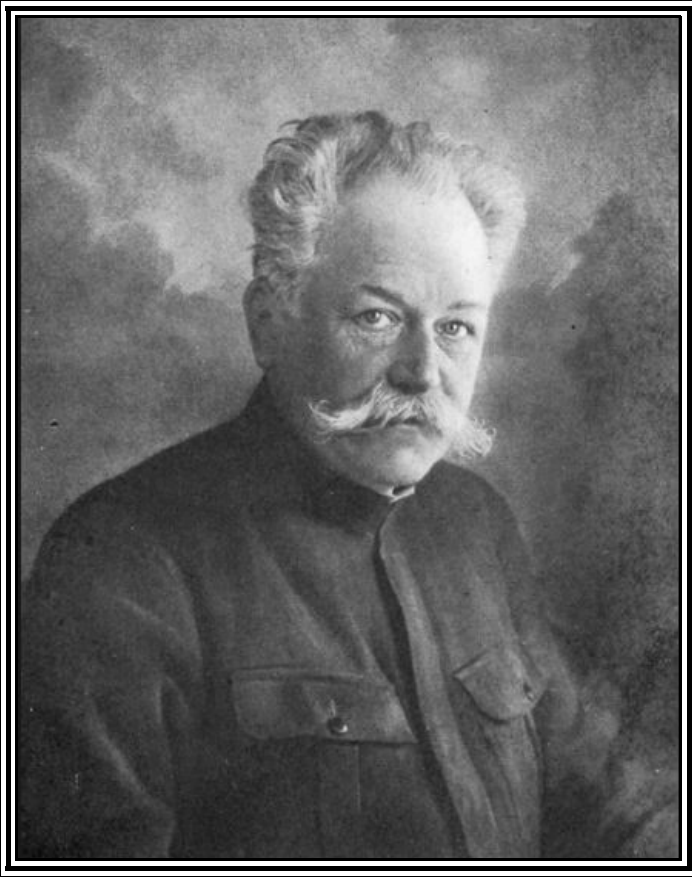
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December 9, 1916

Tightening the Rope



Sarrail and the Greek Tragedy

By 9 December 1916, the harsh fighting that took place in western Greece and in south Serbia was concluded by the taking of Monastir (present-day Bitola, Macedonia) a month ago, by the Salonica combined forces of France, Great Britain, Russia, Serbia and Italy.

The Bulgarian divisions that were repelled out of Greece are now bombarding the city from the heights of the mountains to the north, spending the winter in much discomfort. Their defeat marks a reverse to the dream of Greater Bulgaria.

The Serbs are the true heroes of this campaign. They have ascended the mountain chains that mark the frontier of their country with the scent of home in the nostrils. After having been hunted out of their land in 1915, their return through the Salonica expeditionary force is amazing. Their courage has been extreme, to the praise of all of their allies.

General Maurice Sarrail, the French Commander of this multinational force, now has to deal with Greece, still at odds with itself. The conflict between the Venizelist Greeks who have

now joined the Salonica force, and the pro-King neutralists has become more vicious. Naval allied forces are now patrolling the Greek shores in case of hostile action and the Greek Army is being barely-diplomatically pushed out Chalcidice, where they might decide to hamstring the Salonika force from the rear.

The Greek political tug-of-war might break the rope of nationalism. Tempers flare not only in Athens.

• TIME History of the War Illustrated (1917), , Vol XII, Chap 181: «The Salonika Expedition, October 1915 - November 1916»



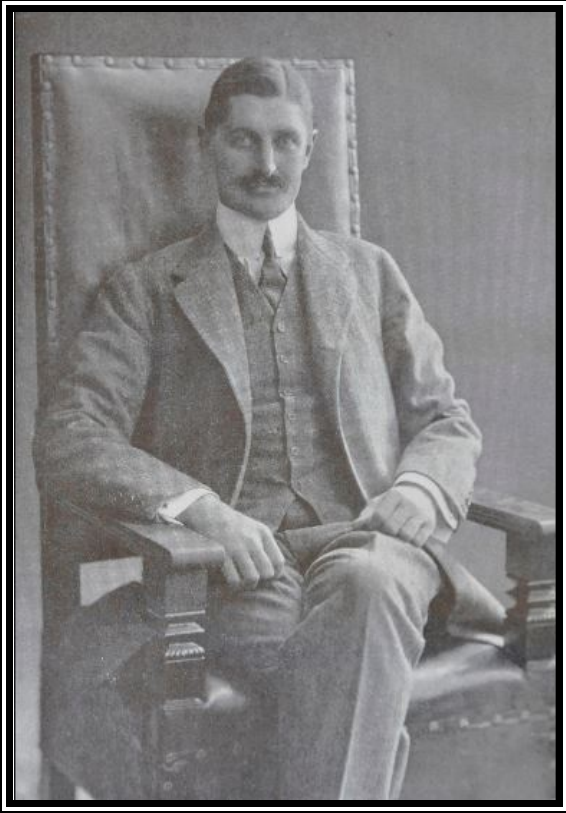
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December 10, 1916

The Kernel of Failure



Germany and Belgium: Scissors, rock and paper

In December 1916, there is talk, in various places, of a Peace Offer that might be made by one side or the other. Lord Lansdowne's letter to the British Cabinet, in mid-November was made without awareness that Emperor Charles of Austria-Hungary was simultaneously sending secret feelers to France to see if some arrangements might not be found.

