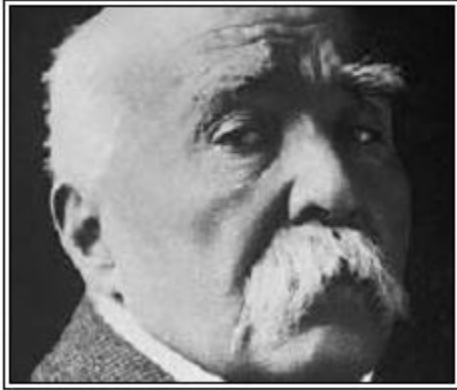


1 December 1917

Meeting a kindred soul



Between 29 November and 2 December, Allied Heads of States and key ministers and public servants, as well as senior military, meet in Paris for a series of Allied Conferences.

A General Assembly first takes place at the Quai D'Orsay where the new *Chef du Conseil* of the French Government, **Georges Clemenceau**, introduces himself as President of the Conferences in a momentous speech. Then the Assembly is broken up in specific committees.

On 1 December 1917, a meeting of the Supreme War Council takes place at the Trianon Palace Hotel, in Versailles, where only the Heads of States and their single military adviser are present. This is to discuss the strategy for 1918.

That is the moment when British Prime Minister Lloyd George comes to meet more intimately the hugely intimidating «*Tigre*» of French politics. A physician, former Radical journalist and editorialist in his own famous *L'Homme Libre*, a labour and anti-clerical campaigner, municipal politician and pre-war prime minister, Clemenceau is known for his ability to destroy men, careers and governments as a rabid speaker and writer.

Lloyd George is delighted to see that Clemenceau is uncannily aligned with his own views, and that forging a team with a combative and curt feline proves in fact quite rewarding...

Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, Chapter 74.



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2 décembre 1917

Promesses aux fermiers



Les élections fédérales se pointent pour le 17 décembre et les partis dans la course redoublent de promesses à l'électorat.

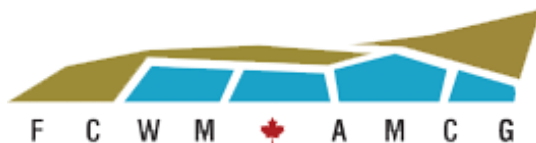
De toutes les promesses faites par le parti de l'Union du premier ministre Borden, celle aux fermiers ressort comme une des plus importantes.

Le **2 décembre 1917**, Borden émet un décret du Conseil privé du Gouverneur Général, de sorte que la loi sur le service obligatoire soit modifiée pour que les fils de fermiers qui sont vraiment engagés dans les travaux de la ferme soient exemptés du service militaire. Puisqu'une haute proportion de la population vit dans le milieu rural, cette promesse assurée par une modification à la loi déjà confirmée, rallie les opinions dans les campagnes.

Il s'agit d'une autre mesure politique partisane que le gouvernement au pouvoir se permet de légiférer hors du Parlement pour s'assurer la victoire conscriptionniste.

Les Libéraux opposés à la Conscription peuvent bien crier au scandale, mais en ville...

Granatstein & Hitsman, Broken Promises , p. 75.



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3 December 1917

First Negotiations at Brest-Litovsk

The Russian Revolution has put a stop to fighting against the Germans and Austrians-Hungarians in East Europe. The two sides are eyeing each other without much assurance of what will happen with the new Bolchevik government in Soviet Russia.

On 3 December 1917, Trotsky goes to Brest-Litovsk (Brest, in present-day Belarus), a town at the edge of the battle lines, to meet negotiators of the Central Powers in view of making a treaty of peace «without annexations or reparations.»

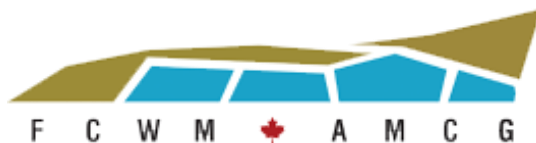


At this time Trotsky is still convinced that the workers of all Western countries will very soon follow the bold example of the Russians and create their own revolutions to topple governments bent on war at their expense. His eyes are still on the prize: international union of the proletariat and soldiers for a better world.

Negotiations do not go particularly well. The moment has not come for the Russians to exploit internal revolution among their enemies. This becomes a waiting game.

— Meanwhile the Germans and Austrians-Hungarians want to concentrate on the West.

Fischer, Germany's Aims, Chap 18. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2143



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4 December 1917

Discussion of Tank Warfare at GHQ

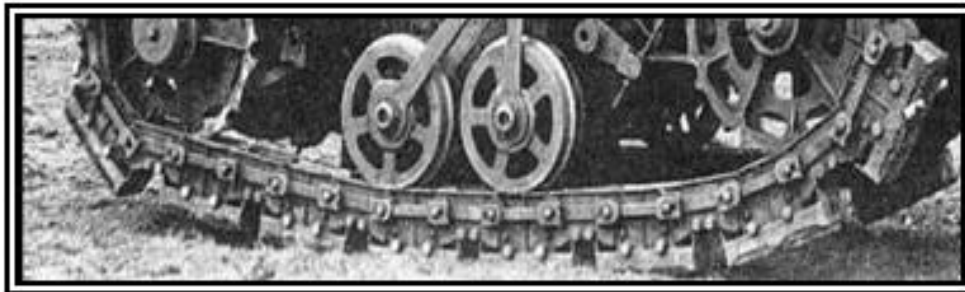
Responding to the challenge in Winston Churchill's letter of 21 October on mechanical warfare, and his own reply letter to the subject, on 23 November, Haig holds a meeting at GHQ on the question of the employment of tanks in operations.

Fresh from the experience in Cambrai, the consensus there is that tanks can be an asset in certain circumstances, but that their efficiency has been exaggerated.

