

# 1 October 1917

## A Canadian VC with the Leicester Regiment

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**Philip Eric Bent** was born in Halifax in 1891, but grew up and was educated in the United Kingdom. He joined the Merchant Navy in 1907, and on the outbreak of the First World War, he and a friend enlisted in the British Army thinking the war would be over quickly. Some months later, he was commissioned as an officer in the Leicestershire Regiment, and he left for the Western Front in July 1915.

Lt Col Bent was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery whilst leading a successful counter-attack, which secured a vital piece of the line, on **1 October 1917** near Polygon Wood.

The last part of his citation reads as follows:

**«The coolness and magnificent example shown to all ranks by Lt.-Col. Bent resulted in the securing of a portion of the line which was of essential importance for subsequent operations. This very gallant officer was killed whilst leading a charge which he inspired with the call of Come on the Tigers. »**

Lieutenant-Colonel Bent has no known grave, but is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium.

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See : <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/ww1-canadian-vc-recipient-philip-eric-bent>  
Legion Magazine, May 2005 p. 36.



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## 2 October 1917

### Canadians being drawn into the mud

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By the beginning of October, the Canadian Corps is still in front of the city of Lens, which has not been taken despite the best efforts of the battles for Hill 70, and the Green Crassier, six weeks ago.

The Corps rebuilt its diminished divisions since then, and continues to patrol and harass the German defences there.

**On 2 October 1917, Field Marshal Haig** warns the First British Army Commander, General Horne, that he will be ordering two of his divisions to the north to involve them in the Flanders campaign.

**General Arthur Currie** is informed on the same day that the Canadian Corps will be providing the two divisions.

Currie does not agree. If any Canadian division is going north, the whole Corps will be going north, as Currie has his national government's backing that he is to keep the Corps together, and not send his divisions separately to other corps, as the British staff would prefer.

Horne has a decision to make: will he send two British divisions north or will he recommend to Haig that he take the whole Canadian Corps with its four divisions?

Ask a beggar if he wants a buck!!!

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Nicholson, CEF, 339; Dancocks, Passchendaele, 69.



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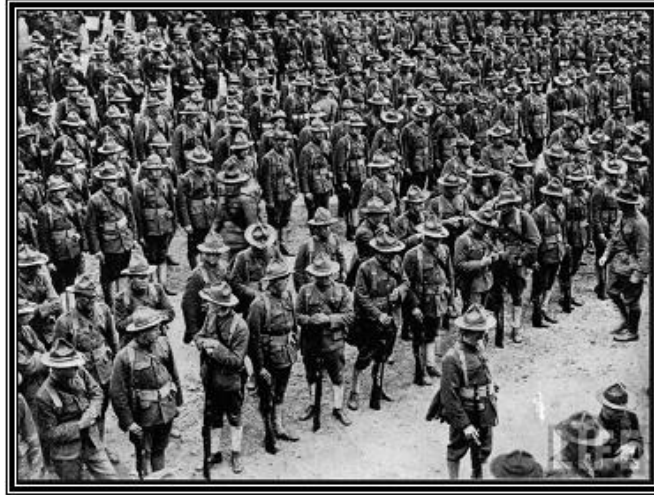
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# 3 October 1917

## The American Expeditionary Force in France

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When General John Pershing assumed command of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in May 1917, he set in motion a plan by which at least 1,000,000 American soldiers should be in Europe by May 1918; this is what he cabled Washington in July 1917.

However, Pershing failed to appreciate two problems: the British were crowding the Channel ports and the French were exploiting the manufacturing center of Paris, so that the railroads of northern France were already much overtaxed.

Moving materials from the ports inwards was increasingly difficult for the Americans as they arrived.

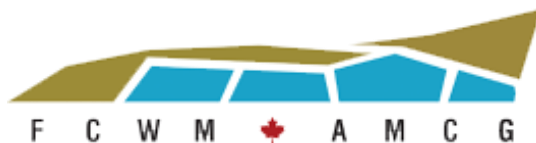
However, the AEF faced a second, more critical and crucial problem: the amount of shipping available for military purposes was in competition against that required to supply the Allied effort with other amenities like steel, coal, and food.

The end result was that the American force was only at around 60,000 personnel in France by early October 1917.

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For more information : Byron Farwell, Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918 (New York: Norton, 1999; Norton paperback, 2000), p. 49-60.

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## 4 October 1917

### Plumer's Second Attack in Flanders

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General Sir Herbert Plumer, the Commander of Second British Army, launched his first attack as spearhead of the British Army Group in the north on 20 September.

This resulted in an advance of the line into German defences, in a battle that resulted in immense casualties on both sides.

Haig insists that this is to be followed on **4 October 1917** by another attack by Second Army, supported by Fifth British Army and French *Première Armée*, on the left.

These attacks, launched at a time when the rain has eased from the August downpour, are having some effect as attritional engagements. The progress on the ground counted in hundreds of yards results in enemy prisoners captured in thousands, and enemy casualties inflicted in tens of thousands.

Ludendorf, very worried at this point, acknowledges a 'period of tremendous anxiety.›

– Everything edges on the weather, now. The Germans are praying for General Rain.

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Dancocks, Passchendaele, p. 77-81.



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## 5 octobre 1917

### La pluie fait son entrée

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L'attaque d'hier de la Deuxième Armée britannique a été faite sous le vœux que la température sèche des dernières semaines continue encore pour quelques semaines, permettant aux attaquants de traverser le No Man's Land d'un pas rapide et sûr.