President Wilson, recently re-elected in America, is also thinking that diplomatic intervention by a neutral Power might help negotiations to bring the madness of Verdun and the Somme and submarine warfare to an end.

But the crucial matter has not changed since the beginning of the war. Germany is not willing to extract itself from Belgium and return to a *statu quo ante bellum*. As a matter of fact, the Head of the Political Department, **Baron Oscar von den Lancken**, presents an important memorandum to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, **on 10 December 1916**, outlining the renewed determination that should be incited among German decision-makers that

Belgium remain the 'kernel of Germany's war aim policy in the West'.

Germany's hold on Belgium is a rock against which paper has no chance.

•Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, 112, 267-8.



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December 11, 1916

The War Cabinet Ideas manager



Good help is hard to find

The Secretariat of the War Cabinet, as designed by Maurice Hankey, took upon itself two main activities that Hankey identifies as separate: « **Machinery** » and « **Ideas** ».

The staff at « **Machinery** » are tasked with the normal secretarial duties of a committee.

However, the « **Ideas** » staff also assumed the higher duty, with the full agreement of the Cabinet, of managing the flow of intellectual activity around the table, by recording, organizing and retrieving information as necessary, with a view of forcing new thoughts to emerge for the consideration of ministers and for the better 'storming' of the group as the brain of Government.

Hankey's position is thus enlarged by his executive prerogative of not only implementing the decisions of the Cabinet with full authority over the ministries, but of considering, assessing, challenging, and highlighting ideas before the small Executive.

« They should read what those people will not read, digest what they will not digest, and be prepared to reply to all questions, and to help with every sort of information... »

War is foremost a contest of brains. Good help is hard to find.

•Roskill, Hankey, I, 338.



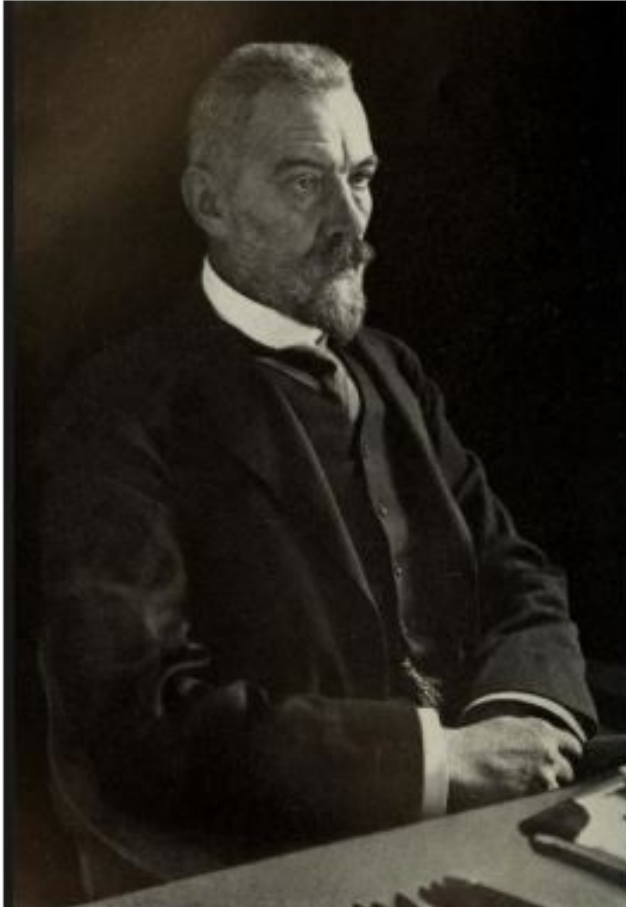
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December 12, 1916

A Self-Serving Peace Offer



Chancellor of Germany
Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg

The Peace Offer of the Central Powers

The peace offer issued by Germany on **12 December 1916** is marked by its strong confidence in victory and by the complete absence of any concrete conditions.

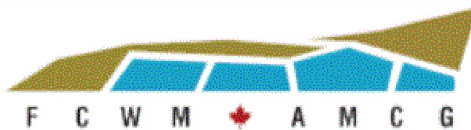
The Central Powers declare themselves ready to enter negotiations under conditions “calculated to assure the existence, honour and freedom of development of their peoples.”

The real motives of the offer are more practical: to achieve a separate peace with one or another of the Entente powers and to prepare the diplomatic ground for the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.

The offer states: “Should the struggle continue, in spite of this offer of peace...the four allied Powers are resolved to carry it on to a victorious end. But they solemnly repudiate any responsibility for this before humanity and history.”

In Washington, President Wilson is now drafting his own proposal.

Further information: ●Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*



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Le 13 décembre, 1916

Toujours Vers Bagdad



Mésopotamie, Prise 2

La défaite des forces britanniques et indiennes à Kut-al-Amara, le 29 avril dernier, a amené la reddition de 2,070 Anglais et de 6,000 Indiens de la Sixième Armée indienne sous le commandement du général Townshend.

La force de deux divisions sous le général Gorringe qui a tenté de secourir Townshend assiégé a elle-même perdu 21,000 hommes dans des défaites tant contre la géographie, la chaleur et la maladie, que contre les assiégeants turcs.