« The report conceded that tanks had certain advantages, for example, surprise, but that 'to exploit the Tank to the prejudice of rifle and manpower would be bad policy, and would end in exalting the servant above the arm it exists to assist and serve.'¹»

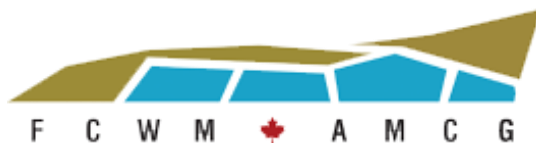
The recommendation is that the Tank Corps be eventually limited to 28 battalions of 60 tanks (1,620 tanks) and an establishment of 22,500 men, as opposed to 18 battalions, but that all increases in mechanical arms should come after infantry has been brought back to establishment numbers.

« 'Infantry is the only arm that can seize and hold a position, and upon its skills and endurance depends the security of the defence.'²»



¹Tim Travers, How the War Was Won: Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-1918, (London: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 2: «A Command Divided: GHQ and the Debate over traditional versus mechanical warfare in early 1918» p. 32-49, quote p. 37.

² Ibid, p. 38.



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5 décembre 1917

Une Indépendance qui sera contestée



Les Finlandais étaient, en tant que nation, différents parmi toutes les nations sous la domination tsariste.

Dominée par la Suède depuis 1150, en lutte permanente contre la Russie, la Finlande jouissait d'une autonomie gouvernementale, de libertés politiques et finalement de son propre parlement élu démocratiquement.

Bien que le tsar ait tenté de limiter cette autonomie, la vie politique à Helsinki ressemblait bien plus à celle de Berlin qu'à celle de Petrograd.

Le **6 décembre 1917**, la Finlande obtient finalement son indépendance et s'émancipe de la Russie, proclamant sa sécession en profitant des désordres occasionnés par la guerre de 1914-1918 et les Révolutions russes de 1917. Ce n'est qu'en 1920 que l'URSS reconnaît officiellement à regret l'indépendance de son ancien dominion.

— Avec "la guerre d'hiver" lancée le 30 novembre 1939, la Russie tentera de reconquérir la Finlande, en vain.

W.L. Blennerhassett, «Finland», *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Twelfth Ed., 1922, XXXI: 71-5.

https://www.herodote.net/6_decembre_1917-evenement-19171206.php

Pour en savoir plus : https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerre_civile_finlandaise et

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-marc-b/blog/140617/la-revolution-finlandaise-de-1917>



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6 décembre 1917

L'Explosion d'Halifax

Le 6 décembre 1917, dans le port d'Halifax, le navire français *Mont Blanc* entre en collision avec le navire *Imo*, prend feu et explose à 09h04.

Mont Blanc transporte secrètement près de trois kilotonnes (3kt) d'explosifs destinés à la France.

La vague de pression causée par l'explosion écrase toutes les structures bâties dans un rayon de 800 mètres, et déferle sur de nombreux kilomètres, causant plus de 1900 morts et probablement 9,000 blessés, en particulier des gens coupés par les vitres qui ont éclaté jusqu'à 100 kilomètres.



Il s'agit de l'explosion la plus puissante jamais enregistrée avant la première bombe atomique de Hiroshima en 1945 (12-15kt).

John Griffith Armstrong, *The Halifax Explosion and the Royal Canadian Navy: Inquiry and Intrigue*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-december-06-2017-1.4433556/it-s-part-of-the-dna-of-haligonians-100-years-after-the-halifax-explosion-1.4433619>

<http://www.encyclopediecanadienne.ca/fr/article/lexplosion-de-halifax/>



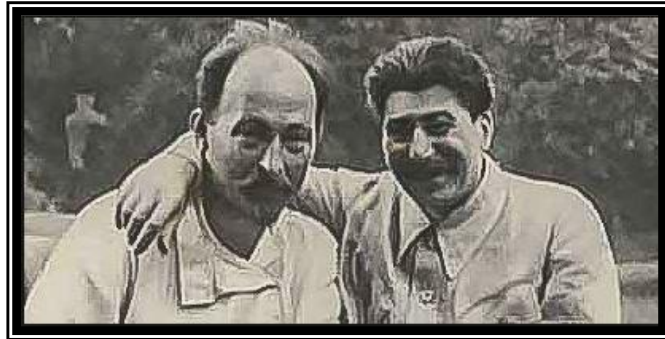
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7 December 1917

The Bolshevik secrets of a revolutionary political police



On 7 December 1917, the Revolutionary Bolchevik Government of Russia creates the Secret Political Police, the *Cheka*.

Under the direction of **Felix Dzerzhinsky**, this police is mandated to act as an extraordinary commission for the struggle against counter-revolution, speculation and sabotage.

The *Cheka* has its own secret tribunals system with unlimited sentencing powers, guided by ‘**the circumstances of the case and the dictates of the revolutionary conscience.**»¹

Its existence will not be confirmed until 1927, but in three years it will grow to 250,000 agents, ordering 1,000 executions in 1918-1919 alone.

«We are not carrying out war against individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. We are not looking for evidence or witnesses to reveal deeds or words against the Soviet power. The first question we ask is – to what class does he belong, what are his origins, upbringing, education or profession? These questions define the fate of the accused. This is the essence of the Red Terror.»²

This form of Revolution will inspire other regimes purporting to be «democratic» to use terror as an instrument of the people.

Paul Johnson, *History of the Modern World*, 67-79;

¹Ibid., p. 69;

² Quote from M.Y. Latsis, second most important Cheka official, Ibid., p. 79.



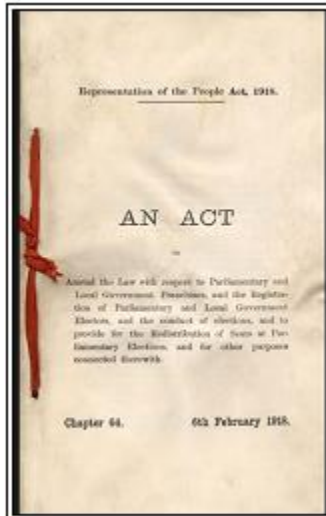
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8 December 1917

Representation of the People Bill Passes Third Reading in British Commons



On 8 November 1917, as the advance of the Canadians toward Passchendaele is drawing the **On December 8, 1917** newspaper headlines in Britain reported the passage the previous evening on third reading of the **Representation of the People Bill** by 214 votes to 7.