Mais le même jour, la pluie se met à tomber fort et ne cessera pas pour les prochains quatre jours. La rivière Steenbeek est bloquée et les cratères d'obus s'emplissent d'eau comme une chaudière, créant «une marmelade de boue.»<sup>1</sup>

C'est la réponse aux prières des Allemands, qui se sont mis à redouter, dans les dernières semaines, que les méthodes britanniques se soient définitivement améliorées et que leurs avances courtes et très planifiées soient venues aux prises avec les défenses en profondeur.

Mais la pluie aide les défenseurs. Attaquer dans une mer de boue est une entreprise qui arrache le cœur.

— Les Australiens et Néo-Zélandais, en avant de la Deuxième Armée, voient leurs espoirs se noyer devant leurs yeux.



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<sup>1</sup>Nicholson, Le Corps Expéditionnaire Canadien, p. 338.



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## 6 October 1917

### Borden Calls Elections for 17 December

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Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden has finished talking in Parliament. On **6 October 1917**, he puts an end to the Parliamentary life of his Government and declares General Elections for 17 December.

This has just given him time to set in place those laws that he felt were crucial for the maintenance of a Government in power that will continue support the war. The three main laws, **The Military Service Act, The Wartime Elections Act and The Soldiers Voters Act** have set the scene for an election that will be in itself a referendum on the Conservatives' War policy.



Borden has also worked hard to form a government with new ministers, which will represent more widely the spectrum of voters, including *bona fide* Liberals who have agreed with his stance and joined the Conservatives.

This a very long electoral campaign shaping up. It will also be a nasty one, where the Opposition is convinced that the Government has used its majority to set itself up for certain victory.

The Battle of Ballots will have important consequences in the European battlefield.

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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.



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## 7 October 1917

### The British Army condemned to Mud

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The attack of 4 October went well by British standards. It again crept by hundreds of yards, with hundreds of men paying dearly for each.

On the same day, it started raining and it has not stopped until briefly this morning of **7 October 1917**.

At GHQ, an optimism surged that almost nobody else could understand. The height from Westroosebeke to Passchendaele to Broodseinde has barely been approached and the new front lines are at the low ground, where trenches cannot be dug, troops cannot be supported because of the lack of duckboards in communication trenches, and horses cannot carry loads up because of the water.



Yet this morning Field Marshal Haig, in conference with his two army commanders, resolves that a further attack will be made on the 9<sup>th</sup>, and again on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

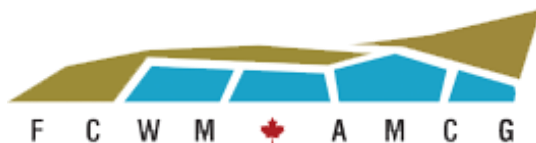
The main argument is that front troops cannot spend the winter in this low ground. They have at least to capture the high ground where some amount of drainage can be done before the snow comes.

The three attacks of September 20<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and October 4<sup>th</sup> have shown that each brought an advance of a half-mile. But those were made over dry land.

— Now the waterline is steadily marching on.

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Wolff, In Flanders Fields, 178-90.



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# 8 octobre 1917

## Le vin aux armées

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Pendant le premier conflit mondial, une grande partie de la production viticole française est destinée aux armées.

Dans le département de l'Hérault, et plus précisément dans la région de Béziers, le vin produit au sein des exploitations viticoles est acheminé par train spéciaux vers la zone des armées.

Le vin, un symbole de la France et un attribut patriotique du soldat : les deux images remplissent la même fonction : populariser l'armée et ses hommes, au moyen d'un art simple, immédiat et largement diffusé.

Si la décision politique et militaire de ravitailler ainsi les soldats répond en réalité à la nécessité de les contenter voire de les étourdir, il convient aussi d'apprécier la valeur symbolique et mobilisatrice de cette association entre les troupes et le vin.

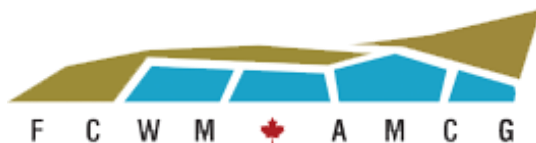
L'Armée montre à tous (ceux de l'arrière, parmi lesquels des futurs combattants et les familles de ceux qui sont au front) qu'elle s'occupe bien de ceux qui défendent la France en veillant à les fournir en vin.

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Sources : <http://www.france24.com/fr/20141001-vin-alcool-premiere-guerre-mondiale-consommation-historien-christophe-lucand-pinard>

En savoir plus sur [http://www.lemonde.fr/centenaire-14-18/article/2014/10/17/boire-et-deboires-pendant-la-grande-guerre\\_4508005\\_3448834.html#jeIKdYt6QLiqVrcz.99](http://www.lemonde.fr/centenaire-14-18/article/2014/10/17/boire-et-deboires-pendant-la-grande-guerre_4508005_3448834.html#jeIKdYt6QLiqVrcz.99)

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## 9 October 1917

### “The Saddest Day of the War”

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Encouraged by British successes in September and October, Haig sought to exploit his momentum by an advance on the village of Poelcappelle to set the stage for the planned Passchendaele offensive.

Days of torrential rain turned the ground facing the two Anzac Corps into a “mud porridge” through which men waded, exhausting themselves before they reached the start line. The infantry, slowed by liquid mud, fell behind the creeping barrage.

While at first, the rain screened the attackers, the skies cleared leaving them vulnerable to German machine guns which had not been suppressed by the artillery which could find no firm ground for its guns, resulting in inaccurate fires.

Overall, Poelcappelle cost 20,000 casualties, in horrific conditions, leading Brigadier Charteris, Haig's chief of intelligence to describe it as the “saddest day of the war.”