Mais la volonté de pousser jusqu'à Bagdad n'a pas pour autant été écrasée. La prochaine phase de cette campagne a maintenant été transférée du commandement indien au Haut Commandement britannique. **Le général Frederick Maude** qui a été assigné à l'armée de Mésopotamie, a passé l'été à remonter, réorganiser et équiper habilement la formation mixte, supporté par la logistique britannique en provenance d'Égypte. Il s'est assuré que son avance serait suivie par des voies de communications protégées le long du fleuve Tigre. Son influence judicieuse a été déterminante pour le moral.

Le 13 décembre 1916, Maude reprend la campagne de Mésopotamie dans le but de pousser jusqu'à Bagdad. Le brillant général allemand Von der Goltz est maintenant mort du choléra. Halil Pasha qui le remplace n'est pas du même calibre.

— La Phase 2 de cette campagne commence sur une base solide.

•Dupuy and Dupuy, Encyclopedia of Military History, (1977), 963.



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Le 14 décembre, 1916 Lyautey arrive à Paris



Le Gouvernement d'Aristide Briand doit réagir

Le changement de gouvernement en Grande-Bretagne n'a pas passé inaperçu à Paris. L'Opposition politique s'appuie sur un fort mécontentement dans l'opinion publique pour exiger du Gouvernement qu'il fasse des changements drastiques au ministère de la Guerre.

Le premier ministre Aristide Briand, qui survit tout juste à la grogne au Parlement, nomme un nouveau ministre, **le général Louis-Hubert Lyautey**, un 'Africain' dont l'expérience au Maroc l'a soustrait, au cours des dernières années, du commandement suprême de Joffre en France.

Le premier devoir de Lyautey comme ministre de la Guerre sera donc de trouver une façon de reconstruire le Haut Commandement, tant au Ministère qu'aux Armées. Il s'en prend premièrement au Grand Quartier général de Chantilly, où Joffre a retenu plusieurs fonctions qui doivent revenir à Paris.

Lyautey prend aussi intérêt au général Robert Nivelle, qui a dernièrement attiré l'attention par ses succès si encourageants à Verdun.

Il va y avoir, dans les prochains jours, un nettoyage à la tête que tous entrevoient déjà.

●Cruttwell, History of the Great War, 394-7.



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Le 15 décembre, 1916

La Victoire du 15 décembre



Victoire à Verdun après 300 Jours d'Enfer

Le 15 décembre 1916, la Deuxième Armée française de Verdun sous le commandement du général Nivelle fonce contre les lignes allemandes.

Il s'agit d'un effort ultime pour récupérer toute la surface perdue à Verdun depuis le **21 février 1916**, et qui n'a pas déjà été regagnée dans la grande attaque d'octobre.

Trois jours de bataille se terminent par un succès éclatant.

Les Français avancent de deux milles, prennent 11,000 prisonniers et 115 canons, et prouvent, dans la manoeuvre, qu'ils ont maîtrisé des techniques d'artillerie de « mise en boîte » comme dit le général Mangin, où ils isolent des groupes ennemis par des « boîtes » dont les murs sont des lignes de feu impassables.

Ce succès termine cette bataille de 300 jours d'Enfer où 700,000 soldats ont été sortis des rangs, morts, blessés, prisonniers, ou disparus, parfois atomisés par l'explosif.



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December 16, 1916
Not amused



Premier Aristide Briand

Reaction of France to Peace Proposal of the Central Powers

The press reports on **Premier Aristide Briand's** unofficial response to the 12 December proposal of the Central Powers.

He is quoted as saying:

“It is after proclaiming her victory on every front that Germany, feeling that she can now win, throws out to us certain phrases about which I can not refrain from making a few remarks....What they are sending us...is an invitation to discuss peace! – It is extended to us under conditions that are well known to you: Belgium invaded, Serbia invaded, Roumania invaded, ten of our Departments invaded! This invitation is in vague and obscure terms, in high-sounding words ... that are merely a ruse, an attempt to weaken the bonds of our alliance...and to undermine the courage of our people.»

●Further information: Speech of Premier Briand in the French Chamber of Deputies, accessed at archive.org



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December 17, 1916
« Dégommé »



Foch dismissed

Ferdinand Foch, General Officer Commanding Army Group «Centre», receives a telegram in the night of **15-16 December 1916**:

«GÉNÉRAL FOCH EST REMIS À LA DISPOSITION DU MINISTRE.»

This means the loss of command. He pleads, humbly, to serve under Nivelle, a man who was a colonel when he was Corps commander:

«To remain at the Front, to escape being sent to the rear, I would have consented to lead a division, or even a brigade. There can be no degradation in leading French soldiers.»¹

Foch is nevertheless sent to GQG-Senlis, to «study strategic problems.» He takes with him Maxime Weygand, his trusted Chief of Staff.

—«*Laissez-les faire...*»

Foch was once dismissed from the École de Guerre; he returned as Commandant.

¹●Hunter, FOCH: A Study in Leadership, 122-3.