Reform was deemed necessary because millions of returning soldiers would not be entitled to vote under the existing qualifications.

The Bill made major changes, expanding the electorate from 7.7 million to 21.4 million. 19-20 year old males on active service and women who had joined the auxiliary services who were 30, as well as women aged 30 or above, if they or their husbands were qualified to vote in local government elections, were enfranchised, but the great numbers of female war workers were denied the vote.

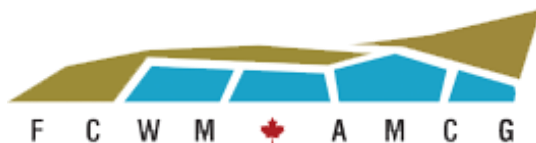
The Bill settled in principle the question of votes for women, so contentious an issue pre-1914.

As Lloyd George was to observe, on final passage of the Act in February 1918, “...**except in times of war, and party unity, it would have been utterly impossible to get the Second Chamber to adopt this Bill at all.**”

Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, IV, p. 1981;

Wilson: *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 660-2; A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, p. 133-4, 159-60;

Hugh Fraser, *Representation of the People Act*.



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9 December 1917

Russia - The Bolshevik votes are not there

The elections for the First Russian Constituent Assembly took place from November 25th. The startling returns of these elections are known throughout the land by **9 December 1917**.



«Out of a total of 41.7 million votes only 9.8 million were polled for the Bolsheviks —24 per cent or, at the most, 29 per cent if you counted the Left Social Revolutionaries in with them. Even in Petrograd and Moscow, even in the army and the navy, Lenin had less than half the vote. The Social Revolutionaries, with nearly 20.8 million votes, or 58 percent of the total, were the big winners. As for the Mensheviks, they had all but vanished from the scene, and the bourgeois parties polled only 1.99 million votes between them.»¹

Lenin must act rapidly so as to prevent the delegates from coming to Petrograd, and delay the Assembly from meeting as he does not have a majority to keep the reins of government for the Bolsheviks.

— He has one recourse: cheat with the help of the newly formed Cheka, an instrument of brutal force.

Moorehead, Soviet Revolution, Chap 15 – The Constituent Assembly, p. 258-270;

¹ Ibid, p. 264.



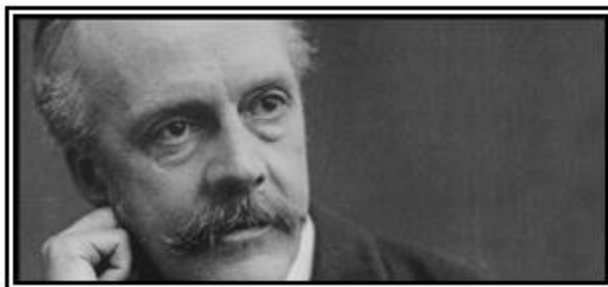
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10 décembre 1917

Arthur Balfour veut cultiver la Russie



Le Secrétaire d'État au *Foreign Office*, **Arthur Balfour**, croit qu'il est de la plus haute importance de cultiver des liens d'amitié avec le nouveau régime socialiste de Russie, de sorte à empêcher que les puissances du Centre exploitent sa faiblesse et profitent de ses ressources.

Contrairement à plusieurs de ses collègues du Cabinet, il est d'opinion qu'il serait avangeux, le plus longtemps possible, d'éviter toute prise de position conflictuelle avec ... ce système fou¹...

«Toute aussi incapable de combattre que puisse être la Russie, elle ne sera pas facilement envahie. Sans une invitation de la part des Russes eux-mêmes, les troupes allemandes – même s'il y avait des troupes allemandes en réserve-, ne pourront pénétrer des centaines de milles dans ce pays immense. Un simple armistice entre la Russie et l'Allemagne peut très bien, pour plusieurs mois, ne pas amener de façon importante, l'assistance à l'Allemagne par des ressources russes. Il doit donc être de notre affaire, de rendre cette période aussi longue que possible, de toutes les façons que nous le pourrons, et aucune politique ne serait plus fatale pour nous que de donner aux Russes un motif pour accueillir chez eux ouvertement, des représentants politiques et des soldats allemands en tant qu'amis et sauveteurs.»²

¹ «*this crazy system*», Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, V: p. 1575;

² Ibid., p. 2578. — Tr. libre.



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11 December 1917

Allenby Enters Jerusalem



On 11 December 1917, General Edmund Allenby, accompanied by T.E. Lawrence and Allied representatives, enter the historic city by the Jaffa Gate.

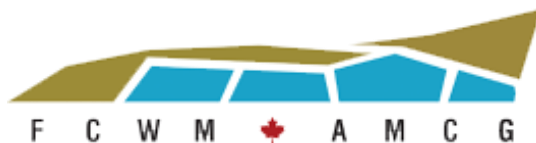
They enter on foot, out of respect for the religious significance of the city. At the Citadel, Allenby reads a proclamation regarding the safety of the city and its religious places.

Over 400 years of Ottoman occupation end after a five week campaign.

In Allied capitals, there is public celebration, the first since the beginning of the war. The moral and political effect of the capture of Jerusalem outweighs its military strategic significance; much campaigning still lays ahead.

Allenby's campaign employed a unique synthesis of the modern –tanks, armoured cars, bomber aircraft, heavy artillery–, with traditional horse and camel cavalry in their classic functions, from scouting to flank protection, long and deep penetrations, rear area sabotage, as well as all-out charges.