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Further information:

Leon Wolff, *Flanders Fields*, p. 197-203.

Wikipedia, «The Battle of Poelcappelle»



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# 10 Octobre 1917

## Richard Meinertzhagen's Haversack Trick

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General Edmund Allenby of the Egypt Expeditionary Force is preparing a plan to take Palestine from the Turks in the Fall. He is adamant that a deception plan must be prepared so as to fool the Turks into believing that he will not take the obvious route through Gaza, but will start with an advance toward Bersheeba.

An officer on his staff, **Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen**, conceives and prepares a trick to misinform German/Ottoman Intelligence towards that aim.

**On 10 October 1917**, Colonel Meinertzhagen goes into the desert with a haversack full of tricks to induce the enemy to believe that he is an Intelligence officer on a reconnaissance. His notebook, letters from his wife, money, and cipher used as sandwich wrappers are dropped when he is taken under fire.

According to his own account, the scheme was instrumental in supporting the deception plan that Allenby used very successfully a few weeks later.

There are however, great doubts as to the veracity of this tale. Meinertzhagen published four books based on his prolific diaries, but these proved to be the source of much creativity.

It nevertheless remains that the story inspired a whole school of tricksters in the British Intelligence community which was very active with various *ruses de guerre* in World War II.

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Anthony Cave Brown, Bodyguards of Lies, p. 279-82;  
Wikipedia, «Meinertzhagen».



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# 11 October 1917

## Lloyd George's feud with Haig

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Lloyd George's toxic relationship with his military leaders, in particular Haig (C-in-C) and Robertson (CIGS), reached its lowest point by early 1917.

LG had always disapproved of the concentration of effort on the Western Front, and the tactics of mass assault resulting in heavy casualties, advocating instead for the main effort to be in Italy.

There were earlier attempts to dismiss or sideline Haig, beginning as early as 1916 after the Somme offensive, then in Rome in December 1916, followed by the Calais Conference early in 1917, where LG plotted to have Haig placed under the command of the "charismatic fraud French general Nivelle."<sup>1</sup>

**On October 11, 1917**, as Third Ypres (Passchendaele) unfolded, LG invited Field Marshal Sir John French and General Sir Henry Wilson, both failed commanders and known intriguers, hostile to Haig and Robertson and the Western Front strategy, to meet with the War Cabinet. They criticized Haig's conduct of the campaign, recommended defensive action only until the Americans arrived in force, and the setting up of a Supreme War Council.

— This was a blatant attempt by David Lloyd George to sideline Robertson and destabilize Haig.

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<sup>1</sup>Cook, *Shock Troops*, 312;  
Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, IV:2367-84;  
Sheffield, *The Chief*;  
Wilson 'The Myriad Faces of War'.



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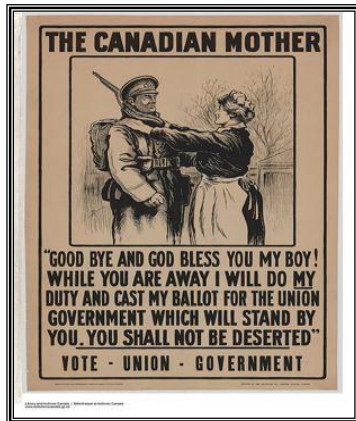
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# 12 October 1917

## Union For and Union Against

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On 12 October 1917, just a few days after having closed the parliamentary session and having called a general election for 17 December 1917, prime minister Robert Borden officially announces the creation of the Union Party.

Borden wants all men of any political party or persuasion who believe that the war should proceed with a national Conscription, to join the Union Party and win the election of December.

He can already announce that Opposition Liberals, as well as provincial Liberal politicians have left the ranks of their party to join the Union Party to campaign for Conscription.

To ensure Conscription will be won, Borden has already orchestrated the passing of the Wartimes Election Act – which disenfranchises conscientious objectors, as well as Canadian citizens born in enemy countries who arrived after 1902. Most notably, this law also permits only female relatives of servicemen to vote. Thus, the 1917 general election will become the first election in Canadian history where some women will be able to vote!

— However, this strong-arm Union approach is creating divisions – deep ones!

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J.L. Granastein and J.M. Hitsman, Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press), p. 46-63.



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# 13 October 1917

## Currie's Passchendaele Job

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By early October of 1917, after more than two months of fighting in Flanders, the Allies had suffered over 100,000 casualties and had ultimately failed at taking the Passchendaele objective. Still, General Haig was adamant – Passchendaele had to be taken for the greater success of the Allies.

The General's next step was to bring in the Canadian Corps. **On October 13, 1917**, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie received a request to submit plans for the capture of Passchendaele. Currie strongly objected, claiming that

his men had not recovered enough for such a battle.

He predicted over 16,000 unnecessary Canadian casualties and repeatedly requested the attack be called off, blaming the weather and logistic problems, but Haig was persistent. "I carried my protest to the extreme limit," says Currie<sup>1</sup>. However, he reluctantly agreed, and provided Haig with a detailed, multi-phase plan for the capture of the village that would begin on October 26<sup>th</sup>.

— Passchendaele was a job that Currie definitely did not ask for...

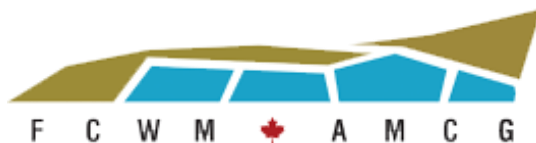
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<sup>1</sup>A.M.J. Hyatt, General Sir Arthur Currie, 79. Also:

Norman S. Leach, "Passchendaele – Canada's other Vimy Ridge," *Canadian Military Journal*, 9:2 (2008): 76-7;

E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud*, p. 56;

Andrew Macdonald, *Passchendaele*, p. 66-7.