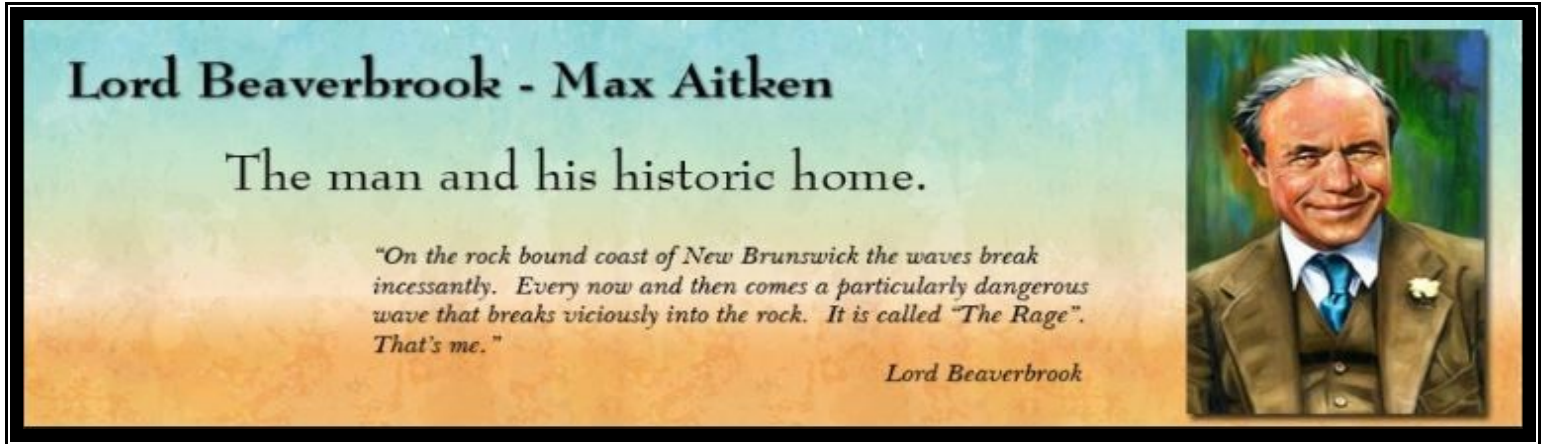
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December 18, 1916

Lordy Lord!



Max Aitken's influence in the newspapers was a key element of political support for the transfer of power between PM Asquith and PM Lloyd George, on 7 December.

Aitken was in fact pushing for the Conservative Party to exercise more influence in a Second Liberal Coalition Government.

Bonar Law, the Leader of the Conservative Party, benefitted from Max's columns in the Press, becoming Parliamentary Leader.

Max liked the propaganda experience so much, he bought the Daily Express.

Two weeks later Max Aitken is knighted in the King's New Year List.

He chooses the name of «Beaverbrook» from a stream near Newcastle, New Brunswick, where he spend is youth.



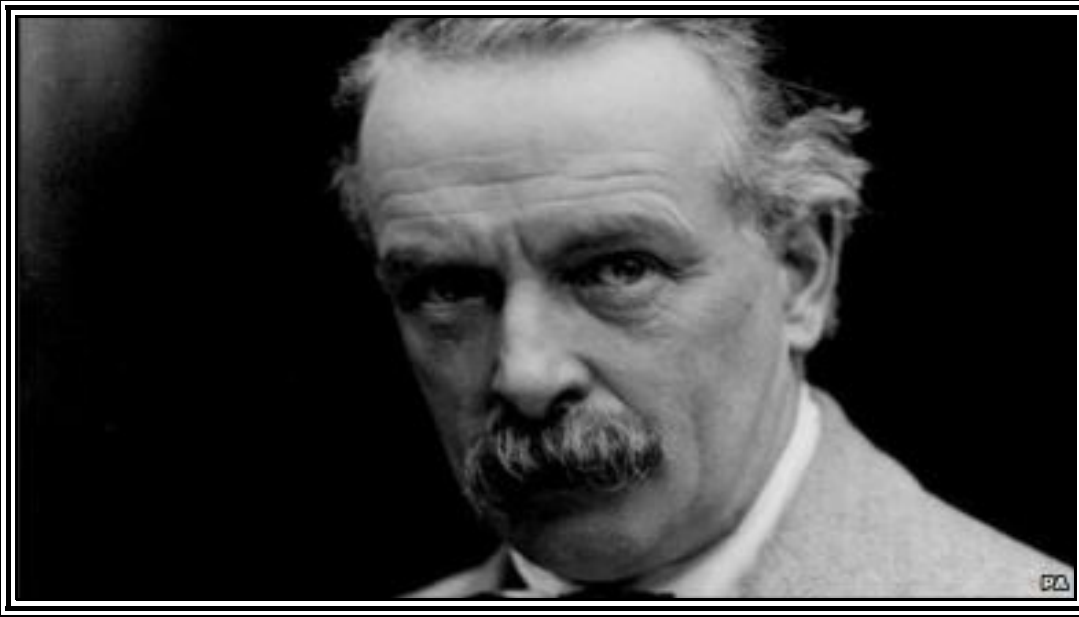
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December 19, 1916

A Not Unwelcome Dictator



A Crisis Government

Twelve days after having been sworn in as Prime Minister, David Lloyd George makes a first speech in Parliament to outline the policy of the Second Coalition.

He makes it clear that this is a crisis government and that normal democratic procedures will not apply.