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



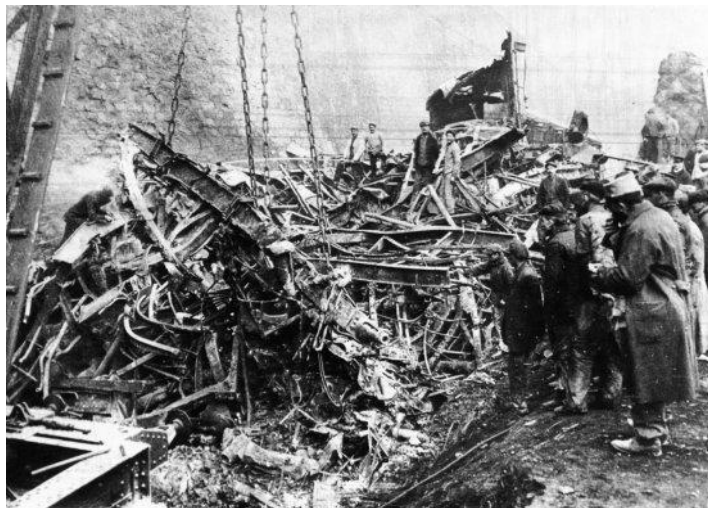
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12 décembre 1917

Un accident ferroviaire en France



Le **12 décembre 1917**, un train militaire déraille dans la descente de la vallée de la Maurienne (Savoie). Il était rempli de permissionnaires, partis aider l'armée italienne à reprendre les territoires perdus lors de la bataille de Caporetto.

Le démarrage du train s'effectue normalement et, afin de contrôler son lourd convoi, le mécanicien ferme l'arrivée de vapeur avant une forte pente qui précède le tunnel des Epines blanches. Le train part toutefois en descente incontrôlée.

Le chrono-tachymètre de la locomotive examiné plus tard, indiquera que la catastrophe s'est produite alors que le train filait à 102km au lieu des 40 kilomètres prévus à cet endroit. L'hôpital militaire de Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne et l'usine de pâtes alimentaires Bozon-Verduraz furent immédiatement réquisitionnés afin de servir de poste de secours et de chapelle ardente.

— Avec 457 morts dont 455 soldats, cet événement constitue le plus grave accident ferroviaire survenu en France.

Sources : <http://aujourd'hui.over-blog.fr/article-12-decembre-1917-accident-ferroviaire-de-saint-jean-de-maurienne-121554783.html>

Pour en savoir plus : <http://aufildesmotsetdelhistoire.unblog.fr/2009/05/18/laccident-ferroviaire-de-saint-michel-de-maurienne/comment-page-1/>



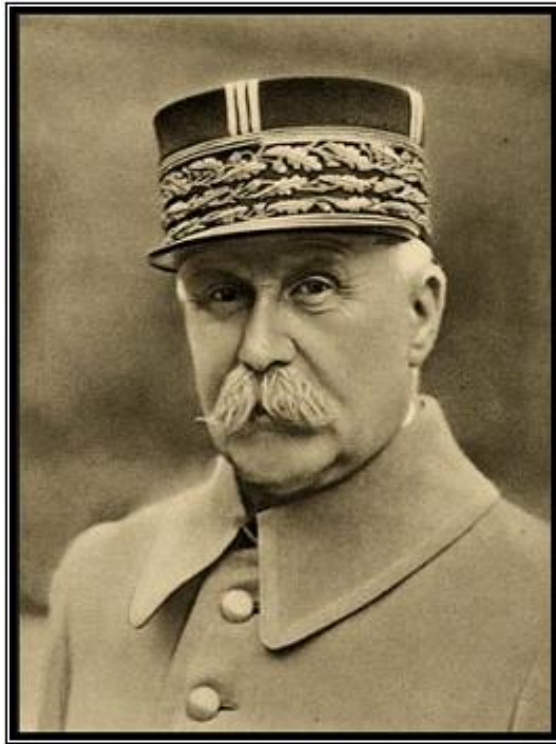
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13 December 1917

Pétain stands tall before Government



On 6 December, **Général Philippe Pétain**, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, had presented to the War Committee of the French Government his report on the actions taken by the French forces to come to the aid of the Italians in the Battle of Caporetto.

His presentation had included gloomy prospects about the further movement of German and Austro-Hungarian troops from the east to the west, with the expected numbers of divisions and batteries available to the Germans jumping inexorably by leaps and bounds.

One week later, **on 13 December 1917**, in the same War Committee, both the presidents of the Assemblée and the Senate now criticize him for being too defensive in his approach.

Pétain was never more defensive than on that occasion when he replies:

—I am eager to say that if another method is believed superior to mine, I am ready to stand and return in silence into the ranks.»

Corelli Barnett, The Swordbearers, p. 289.



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14 December 1917

The Lessons of Passchendaele



On 14 December 1917, the British Grand Headquarters publishes a General Instruction on Defensive Layouts and Tactics that set new doctrine for the British Imperial forces in defence.

It is in fact the adoption of methods developed by the Germans and published in two pamphlets, Conduct of the Defensive Battle, of December 1916, and Layout and Construction of Field Defences, of August 1917.¹

The new method makes it clear that the line established along the height of the Passchendaele ridge is not an adequate defensive position.

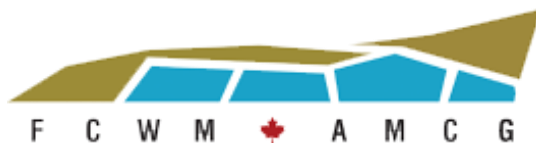
The doctrine now dictates that the line of defence should be before the crest, not at the top of it, and that the positions already held at the top be relinquished.

Although these military instructions are not passed on to Cabinet, Lloyd George hears of them and understands that the losses of the Passchendaele campaign were largely in vain, when getting to the top of the height was such a priority.

The Prime Minister will call this « **One of the most remarkable documents which ever emanated from a victorious staff.** »²

¹Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 327ff;

²Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, IV, 2240-1.



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15 December 1917

The Armistice of Brest-Litovsk

Germany and its allies were slow to respond to Lenin's Peace Decree in October 1917, nervous of dealing with revolutionaries who were calling for workers of all lands to rise against the ruling classes as a means of bringing the war to a close.

When world revolution did not erupt, and Lenin repeated his appeal for peace, the Germans decided to respond and an initial agreement was signed at Brest-Litovsk in November.



The Russian army began to disappear, as Lenin said: "They voted for peace with their feet."

On December 3rd the Central Powers' delegation (Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria) met the Soviet delegation and **on 15 December 1917**, a three-month armistice is concluded, leading to peace negotiations starting a week later.