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# 14 October 1917

## Pershing Forms a Second Army

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Since its arrival in France, the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) is eagerly awaited in the front lines of the Western Front.

With no more than basic training, formations were thrust into battle beginning in July with the 42nd Division going into the line east of Reims.

As more reinforcements arrived, they were poured into the line. “The Allied progress elsewhere cheered the efforts of our men in this crucial contest” wrote General John Pershing about the period, while the AEF was in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

By October, it was clear, however, that First Army was not big enough for the numbers of troops needed for the battles underway.

As the Argonne Forest was cleared on October 10<sup>th</sup>, he wrote, “It was now necessary to constitute a Second Army,” a command duty he assigned to **Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard**, previous Commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Division and III Corps.

— Second United States Army was created on **14 October 1917**.



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United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919. Volume 12. Reports of the Commander-in-Chief, Staff Sections and Services. (CMH Pub 23-18. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1948, 1991), p. 11.



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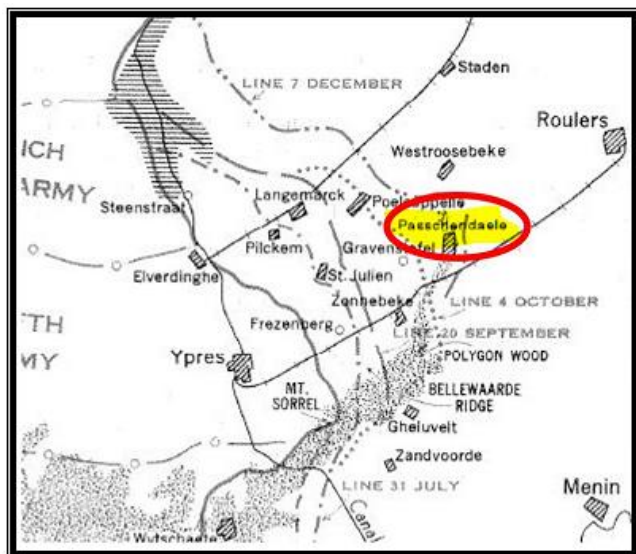
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# 15 Octobre 1917

## Currie arrive à Ypres



Le lieutenant-général Arthur Currie, le commandant du Corps canadien, a maintenant reçu son ordre de mission pour déplacer son Corps en entier de la Première Armée Britannique, près de Lens, à la Deuxième Armée, dans le secteur de Ypres.

Le 26 octobre, tout doit être en place pour lancer une autre attaque dans ce secteur de triste mémoire des Canadiens.

C'est là qu'en mars 1915, à Saint-Julien, tout près, tout juste après son arrivée sur le champs de bataille pour la première fois, la Première division canadienne avait été attaquée avec des gas de chlore.

Currie était alors commandant de brigade.

Il arrive aujourd'hui, le **15 octobre 1917**, comme commandant du Corps, avec la responsabilité d'orchestrer une attaque où deux armées britanniques se sont déjà édentées.

Nicholson, Le Corps expéditionnaire canadien, 1914-1919: histoire officielle de la participation de l'Armée canadienne à la première guerre mondiale.

Voir texte .pdf complet: [http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/docs/CEF\\_f.pdf](http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/docs/CEF_f.pdf)



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# 16 October 1917

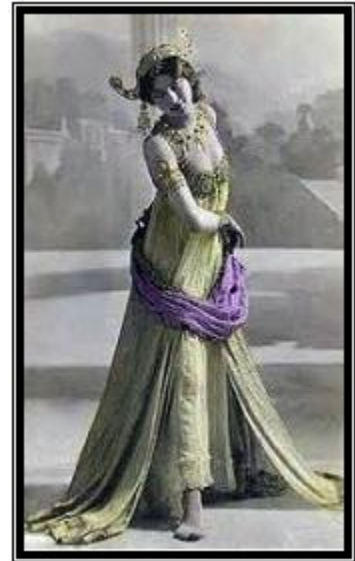
## The execution of Mata Hari

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The War Times Elections Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on 6 September. The Dutch-born **Margaretha Geertruida Zelle**, daughter of a bankrupt father and former wife of an abusive husband, adopted the stage name **Mata Hari** when financial circumstances forced her to become an exotic/erotic dancer performing Asian-inspired dances after moving to Paris in 1905.

She quickly became hugely popular in the dance halls and opera houses of Europe and this brought her to the attention of high-ranking diplomatic and military officers of various nationalities that she took on as lovers.

At the outbreak of the war the French secret police recruited her to use her liaisons with German political and military figures to obtain any intelligence that would be useful to the allies.



She was, however, accused of being a double agent working also for the Germans and after a trial in February 1917 she was convicted by the French as a German spy and sentenced to death.

In the early morning of **16 October 1917**, Mata Hari was taken to a barracks on the outskirts of Paris and executed by a firing squad.

— The shots that killed her echoed around the world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D.W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France, 1870-1939*, (New York: Harper, 1966) II:537.

See: <http://eyewitnesstohistory.com/matahari.htm> ;  
[https://www.biography.com/people/mata-hari-9402348?\\_escaped\\_fragment=](https://www.biography.com/people/mata-hari-9402348?_escaped_fragment=)



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# 17 October 1917

## Floating on mud

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Currie and his staff have put together a plan for a methodical advance through the narrow corridors that are drier, toward the Bellevue Spur and Passchendaele village.