Historian A.J.P. Taylor is clear on this:

«Lloyd George made no secret of his intentions when he first addressed the House as prime minister on 19 December 1916. Parliamentary government, as it had been known for the last century or so, ceased to exist.»¹

But Lloyd George was not an unwelcomed dictator:

«The House was not browbeaten into impotence. It acquiesced. The back-benchers had confidence that Lloyd George would win the war and, having this confidence, insisted that he be left alone.»²

●A.J.P. Taylor, From the Boer War to the Cold War: Essays on Twentieth-Century Europe, (Penguin Books, 1996), «Politics in the First World War» p. 197-226. Quotes from: ●¹ lb. p . 217; ●² lb. p. 218.



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December 20, 1916

A diplomatic High Road not taken



Colonel House, Advisor to the President

Wilson's Offer to Mediate

President Woodrow Wilson's diplomatic note of **18 December 1916** proposes that the belligerent powers make public the conditions under which they are ready to conclude peace.

This proposal reflects the President's fear that prolongation of the war will result in lasting embitterment, destroying his hopes for a League of Nations.

In fact, at this point Wilson does not want either side to win. His highly idealistic aim, which will be made public in a speech in January, is a «peace without victors and vanquished» and «without annexations or indemnities».

Wilson's original draft note stated that America would throw its weight behind the side which accepted his offer. His close advisor, Colonel Edward House had this part deleted.

But, in fact, Germany could have improved its diplomatic position by a conciliatory response to Wilson, which might have indefinitely secured American neutrality.

●Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, «Wilson's Offer to Mediate», p. 298-300.



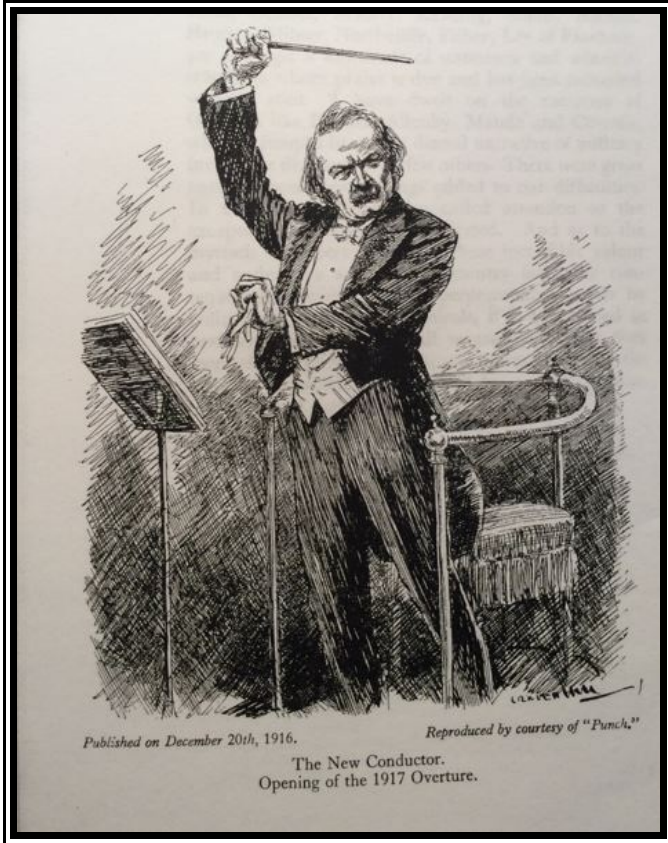
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December 21st, 1916

Calling the Tune from London



LG's response to the invitation to a Peace Conference

Lloyd George who is just taking over as Prime Minister in Great Britain is not long in setting the score straight.

«Mr. Lloyd George, who had overthrown Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister only a few days earlier, was not favourably impressed by Ludendorff's extravagant claims, nor even by Bethmann-Hollweg's self-confident assertions.

'To enter into a conference,' he told a large London audience, 'on the invitation of Germany, proclaiming herself victorious, without any knowledge of the proposals she has to make, is to put our head in a noose.... What hope is there in the Chancellor's speech that the arrogant spirit of the Prussian military caste will not be as dominant as ever if we patch up peace now?'»¹

Ten days later, the Allies will send a formal rejection.

•¹Cowles, The Kaiser, 375.

•The famous image «**The New Conductor - Opening of the 1917 Overture**» was published in PUNCH on 20 December 1916, and reproduced in David Lloyd George's War Memoirs, Frontispice, Volume III.



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Le 22 décembre, 1916

Étudiants canadiens dans les rangs



Les compagnies universitaires

Au cours de 1915 et 1916, le **Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry**, a développé la pratique de faire du recrutement dans les universités pour pouvoir former des compagnies de fantassins qui puissent aller rejoindre le bataillon outre-mer.

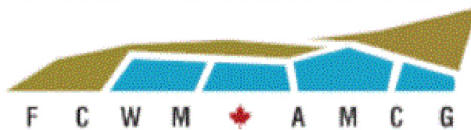
Les université McGill, en particulier, et celles du Manitoba, Saskatchewan et Alberta, ainsi que de la Colombie britannique, ont par la suite fourni des contingents d'hommes étudiants, gradués ou 'de leurs amis' pour aider au recrutement général en baisse à travers le Canada.

Ces soldats sont entraînés en Angleterre et joints à des bataillons de réserve avant d'être affectés à des bataillons d'infanterie du Corps expéditionnaire canadien en France. Leurs états de services seront généralement exemplaires.

C'est le *War Office* qui a rappelé aux autorités canadiennes que de tels candidats bien éduqués devraient être acheminés vers les cours d'officiers, et identifiés pour des rôles de leadership dans tous les corps de spécialistes de l'Armée canadienne où leur formation pourrait être mise à profit.