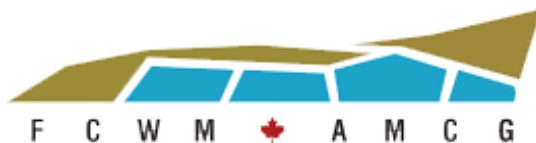
The terms will be harsh and disastrous to Russia and will include demands for the separation of Poland from Russia and wide annexations of territory further east.

Keegan: [The First World War](#), 341-2;

Riasanovsky: [A History of Russia](#), 528-9;

Vernadsky: [A History of Russia](#), 299-302.

Photo: Russian and German troops at the time of the Armistice of Brest-Litovsk, www.pinterest.com



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16 December 1917

Media Tycoon and Propagandist



Alfred Harmsworth, Baron Northcliffe, was the most influential media proprietor in England, founding mass circulation dailies such as the *Daily Mail*. A strong supporter of Lloyd George, his papers did much to overturn PM Asquith and bring Lloyd George's coalition to power.

Northcliffe was very knowledgeable about aviation and supported creation of the Air Ministry but declined appointment as Air minister.

In December 1917, he accepted appointment to the Department of Information where he became director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries.

Among other projects aimed at demoralizing the enemy, such as dropping millions of leaflets on Germany, he turned his talent for propaganda to publicizing the exploits of British flyers in his newspapers, such as James McCudden, who was awarded the Victoria cross after Northcliffe published accounts of his valour.

An *enfant terrible* of British politics, Northcliffe was a bit like Beaverbrook, a king-maker and a king-breaker, but not, as he would have it, a king himself.

J.Lee Thompson, Politicians, the Press and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War 1914-1919.

Herbert Wrigley Wilson, «Northcliffe, Alfred Charles William Harmsworth», Encyclopaedia Britannica, Twelfth Ed., 1922, XXXI: 1146-8.



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17 December 1917

The Making of the Great Divide

1917		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	YK	Total
Union	Seats	13	11	16	14	74	3	7	12	2	1	153
	%	68.4	61	74.1	79.7	62.3	24.7	59.4	48.4	49.8	54.3	56.9
Laurier Liberal	Seats		1		1	8	62	4	4	2		82
	%	25.6	30.6	23.4	20.3	32.1	73.4	40.6	45.5	50.2	45.7	38.8
Other	Seats											
	%	6	8.4	2.5	0	5.6	1.9	0	6.1	0	0	4.3

On 17 December 1917, Canada emerges from one the most divisive federal general elections of its history.

Basically a referendum on Conscription, the campaign saw the creation of a new party, the Union Party, headed by the sitting Conservative Prime Minister, Robert Borden, to ram in a coalition government committed to continue the process already set into place in the previous months, for the compulsory service of men of military age and capacity.

The Opposition Liberals, determined to derail this process, find themselves with a majority of 62 of 65 seats in Quebec, but with only 20 seats in the rest of Canada. The coalition of Unionists and Conservatives takes 60% of the votes with 153 of 235 seats in Parliament (65%).

The aftermath of this election is particularly bitter as the division is clearly set on a regional divide and much resentment remains on the methods used by the government in power to influence the results.

The pro-conscription Canadians are adamant that duty to Empire had to prevail over propriety. As a prominent Manitoba Tory MP remarked chillingly:

— «Today patriotism is greater than abstract justice or legal rights.¹»

¹Tim Cook, «The election that nearly destroyed us», *The Ottawa Citizen*, Monday, December 17, 2012, p. A9, taken from his *Warlords* (2012).



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18 December 1917

Pétain's reforms run into a Tiger



Général Philippe Pétain has been dedicated to the task of rebuilding the French Army's morale after the disaster of the Chemin des Dames, in April, and changing the culture so as to make the staff more efficient.

His new training programs have dealt with a wide array of subjects where techniques were improved, and troops were given leave to rest and recuperate.

Pétain's aim is to prepare the French Army to fight side by side with the American Army when it is ready on the ground, which may very well take a year.

This does not sit well with *Président du Conseil* **Georges Clemenceau**. The Tiger is not going to wait for the Americans to win the war for the French. He wants the French Army to get back on the offensive and renew the pressure on the Germans so as to prevent them from recuperating on their side with assets moved from the East.

Clemenceau sees the President of the Republic to recommend that General Debeney, the Chief of the General Staff for Pétain, be replaced by someone who is more aggressive. He also stops the *Bulletin des Armées*, a military publication where Pétain's attitude is too obvious.

— The 76-year old Tiger of France is now looking for one of his own breed.

Corelli Barnett, *The Swordbearers*, p. 286-91.



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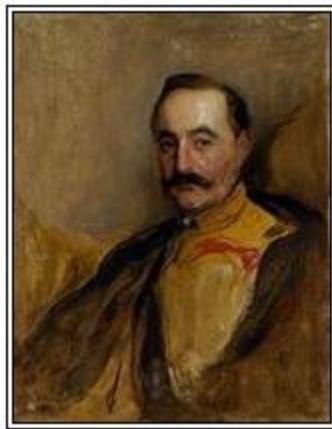
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19 December 1917

Austrian Special Envoy Count Mensdorff Meets Smuts

After his accession to the throne, Emperor Charles of Austria-Hungary pursued several peace initiatives as he was convinced that the war would end disastrously for Austria.

PM Lloyd George considered a separate peace might be possible so in December 1917, he sent Lieutenant General Jan Smuts (member of the Imperial War Cabinet) to Geneva to meet with **Count Albert von Mensdorff-Pouilly-Dietrichstein** to explore the possibilities.



Mensdorff had been Ambassador of Austria-Hungary in London before the war and was frequently used by his government on sensitive diplomatic missions.

At their meeting on **19 December 1917**, it becomes clear that there is no prospect of success. Mensdorff tells Smuts that although Austria has in the past considered separate peace agreements (notably with France), Austria will not now negotiate behind Germany's back nor can it accede to Italian and Rumanian territorial demands.

—This makes it clear that the Habsburgs are chained to the German bull to their bitter end.

A.F. Pribram, «Austrian Empire, 1908-18», *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Twelfth Ed., 1922, XXX: p. 313-43;
Wikipedia: «Count Albert von Mensdorff-Pouilly-Dietrichstein»



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20 December 1917

Doughboys can't come fast enough



At the end of 1917, Allies are taking stock of what is happening with the arrival of the United States forces in France. Inter-Allied conferences point out the dire consequences of lack of sea transport to get the American soldiers over in large numbers.