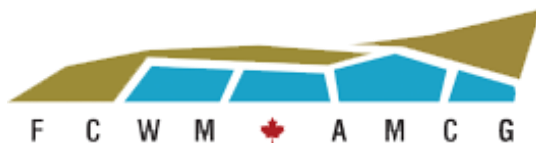
One week of preparation is granted to get this preliminary work ready.

Production of «bathmats» or «duckboards» go apace for movement to be reestablished around the flooded areas of the choked Ravebeek river.

**« Experience had taught the Canadians that success in battle was dependent on an effective transport system, wisely positioned artillery and a reliable communications network. Currie insisted that this groundwork be completed before the Canadian Corps began its step by step assault on Passchendaele Ridge. Consequently, on October 17<sup>th</sup> [1917], Canadian engineers and pioneers started to reorganize the transportation links between the staging areas and the front and to construct artillery positions. In a short time, the transfer of huge amounts of ammunition and supplies to designated areas near the front-lines was underway.»<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Norm Christie, For King and Country: A Social History and Battlefield Tour, Volume 4: The Canadians at Passchendaele, October-November 1917 (CEF Books, 1999), p. 9.



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# 18 octobre 1917

## La méthode Pétain à La Malmaison

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Le but premier du général Pétain est de remonter le moral de l'Armée française sans abandonner de terrain aux Allemands. Mais le moral n'est jamais aussi bien servi que par la victoire.

C'est pourquoi Pétain organise une attaque au Chemin des Dames contre la forteresse de La Malmaison, où il met toutes les chances de son côté.

En trois jours de préparation, les canons massivement réunis lancent trois million d'obus sur une place forte occupée par les

Allemands qui s'écroule. Pétain insiste que:

**«L'artillerie conquiert, l'infanterie occupe.»**

Il ne fait avancer les bataillons que lorsqu'il est devenu évident que l'objectif est réduit. Cette méthode de Pétain, qui symbolise prudence et sûreté, remonte l'Armée française de sorte qu'elle soit prête à faire équipe avec l'Armée américaine au printemps 1918.

La méthode Pétain servira pour un temps. Mais un gouvernement français conciliant et passif sera bientôt remplacé par un homme d'une toute autre trempe.

— Le Tigre suit les choses de près et trouve qu'avec Pétain, on oublie la Guerre...

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Brigadier General Henry Arthur Bethell, CMG, «Artillery», Encyclopaedia Britannica (Twelfth Ed, (1922) XXX, 248-64, see 254.

Denis Defente (Dir.), Le Chemin des Dames (2011), p. 121



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# 19 October 1917

## The Campaign anchors in Toronto

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With the closing of the session of Parliament, the announcement of the creation of the Union Government, and the launching of the general federal elections campaign for 17 December, the country is completely focused on the Conscription debates.

In Toronto, at the Hippodrome Theatre, **on 19 October 1917**, an important rally is headed by Toronto Mayor **Tommy Church**, a fierce Conscriptionist who drew «ferocious applause» for his views that conscription was the most fair and equitable way to obtain recruits.

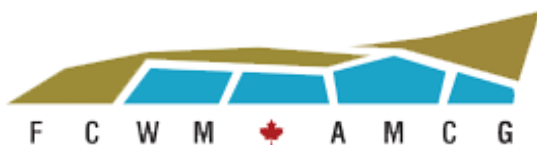
Church will be behind an initiative by which each serviceman of the city will become the object of a life insurance policy of \$1,000.00 to be paid out to his family. The Great War Veterans Association, formed of returned servicemen, is also very active in promoting compulsory service. Toronto is thus becoming the anchor point of a nation-wide movement.

— There are no holds barred in this debate. Lives are at stake.

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Photo: J.D. Morrow and Mayor Tommy Church recruiting, 1916. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 721A <https://torontoist.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/20140610churchrecruiting.jpg>.

Bill Twatio, «The Conscription Crisis», *Esprit de Corps*, Part I: 11:6 (May 2004), p. 20-2; Part II: 11:7 (Jun 2004), p. 21-2; Part III: 11:8 (Jul 04), p. 21-2, 29. See Pt I, p. 20.



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## 20 October 1917

### Churchill still rides the tank

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**Winston Churchill** was reintegrated into Government in January 1917, and given the job of Minister of Munitions in July when the incumbent agreed to step aside because he thought Churchill was the best man to oversee the department.

Lloyd George, who had always wanted to take Winston back despite his immense loss of popularity after the Dardanelles failure, instructed him to stick to Munitions and not try to run the whole Government.



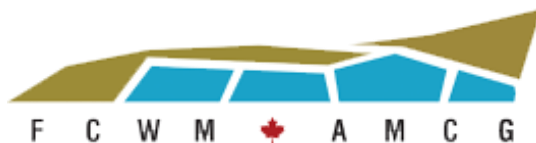
But Churchill cannot stop himself from expressing his views on the importance of the tank and how underrated and misused it is in Haig's strategy. Churchill was there at the creation, back in 1915, and still has not changed his view that the tank is the only hope for tactical victory in France. He is revolted by the principle of attrition applied in Flanders.

Another of his brilliant memoranda comes out, on **20 October 1917**, expounding the value of offensive armoured vehicles in the context of six areas of technical developments that will win the war.

Under the heading of «**Blasting Power and Moving Power**», he recognizes 1-Artillery; 2-Aviation, 3-Railways and Trucks, 4- Trench mortars; 5-Tanks, and 6-Gas, as areas of top priority in industrial production.

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Churchill, World Crisis, Vol III (Part I), Chapter XII, p. 308-9; App V, p. 568-77.