C'est toutefois à partir de la fin de 1916 que le besoin d'officiers supplémentaires a essuyé un refus d'une grande proportion de ces hommes, qui avaient déjà trouvé leur rôle comme soldats, entourés de leurs camarades. Ils n'avaient aucune ambition pour des épaulettes.

●Nicholson, Le Corps expéditionnaire canadien, p. 245-9.



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Le 23 décembre, 1916

Une cavalcade nocturne



Le raid du 1er régiment canadien de fusiliers montés

Les régiments de fusiliers montés ont été transformés en infanterie lorsqu'il s'est avéré que les services de fusiliers montés n'avaient pas de rôle à jouer en tant que tels dans la guerre des tranchées.

Entraînés à franchir de longues distances à cheval pour aller assumer un rôle d'infanterie temporaire à un endroit donné, les fusiliers montés ont dû abandonner leurs chevaux et s'insérer dans les tranchées parmi les bataillons de la ligne de front.

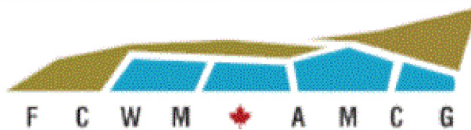
Leur réputation a toutefois été rehaussée parmi leurs camarades de l'infanterie lorsque le

Premier régiment des fusiliers montés, au sein de la Troisième division canadienne, a effectué un coup de main chez l'ennemi qui a été couronné de succès.

Le 20 décembre 1916, près de Arras, quatre cent membres de cette unité ont surgi la nuit de galeries spécialement aménagées pour les amener dans le *No Man's Land*, d'où ils ont attaqué et détruit 26 abris ennemis, un emplacement de mitrailleuses, et fait une soixantaine de prisonniers.

Les cavaliers ont ainsi prouvé qu'ils pouvaient apporter un esprit combatif au Corps d'infanterie canadien, et inciter les autres à sortir en cavalcade nocturne. Le défi sera relevé.

●Nicholson, Le Corps expéditionnaire canadien, p. 253.



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December 24, 1916

Forward in Egypt



Big Push in the Sinai

General Archibald Murray is in charge of the defence of the Suez Canal, a strategic passage of great importance for the British Empire.

The Turks have repeatedly attempted to reach Egypt and damage the Canal, if not take it.

They have all along hoped that the Egyptians would at the appropriate moment turn on the British and help them regain the Muslim control of the Middle East.

But General Murray, with remnants of the Dardanelles expedition not sent to France,

pushes forward in late December to the mid-Sinai so as to defend well to the East of the Canal. It is a logistical operation that will do much for his defence plan.

«By December the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was nearing its goal after a year of what the Book of Deuteronomy calls ‘walking through this great wilderness». On [23 December 1916] it struck at the Turkish outpost camp at Magdhaba, twenty-five miles southeast of El Arish, with the Australian and New Zealand mounted division and a newly formed brigade of camelry. After hard fighting it enveloped the Turkish redoubt and swallowed the whole garrison but for a mere handful who contrived to escape. It was now in the center of the line on which Murray had proposed to base the defense of the Suez Canal and Egypt itself: Kossaima to El Arish.»

●Cyril Falls, The Great War, 243.



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Le 25 décembre, 1916 Aux Femmes de Parler



Pouvoir aux Femmes de France

Maurice Barrès, dans sa *Chronique de la Grande Guerre*, demande à la France, fin 1916, de donner aux femmes le vote de leurs hommes morts pour qu'elles puissent finalement influencer la vie publique.

«Les Femmes de France! Par quelle porte plus noble veulent-elles entrer dans la vie publique? Les héros se soulèvent pour leur tendre le bulletin de vote. Elles débiteront dans la gestion des intérêts de la cité en exprimant les pensées de ceux qu'elles ont soignés, consolés et ensevelis. Jamais à l'origine d'aucun droit le monde n'aura vu de source si pure. La mère, recevant ses pouvoirs de son fils, l'épouse de son mari, la fille de son père, quelle grandeur! Les voilà citoyennes. Il y a dans ce baptême sur le champ de bataille quelque chose d'invincible, une beauté si belle qu'il est impossible qu'on l'empêche d'exister. Qui donc osera demander que les femmes de France, dont les mérites s'imposent au respect attendri de tous, soient privées de ce couronnement au jour de la victoire?»

●Maurice Barrès, *Chronique de la Grande Guerre, 1914-1920* (Librairie Plon, 1968), p. 380.

●<http://www.ouest-france.fr/pays-de-la-loire/la-vie-des-femmes-durant-la-grande-guerre-3216230>



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December 26, 1916

Final Exit



Joffre Goes Up

General Joseph Joffre has been, from the beginning of the War, the embodiment of the French determination to resist the German invasion.

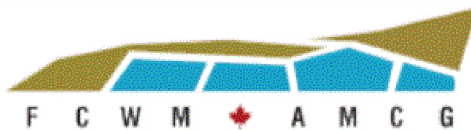
The success of the Battle of the Marne, the most important battle of the whole War, earned him the affectionate nickname of Papa Joffre, at the end of 1914.

But 1915 and 1916 were terrible years for the French Army. The battles of Artois and Champagne, in 1915, much more costly than generally recognized, and the battles of Verdun and the Somme, in 1916, convinced the government and public opinion that Joffre, in the end, was not particularly inspired. He is now seen as lacking foresight and abilities.