On 20 December, 1917 , the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. General John J. Pershing, sends a pleading letter to the U.S. government expressing his concern that the United States is not providing enough ships to carry divisions over in good time. He points out that by the middle of December, eight months after having declared war, the first army corps is still incomplete.

«It cannot be too emphatically declared that we should be prepared to take the field with at least four corps (24 divisions) by 30th June. In view of past performances with tonnage heretofore available such a project is impossible of fulfilment, but only by most strenuous attempts to attain such a result will we be in a position to take a proper part in operations in 1918...»

— The dilemma comes to worse: with the limited tonnage available, what proportion should be men and what proportion should be equipment?

Lloyd George, Memoirs, Vol. V", p. 3013-14.



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21 December 1917

The Whitley Councils



Labour unrest, in the war industries in particular, is of great concern to the British Government. Strikes are often called by trade unions to protest low wages, work conditions and the hiring of women for jobs they consider “men’s work”.

To address the labour situation, the British Prime Minister appoints MP **John Henry Whitley** to chair a committee which produces a Report on the Relations of Employers and Employees.

Whitley, a Radical Liberal from Halifax, Yorkshire, has empathy for the working class. He proposes a system of regular formal consultative meetings between workers and employers to cover any issue related to pay and conditions of service leading to arbitration if necessary.

These consultative meetings, known as Whitley Councils, it is hoped, will lead to improved industrial relations. The first National Whitley Council, for the pottery industry, is announced on **21 December, 1917**.

— Whitleyism, as it is nicknamed, will become a great contribution to labour harmony once adopted by other industries.

Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, IV: p. 1959-60;

Edward Brydges, «Civil Service», *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Ed., 1978, Vol. 4: p. 667-74, see p. 672;

also: «Industrial Councils (United Kingdom)», *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

https://theodora.com/encyclopedia/i/industrial_councils_united.html



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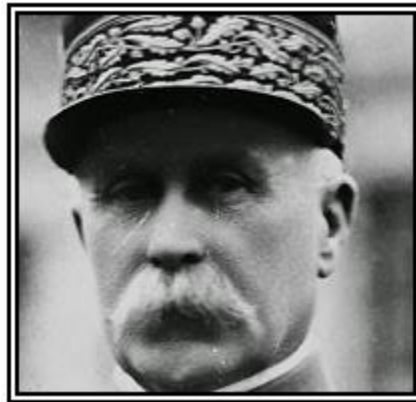
22 décembre 1917

La Directive No. 4 du Général Pétain

Le Général Philippe Pétain est de plus en plus conscient des effets de la présence du nouveau Chef du Conseil des ministres, Georges Clemenceau, à la tête du gouvernement.

Sa stratégie est mise en doute par le Tigre, qui exige plus d'opérations offensives.

Tous sont conscients que le nombre des divisions allemandes en France augmente à la suite des transferts du front russe, et que le printemps amènera sans aucun doute des regains d'efforts de la part de l'ennemi.



Pétain désire préparer les armées dans le calme pour une défense solide au printemps, alors que Clemenceau veut tuer le serpent dans l'oeuf dès maintenant.

Pétain maintient toutefois sa position envers et contre tous. Il a déjà affirmé devant l'Assemblée que si quelqu'un avait une meilleure stratégie que lui, il laisserait sa place comme commandant-en-chef.

Le 22 décembre 1917, Pétain publie sa quatrième directive aux armées, accompagnée par une «Instruction pour l'Application de la Directive No. 4» très détaillée qui livre une doctrine cohérente et étudiée de défense mobile en profondeur.

— L'Homme, réfléchi et responsable, suit ses convictions jusqu'au bout.

Barnett, The Swordbearers, p. 292.



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23 décembre 1917

Le général Guillaumat nommé à Salonica

Le général Maurice Sarrail, commandant-en-chef des forces alliées sur le front Méditerranéen de Salonica, en Grèce, est rappelé à Paris.

Son commandement a été marqué par des difficultés dans les relations françaises-anglaises, et Sarrail est considéré comme un général politique, républicain, qui n'hésite pas à solliciter l'influence des partis politiques pour faire avancer ses idées.

L'arrivée de Georges Clemenceau y met un terme.

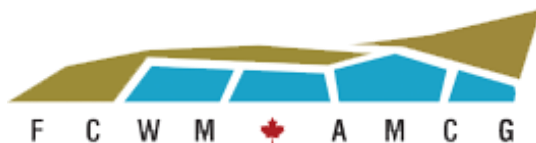


Adolphe Guillaumat a été commandant de la Deuxième armée, en remplacement de Nivelle, à Verdun; il a la réputation d'être un organisateur énergique. Il est envoyé à Salonica pour reconstruire l'unité de ce commandement allié complexe et difficile. Les Allemands se vantent d'y avoir emprisonné une armée alliée multinationale de plus de 300,000 hommes (Français, Britanniques, Italiens, Serbes, Russes, Grecs et autres) qui ne peut pas être employée ailleurs.

Le but de Guillaumat est de remettre les relations inter-armées sur un bon pied, remonter un système logistique cohérent qui puisse accompagner une poussée opérationnelle sur un terrain montagneux jusqu'en Autriche, et offrir aux Alliés un front alternatif à la France qui soit sérieux.

—Sa nomination sera judicieuse.

«Salonica Campaigns», *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 12th Ed., 1922, XXXII: 345-56;
Wikipedia, «Guillaumat, Adolphe»



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24 December 1917

Lloyd George has Admiral Jellicoe dismissed



On **Christmas Eve 1917**, with no prior warning or discussion in the War Cabinet, and only hours after Jellicoe had attended a Cabinet session, he found a letter on his desk at the Admiralty from Sir Eric Geddes demanding his resignation.

This was reminiscent of the similar treatment of Admiral Callaghan in 1914; it was a peremptory dismissal effected with no rational explanation other than Lloyd George's vindictiveness.