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# 21 octobre 1917

## La Première Division américaine entre en ligne

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Le 6 juillet 1917, le quartier général de la Première Division expéditionnaire des États-Unis a été renommé QG de la Première Division, «*The Big Red One*».

Les troupes de la Première Division américaine arrivent en France et en Angleterre depuis juin et les derniers éléments arriveront jusqu'en décembre 1917.

Il s'agit d'une division dont la structure est complètement différente des divisions britanniques ou françaises.

Celles-ci ont tout au plus 18,000 hommes sur papier, et leurs effectifs sont beaucoup plus bas au combat, en 1917, alors que leur renforts sont si difficiles à trouver. La nouvelle division américaine compte 27,000 hommes sur le terrain.

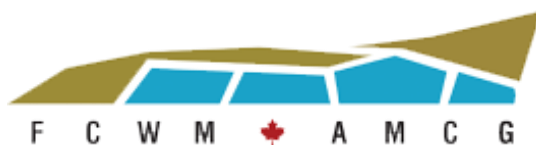
La Deuxième Division Américaine «*The Indianhead Division*» est en train d'être formée en France selon les mêmes principes.

**Le 21 octobre 1917**, la Première Division prend place le long de la ligne de front en France. Son artillerie ouvrira le feu pour la première fois dans deux jours, et ses premières pertes de vie seront subies le 25 par le 2e Bataillon du 16e Régiment d'infanterie.

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Wikipedia «First Division (United States)»

NOTE: La note du 14 octobre 1917 dit que la Deuxième Armée américaine a été créée en ce jour. Cette note date en fait du même jour d'octobre de 1918 et a été utilisée par erreur. La note a été retirée de notre série.



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## 22 October 1917

### The Canadian Corps relieves II ANZAC

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The Canadian Corps is being moved from Lens, near Vimy, where it stayed from the fall of 1916, after the battle of the Somme, to the area of Ypres, where it started the War, in 1915.

The Corps is being attached to Second Army to continue the advance toward Passchendaele, begun on 31 July 1917, with Fifth British and First French Armies.

**On 22 October 1917**, the Canadian Corps relieves the Second Australian and New Zealand Corps (II ANZAC) as spearhead of Second Army.

The New Zealand Division and the 49<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> British Divisions of II ANZAC are utterly exhausted and depleted.

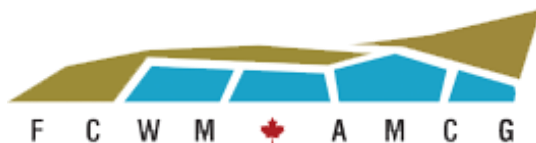
They were involved in repetitive attacks since the last week of September, and the New Zealanders have experienced their worse day of the war on 12 October, groping in mud under machinegun crossfire to gain yards of ground.

The Canadians are seeing them return, caked and bloodied, from Hell on Earth.

— It is now their turn to cross the Styx of Flanders.

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Prior & Wilson, Passchendaele: the untold story (Yale University Press, 1996), Chap 17: «Final Folly», p. 171-81.



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## 23 October 1917

### Lenin seizes the moment – To Arms!

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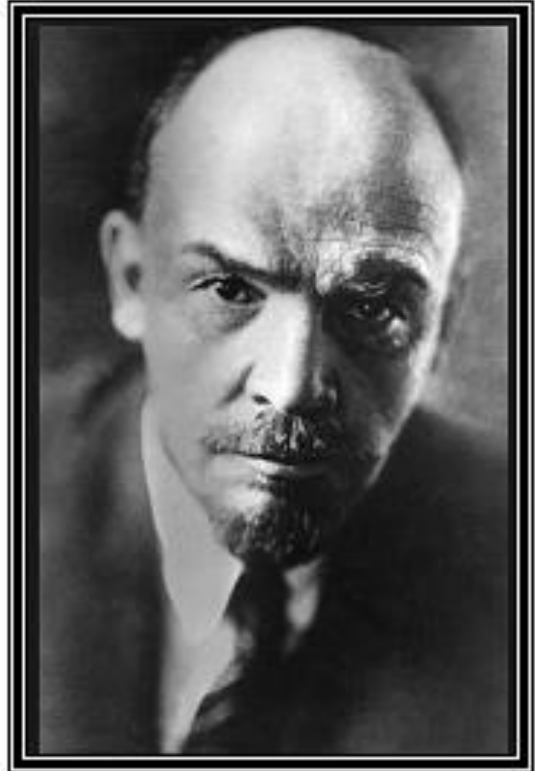
The Kerensky Provisional Government, a self-proclaimed socialist and interim government of Russia, replaced the Tsarist regime in March 1917.

President-Minister Aleksander Kerensky has just put together a third coalition in the hope of balancing not only the Right against the Left, but the many factions of the revolutionary Left, with three main parties contending for influence, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Mencheviks and the Bolcheviks.

The Bolcheviks, under the keen leadership of Trotsky, have created a wide machinery of military revolt through the control of the Petersburg Soviet.

When the Kerensky government still refuses to adopt policy crucial to the socialist revolutionaries: end of the war and peasant ownership of land, it is seen as becoming counter-revolutionary and bourgeois in the midst of national débâcle.

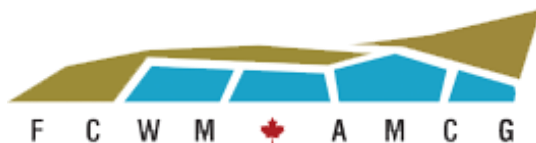
On 19 and 21 October, **Lenin** publishes two articles in socialist newspapers calling openly for revolt under the slogan «Peace, Land and Bread». **On 23 October 1917**, (5 November 1917 in Old Russia) he calls his Military Revolutionary Committee to arms.