On 27 December 1916, after having given him the honorary title of *Maréchal de France*, the first to be so created for more than 40 years, and having declared him adviser to the Government, he is taken out altogether of the High Command.

General Robert Nivelle is named Commander-in-chief of the French Forces on the Western Front, which closes the door for good for Papa to stage another comeback.

●Liddell Hart, Reputations, 37-8.



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December 27, 1916

Platoon Tactics



Study in the Canadian Corps

General Byng has ordered a study to be made, right at the end of the Corps' involvement in the battle of the Somme, on what should be improved so as to increase the ratio of success of attack over defence.

On 27 December 1916, the senior staff officer of the Corps, Brigadier General - General Staff (BGGs) Percy Pollexfen de Blaquiére Radcliffe, a British Officer, raises the question of platoon tactics in Infantry.

To his view, gained from many sources of information, the incorporation of new weapons

into platoon tactics is overdue. The retention of such weapons as the automatic rifle, the grenade, the trench mortar and the grenade launcher at the level of company specialists prevents the integration of these weapons to the fire and movement within the platoon.

This is an area of exploration that is being studied by other officers. Major General Arthur Currie has been on the case for two months. He is preparing a report that he does not want to hand in before having gone to Verdun, early in January, where he intends to note thoroughly what was learned by the French.

By the way, the Germans are also playing with the idea. They know the weaknesses of their own defence and know what low-level fire and movement can do when skilfully applied.

●Mark Osborne Humphries (Chap 4) and Patrick Brennan (Chap 5), in Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, Mike Bechthold (eds), **Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment** (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).



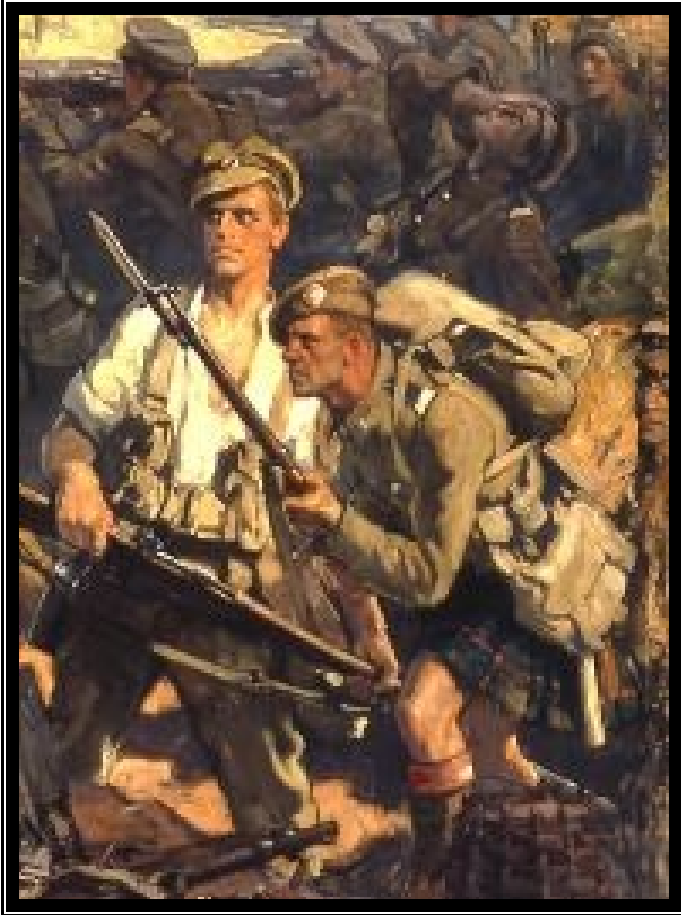
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December 28, 1916

The War on Canvas



The Beaverbrook-Rothermere War Artists program

Lord Beaverbrook was involved in many things, in London. The writing of the second book of Canada in Flanders, of which the first book was a great success, was high on the agenda. But his groundbreaking activities in the field of photography soon led him to think of paintings and war art.

In the autumn of 1916, «with a germ of an idea in mind,»¹ Aitken called on his friend, Lord Rothermere, to establish a brilliant scheme supported by public and private patronage.

Artists would be commissioned and paid as «The King's Guests» to paint scenes of the war. By **end-December 1916**, the Canadian Records Office is fully involved in the program.

British and Canadian artists are progressively called in to add to the teams of painters sent out with the troops to capture the essence of war at the Front.

Names that are iconic today were drawn to the War Artist program: Maurice Cullen, Fred Varley, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, David Milne and many others.

Beaverbrook did not succeed in having an Art Gallery in Ottawa after the war. Some of the paintings remained in storage, unseen for 80 years.

¹ ● Sandra Gwyn, Tapestry of War, 290-2; ● Oliver & Brandon, Tableaux de guerre (2000); ● Granatstein, Hell's Corner, p. 120.