There is no evidence that the hero of Jutland had lost the confidence of War Cabinet members, other than Lloyd George, who took advantage of Parliament's Christmas break and the fact that no newspapers would be published until December 27th to engineer Jellicoe's dismissal and his replacement as First Sea Lord by Admiral Wemyss. Geddes, minister at the Admiralty, stood as the martinet to deflect criticism away from the prime minister.

Lloyd George knew that he risked a political crisis, as all ranks of the Navy would be indignant and the Sea Lords would threaten to resign.

— As Lady Carson wrote, **“Geddes has dismissed Jellicoe as one might a dishonest butler.”**

Wilson: *The Myriad Faces of War*, p. 626-7;
Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, Vol. III: p. 1170;
Macfarlane: *A Naval Travesty*, p. 201, 247, 261.



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25 December 1917

Permanent Military Representatives' Concern Regarding Russian Front

In late December, the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles grappled with the implications of the Russian revolution.

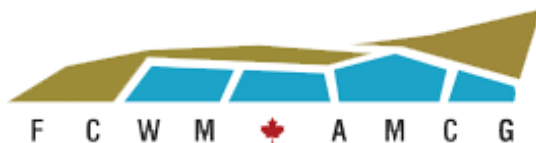
Their fear, expressed in their Christmas Note No. 5 to the Supreme War Council, was that the Germans could break into the Caucasus via southern Russia to obtain food, circumventing the Entente's blockade of the Central Powers, which they considered essential to weaken Germany, Austria and Turkey and shorten the war.

Note No. 5 recommended that all national groups of the former Russian empire which wanted to continue the war against the Germans or curb the spread of Bolshevism, should be supported by any means, from the north, but also via the eastern port of Vladivostok.

This recommendation contributed to shaping the civil war in Russia between the Whites, supported by the western allies, and the Bolshevik Reds.



Further information: Norman Stone, [The Russian Front 1914-1917](#)



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26 December 1917

Japanese Navy Ordered to Vladivostok

Japan, through its Navy, made a significant contribution to the Entente, providing ships for blue-sea pursuit of German cruisers, and anti-submarine patrols, notably in the Mediterranean.

In 1917, the collapse of the Tsarist government and the movement eastwards of Bolshevik revolutionaries alarmed monarchist Japan.

When General Foch, in early December, asked Japan to intervene in Russia, push west across the Urals and re-establish an Eastern Front, the Japanese government declined to do so.



In late December, Japan was alarmed, however, that Britain, without consulting Japan despite the UK-Japan Alliance, had approached the United States regarding a naval intervention at Vladivostok.

After Britain agreed that Japan should be included in an allied naval task force, but before planning could be completed, the Royal Navy deployed a battleship from Hong Kong to Vladivostok.

Japanese PM Terauchi Masatake was outraged and on the **26 December 1917**, he ordered the battleship *Iwami* (captured from Russia in the 1905 war) to reach the Russian port first.

— After the victory of the Japanese-Russian War of 1905, Japan was not to be out-smarted at its door.

Fairbank, John K., Edwin O. Reischauer, Albert M. Craig, EAST ASIA: Tradition and Transformation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), Chap 23: «Imperial Japan: Democracy and Militarism», p. 682-725, esp. 692-4; Wikipedia, «Japanese Intervention in Siberia».



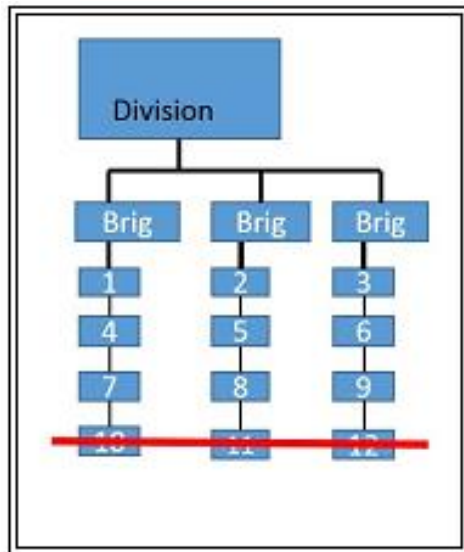
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27 December 1917

Crisis in Manpower Leads to Reorganization of British Divisions in France



The British government in early 1918 was well aware of an impending manpower crisis. The major engagements of Arras, Messines and Third Ypres had resulted in further heavy casualties, leaving Haig short of 80,000 infantry alone.

The ongoing conflict over the strategic direction of the war, and the complex competing needs of both the military and industry, forced a reorganization of British Divisions in France, as the Germans and French had done earlier in the war.

By **December 27th 1917** plans had been put in place to reduce every Division from 12 to 9 Infantry battalions, cutting through an organizational structure in which every officer and man had been trained, at a time when Haig was having to take over more of the front line from the French.

The plan to include the Canadian Divisions in the reorganization was resisted by General Sir Arthur Currie, concerned with loss of tactical efficiency.

He proposed that the Canadian 5th Division in England be used to reinforce the Canadian Corps in France.

John Keegan: The First World War, p. 395-6; Keegan, The Long, Long Trail; A.M.J. Hyatt: General Sir Arthur Currie, p. 98-102.



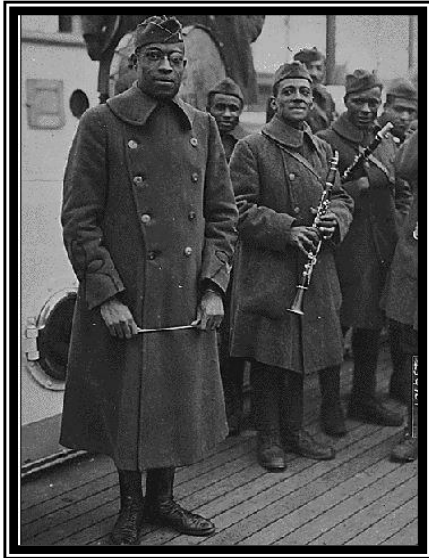
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28 décembre 1917

Europe Jazzin' it all up



Le **27 décembre 1917**, le lieutenant Noir **James Reese Europe**, débarque du *Pocahontas* sur les quais de Brest. Il dirige un ensemble musical, un *brassband*, une sorte de fanfare qui, aussitôt à terre, commence à jouer une musique étonnante, extraordinaire, qui résonne dans toute la ville et stupéfait les Brestois.