— The genius has caught the opportunity with perfect timing. The Bolshevik «October» Revolution will take two days.

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Richard Charques, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia* (OUP, 1958). \*Note dates vary by 13 days ahead in Old Russian system.



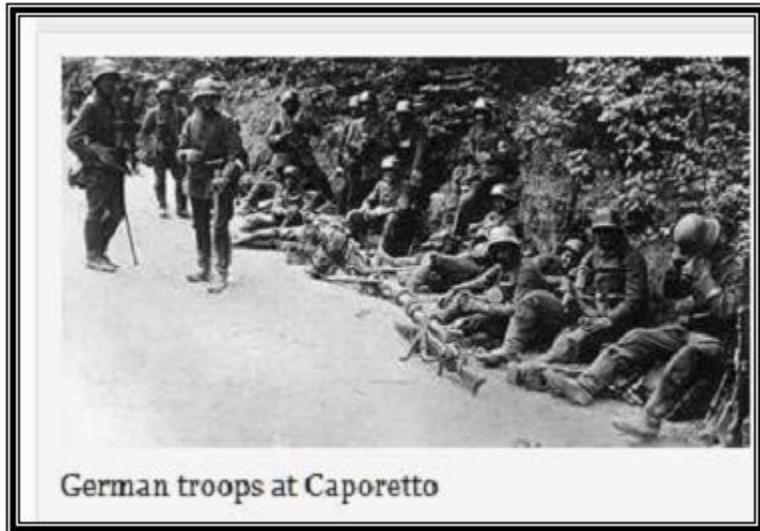
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# 24 October 1917

## Disaster at Caporetto



In order to sustain Austria-Hungary in the field, Germany transferred several divisions to the Isonzo front for a fresh offensive. This included troops freed from the Eastern Front with the collapse of the Russian Army.

On the early morning of the **24 October 1917**, German gas projectors covered the Italian trenches; this was followed by artillery barrages and attacks by specially trained and equipped German stormtroopers.

The «*Sturmtruppen*» used infiltration techniques with small units employing a new Maxim light machine gun, light trench mortars, and mobile mountain guns.

The Italian army collapsed; the Germans and Austrians advanced 25 km on the first day. Italian casualties were enormous: 10,000 killed, 30,000 wounded and 265,000 captured along with 3,000 guns.

Caporetto was the foundation of the *mythos* of the German stormtroopers.

— Erwin Rommel won the Empire's highest award for valour, the *Pour le Mérite*, in this battle.

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Further information: John Schindler, [Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of the Great War](#).



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# 25 October 1917

## Bracing for the morning attack

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After being tasked by General Haig to take the lead of the Passchendaele offensive, Lieutenant General Currie did the best he could to ensure things were prepared for the Canadian assault. He was given one week to do so.

He planned for decent roads to be built, and for artillery to be in the correct position to support the Corps. Drinking water, ammunition depots, aid posts were set up.

His plan for the Canadian Corps was for four successive attacks, each with an advance of some 500 yards, so as to reach the height of the village of Passchendaele.

The Canadians arrived on the scene to a mud-filled swamp, or, as then Captain E.L.M. Burns said, a “primeval bog”. To leave the wooden duckboards, General Burns remembered half a century later, was to “sink into a slough.”<sup>1</sup>

To prepare the soldiers for these stomach-wrenching conditions, infantry battalions were sent to the support lines four days ahead, to adjust and prepare.

**On 25 October 1917**, all that could be done in one hectic week was done for the Second Battle of Passchendaele to begin with an early morning attack.

— One can only imagine the darkness and dread of this damp long night.

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<sup>1</sup>Burns, E.L.M. General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars (Toronto: Clarke & Irwin, 1970).

Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, (Rpt, 2015).

Photo: Passchendaele Mud, CWM.

<http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/wp-content/mcme-uploads/2014/07/eo-2249.jpg>



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## 26 October 1917

### Italian Retreat to the Tagliamento and Piave Rivers

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Faced with overwhelming disaster at Caporetto, the Commander of the Italian Second Army, General Luigi Capello, requested permission, on **26 October 1917**, to withdraw to the Tagliamento River.

Marshall Cadorna refused, believing that the front could be stabilised. Finally after further reverses, Cadorna allowed the Second Army to retreat to the far side of the Tagliamento.

This took four days, with the Germans in hot pursuit.

The attackers established a bridgehead on the Tagliamento, but by then they had outrun their logistical support and were unable to concentrate enough supplies to launch an immediate follow-up offensive, which might have knocked Italy out of the war.

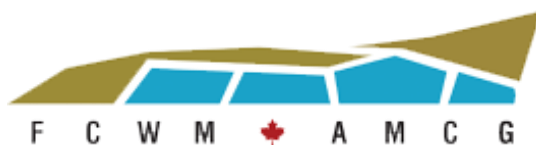
Marshall Cadorna authorised further withdrawals and the Italians established a firm position on the Piave River blocking the way to Venice.

— This was the Near-Run Thing that Ernest Hemingway described in his Farewell to Arms.

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Further information: [John Schindler: Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of the Great War](#)

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# 27 October 1917

## The Canadian Corps in the First Phase at Passchendaele



Yesterday morning, the Canadian Corps started its prepared assault toward the village of Passchendaele.

3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division is on the left of the Ravebeek creek (now a large swamp), and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division is on the right.

General Currie has divided the plan into phases, marking the ground in front so as to rotate divisions and brigades.