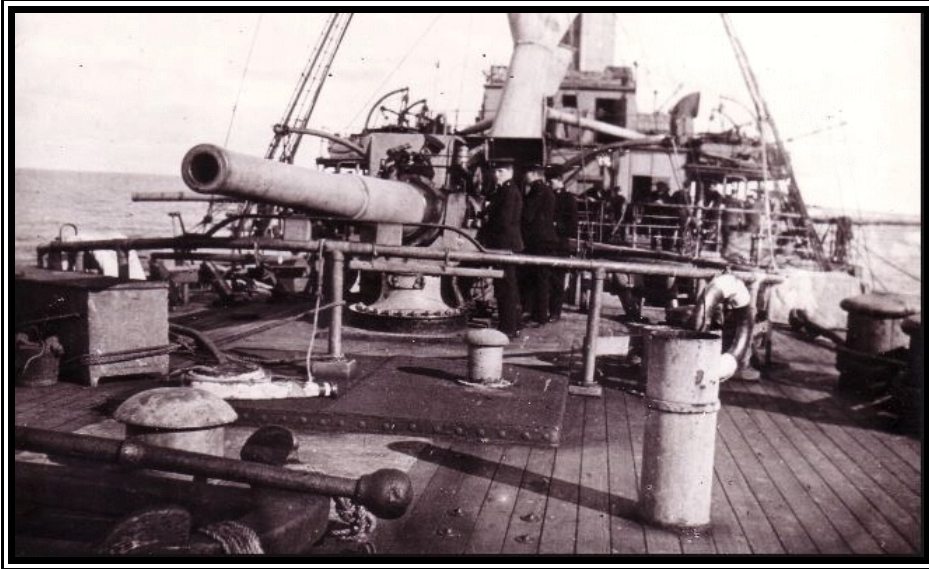
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Le 29 décembre, 1916

De «*Mercantile Marine*» à «*Merchant Navy*»



La Marine marchande de guerre Britannique

À la fin de 1916, l'activité de construction marine principale en Grande-Bretagne est la fabrication et l'installation à bord de navires marchands de canons de tous genres pour leur défense contre les sous-marins allemands.

Plusieurs types de canons dessinés pour des besoins militaires ont été rapidement adaptés aux besoins à bord de transporteurs côtiers ou de haute mer.

On assiste ainsi à la naissance d'un service armé dont l'existence ne sera reconnue officiellement qu'après la guerre, lorsque ses faits d'armes rendront inéluctable le crédit à ses états de service.

La «Marine Marchande» [*Mercantile Marine*] devient ainsi, subrepticement, une arme de combat [*Merchant Navy*] contre les navires de guerre allemands. Certains de ses bâtiments de commerce vont même jusqu'à porter à bord des membres de la Marine Royale pour servir à leur défense.

Le service des mariniers civils à son bord devient une participation au conflit mondial non moins dangereuse et aussi louable que celle des membres en uniforme des forces armées.

● TIMES History of the War Illustrated, «The Work of the Mercantile Marine», Ch. 120 (VII: 429-448), Ch. 171 (XI: 157-78).



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December 30, 1916

The End of the Russian Debauchee



Grigory Yefimovitch Novykh was known as «*Rasputin*» (Debauchee) from early age. Son of a peasant of Petrovskoye, near Tyumen, province of Tobolsk, in Siberia, he was heavily influenced by his early contacts with a heretical religious sect, the Flagellants. He travelled to Greece in his mid-twenties (1890s) and returned as an ordained man of religion with abilities to cure the sick.

After a decade of roaming and performing occult deeds as a 'Holy Man' in which he cultivated the idea that one had to be a sinner to be redeemed and experience salvation, he ended up in St.

Petersburg, warmly received by church officials and high society.

In November 1905, he was introduced to the Tsar for his powers to ease sickness. Nicholas' son Alexis, probably an hemophiliac, benefitted from this intervention and Rasputin was kept close to the family.

His abilities as a manipulator led him to great affection with Tsarina Alexandra, who herself had strong influence over Nicholas II. The relationship corrupted the House of Romanov to the extent that the Tsar's status was compromised and undermined.

Rasputin was finally coldly assassinated on **30 December 1916** (16-17 December, Old Russian System) by high officials who wanted to protect the monarchy at a time of rising turmoil.

It was too late.

●Paul Vinogradoff, «Rasputin», Encyclopaedia Britannica (Twelfth Ed., 1922), XXXII: 249-50); ●(Fifteenth Ed., 1978), VIII: 426.



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December 31st, 1916

CEF Recruitment: What Now?



Canadian recruitment for CEF

By the end of the second full year of war, it has become evident that the recruitment of volunteer men for service overseas has seen its better days.

After a peak of 35,000 in March, only 5,200 come forward in December 1916.

Prime Minister Borden is worried that Canada's pool is drying, especially in one quarter:

« We have more than two and a half millions of French Canadians in Canada and I realize that the feeling between them and the English people is intensely bitter at present. The vision of the French Canadian is very limited. He is not well informed and he is in a condition of extreme exasperation by reason of fancied wrongs supposed to be inflicted upon his compatriots in other provinces, especially Ontario.»¹

But the truth is that men born in Great Britain are all gone now. Men more deeply rooted in Canadian soil are all quite less enthusiastic.

•David Campbell, «'The First 100,000 Came Easily': Recruiting the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War», in Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire, Le

recrutement militaire à l'époque contemporaine (XIXe - XXe siècles), Bruxelles: Commission Internationale d'Histoire Militaire (CIHM), (2006) No 86, pp. 62-87;

•John English, «Political Leadership in the First World War», in David MacKenzie, ed., Canada and the First World War – Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown (University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 76-95.

•¹ *Ib.*, p. 83.



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