Ils sont parmi les premiers Européens continentaux à découvrir le jazz! Le brassband américain se lance même dans une «Marseillaise » pleine de swing qui laisse pantois les passants.

James Reese Europe est l'un des meilleurs chefs d'orchestre de New York et on lui doit, en partie, l'invention du fox-trot. Engagé en 1915 dans l'armée, il va constituer un ensemble incomparable d'une soixantaine de musiciens, les plus talentueux de Harlem et de Porto Rico. C'est cette formation

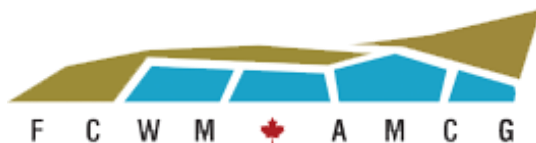
qui arrive à Brest pour remonter le moral des troupes et qui va introduire le jazz dans toute l'Europe.

La discrimination étant en vigueur dans l'armée américaine, ces Noirs vont en effet être intégrés à l'armée française où l'on surnomme l'orchestre le « Hell Fighter Band ».

—Ils rembarqueront en janvier 1919, toujours à Brest, et seront accueillis triomphalement à New York.

Sources : <http://www.leparisien.fr/espace-premium/air-du-temps/ils-ont-introduit-le-jazz-en-france-09-03-2014-3656491.php>

Pour en savoir plus : www.sonsdhiver.org/fr/actualités/1917-2017-le-souffle-continue.html



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29 December 1917

Hugh Trenchard becomes Chief of Staff at the Air Ministry

Hugh Trenchard has a long history in the British Army, having spend many years in South Africa and having been severely wounded there in 1900. He then joined the West African Frontier Force and joined the Southern Nigeria Regiment in 1903 where he served for six years, building the country.

Back in Britain, he lost interest in sedate regimental life, and at the age of 39, sought to become a pilot. He never became a good pilot, nor a good instructor, but his abilities as an administrator pushed his brilliant second career in the Flying Corps.

A master at organization, he was instrumental in setting up structures that fostered steady progress in a fast evolving technical field. After having set up aircraft production and staff training in England, he was sent to France where he soon became the Air Advisor to Generals French and Haig. As the Officer Commanding the Royal Flying Corps in France, from 1915, he created a network of squadrons and wings that assisted in all aspects of air support to the British Army. He was the main influence in convincing British High Command of the incredible advantages that an air component could bring to battlefield intelligence.



At the end of 1917, the British Government is intent in forming the recently created Air Ministry, with its Air Council, and joining the RFC with the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS), the incompatible twins.

— «Boom» Trenchard is returned to England to become the Chief of Air Staff at the Ministry.

A.J.P. Taylor, «'Boom and Bombs' – 'Boom' Tranchard and the RAF» in , From the Boer War to the Cold War: Essays on Twentieth-Century Europe, (Hamish Hamilton, 1995, Penguin 1996), p. 372-5.



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30 December 1917

Lloyd George Continues His Vendetta Against Haig



In early November 1917 **Brigadier-General John Charteris**, the BEF's Intelligence Chief, had written: **"Lloyd George has opened his attack on the Army generally and on DH [Haig] and Robertson in particular. I am told he will go for individuals on the Staff here as the easiest way of hitting DH."**¹

Prophetic words! Charteris and Lieutenant-General Lancelot E. Kiggell, Chief of Staff of the BEF, were in fact two of Lloyd George's main targets. He regarded both men as over-optimistic in providing advice to Haig.

On **December 31st 1917** Lloyd George acted. Kiggell, ostensibly for 'health reasons,' was recalled home and Charteris transferred to a minor post at GHQ.

Haig tried to keep Kiggell, but failed, and was denied his choice of a successor. Their replacements were competent staff officers and Haig was well served by them. Also replaced were the Quartermaster General, the Chief Engineer and the Director-General of Medical Services.

For the politicians led by Lloyd George, to attack Haig by axing his closest colleagues was pure spite and petty interference on a grand scale.

¹ Charteris, *At GHQ*, p. 268.

Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, 326-7; Daniel Dancocks, *Legacy of Valour*, 206-9; Gary Sheffield, *The Chief*, 258, 369.



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31 December 1917

1917 Kaput!

«As light began to fail, the armies stood to. Flares and star shells rose into the sky with the evanescence and sinister loveliness of tropical plants; the crater-studded, moon-like waste spasmodically vibrated to the percussion of desultory shell-fire and explosion. More men were killed, more were wounded, more died. As midnight approached there were sounds of music and singing along the line of the German and Austrian trenches; there was a little mild celebration among the British but none, it seems, among the French.»¹



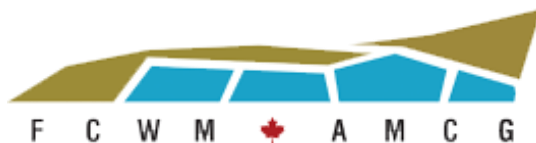
The poet Edmund Blunden wrote of this moment:

*«Midnight; succession of coloured lights from one point, of white ones from another, bullying salutes of guns in brief bombardment, crackling of machine-guns small on the tingling air; but the sole answer to unspoken but importunate questions was the line of light in the same relation to Flanders as at midnight the year before. All agreed that 1917 had been a sad offender. All observed that 1918 did not look promising at its birth.»*²

—«It was the fourth New Year's Eve of the war.»³

¹ Barry Pit, 1918: The Last Act (Ballantine, 1964), p. 48.

² Quoted in *Ib.*, p. 48;

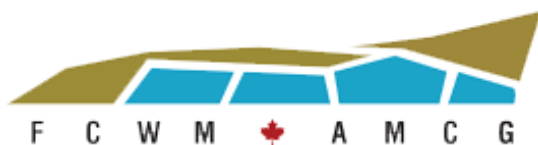


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³ Ib.



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