Each division rotates its brigades on the way so as to share the burden of being up ahead. Brigades shift their units on the go.

RED LINE, BLUE LINE and GREEN LINE mark the objectives at which rotations will be made.

**On 27 October 1917**, these two divisions push ahead for a second of three days. They are progressing with extreme perseverance.

Tomorrow they must reach drier ground into the hill.

Then they will stop for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions to pass through.

— This is the decisive day in which they must leave the thick of the mud behind.

For more information: Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, Chap 10, «Passchendaele».

Prior & Wilson, *Passchendaele: The untold story* (Yale University Press, 1996), Chap 17, «Final Folly»,

Background map from p. 170.



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## 28 October 1917

### Foch to Command Reinforcements to Italy

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Earlier in 1917, the French and British high commands had considered several plans for strengthening their Italian ally but not much had been done except the transfer of one hundred heavy guns.

The rout at Caporetto suddenly forced reconsideration.

Foch had opposed PM Lloyd George's desires to send British and French troops to Italy, but then, as the French Chief of the General Staff, he favored the transfer of four French divisions, heavy artillery and an army headquarters.

Command of this French force was coveted by the French Commander-in-Chief, Général Pétain. But after a furious argument Foch prevailed and was given the command “with full powers to act as he saw fit.”

On the **28 October 1917**, 40 trains per day began to move the troops.

— On the same day, Foch saw fit to depart for Italy.

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Further information: Elizabeth Greenhaigh, [Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General](#)



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## 29 October 1917

### A 230-mile ribbon of underwater mines

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**On 29 October 1917**, the President of the United States signed the formal approval for the construction of a barrage of anchored contact mines in the North Sea.

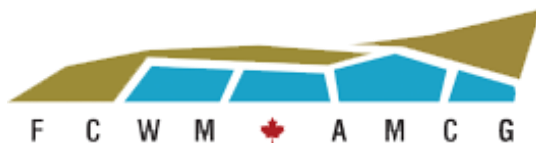
After having obtained the approval of the British Admiralty, the US Bureau of Naval Ordnance will hold a conference of manufacturers to design a new type of contact mine in November 1917.

The first mines will be ready for testing in March 1918, and a barrage 370 km long and 25 to 55 km wide, between the Orkney Islands and Udsire Light, in Norwegian territorial waters, will be ready with 70,263 mines in place by end-July 1918.

— This barrage will, by the end of the war, have blocked passage and destroyed 17 enemy submarines.

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Frederick L. Paxton, «Munitions of War (United States)», *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Twelfth Ed., (1922), XXXI: 1030.



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# 30 October 1917

## Four VCs in one day

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**30 October 1917** marked the renewal of the assault on Passchendaele after a 1-day pause for the two front divisions to switch brigades.

The 4<sup>th</sup> (Right) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (Left) Canadian Divisions continue their advance uphill.

**Private Cecil Kinross** of the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion, is caught under heavy fire early on. Surveying the situation, he removes his gear, charges an enemy machine gun, kills the crew of six, and destroys the gun.

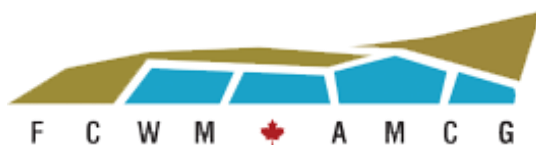
By mid-afternoon, the PPCLI are storming the strongpoints of the Meetcheele crossroads. **Lieutenant Hugh McKenzie** and **Sergeant George Mullin** lead an attack on the enemy position. McKenzie is killed but Mullin and the team complete the attack to capture the pillbox.

To the left of the P.P.C.L.I., **Major George Pearkes** and the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles show determination at the end of the day in refusing to withdraw when in a tight spot.

— All four men – Kinross, Mullin, Pearkes, and McKenzie (posthumously), are awarded the Victoria Cross for their outstandingly valorous action on the same day.

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For more information: [Canadian Recipients of the Victoria Cross, First and Second World Wars](https://www.friends-amis.org/), The Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, University of New Brunswick.



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# 31 October 1917

## Allenby Takes Beersheba

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When General Edmund Allenby took command of the British Empire forces in Palestine, his immediate priority was to end the stalemate at Gaza where the British had twice been defeated by the Ottomans, who were well fortified and reinforced.

Allenby determined that another frontal attack would fail. His plan was to exploit the weakness of the Turkish left at the small town of Beersheba.

Deception was the key: British forces simulated preparation of another offensive at Gaza, while the main force secretly moved inland against Beersheba.

Preparations were greatly aided by the newly arrived Bristol Fighters which denied the airspace to German reconnaissance aircraft.

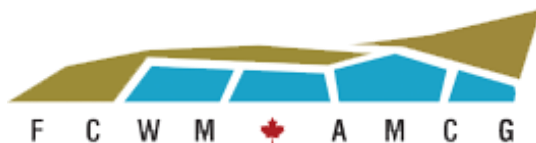
With the ANZAC cavalry playing a major role, on 31 October 1917 Allenby's force successfully attacked Beersheba, setting the stage for the flanking move on Gaza.

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

Photo: This dramatic bronze in the present-day Israeli town of Be'er Sheva, aka Beersheba, commemorates the 1917 charge of the 4th Light Brigade against entrenched Ottoman forces. (Photo by Ian Nellist/Alamy).

See [historynet.com/the-light-horse-takes-beersheba.htm](http://historynet.com/the-light-horse-takes-beersheba.htm) <http://www.historynet.com/the-light-horse-takes-beersheba.htm>



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