



From the Front

June 1917

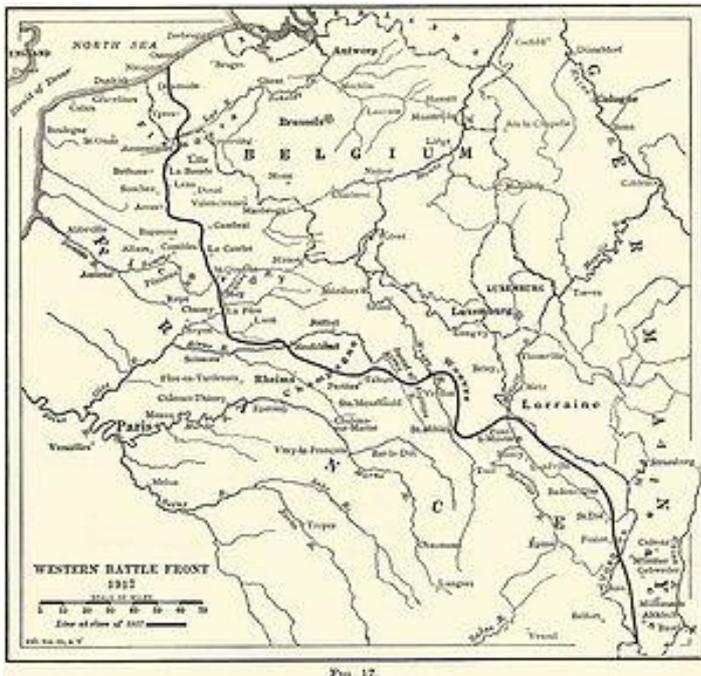
Whilst Sir Douglas Haig might have rejoiced in the decision to switch the attack to the Flanders Salient, an area which had long preoccupied the Field Marshal there was a sinister reason for the decision to take the main focus of the attack away from the main concentration of French Troops. The reason did not emerge until several years after the end of the War and was kept a close secret least it be known to the Germans how near they had come to taking the French out of the War.

The French troops had in fact mutinied! This left the country vulnerable and drastic action was required to redress the imbalance. The actions by the French soldiers started just after the disastrous Second Battle of the Aisne, the main offensive in the Nivelle initiative, in April 1917. The newly appointed C-in-C had promised a decisive war-ending victory over the Germans in 48 hours and the men were euphoric on entering the battle. The shock of failure soured their mood overnight and the mutinies and associated disruption involved nearly half the French Infantry divisions stationed on the Western Front! The men had simply had enough and the Mutiny commenced on the 17th April when seventeen men from the 108th



Infantry Regiment abandoned their posts in the face of the enemy. For this 12 men were sentenced to death, but all were reprieved. They were motivated by the conditions under which they lived, the classic conditions of trench warfare and the long periods of time between being granted leave. True there were instances of the waving of Red Flags and the singing of the Internationale it appears that international communism had little to do with the events of 1917. The men had little argument with the junior officers, with whom they fought

side by side but the senior officers appear to have been the major focus of resentment but there is little evidence to support the notion of widespread confrontation and only one, General Bulot, appears to have been assaulted. Indeed the senior officers played a large part in the suppression of the Mutiny by meeting with the men and discussing their problems with them, on several occasions simply meeting with the men and clearing the air was enough to bring the men back into line.

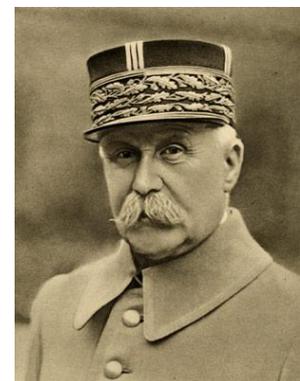


It became clear that punitive measures would not solve the situation, rumours of extremism

merely served to anger the men still further. The first of these was that General Duchene had ordered that every tenth man in the battalions of the 32nd and 66th regiments was to be shot as a punishment for refusing to obey orders when these battalions were ordered to return to the front line. Three mutineers from these battalions were sentenced to death but only one was actually executed. The actions of the junior officers served to gain the cooperation of the men and the whole incident appears to have been exaggerated.



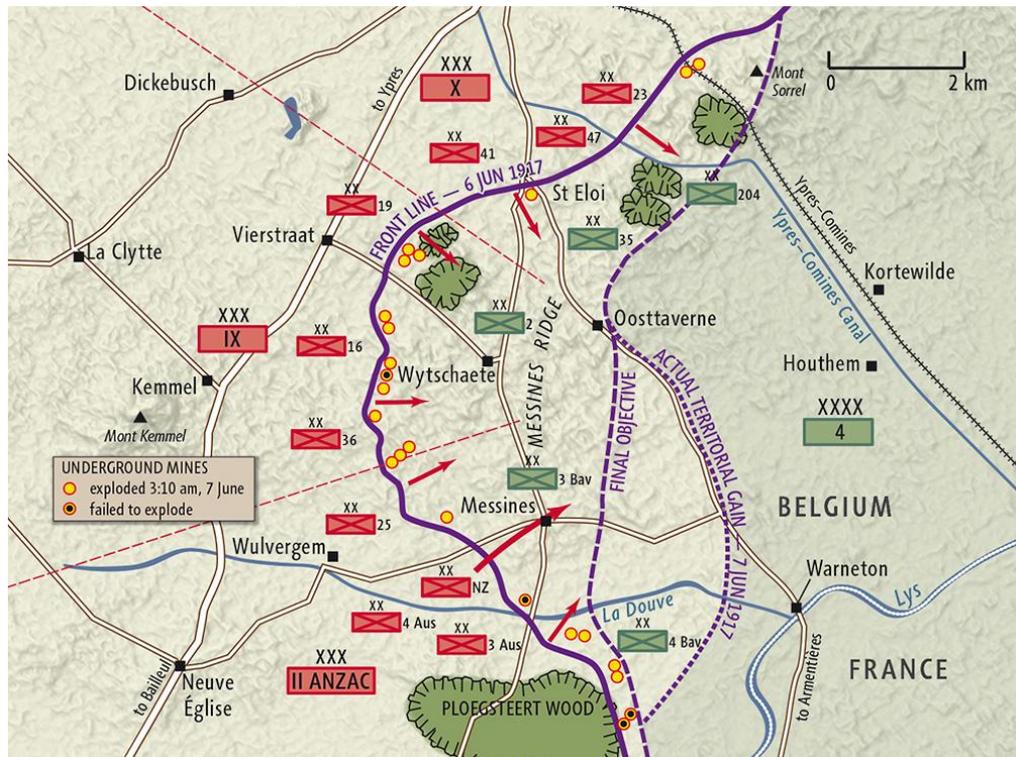
The new commander, General Philippe Petain restored morale by talking to the men, promising no more suicidal attacks, providing rest for exhausted units, granting home leave and moderate discipline. He held 3,400 courts martial, 554 of the mutineers were sentence to death but over 90% had their sentences reprieved and the affair was concealed from the Germans, indeed General Ludendorff stated after the War that he knew nothing about what was happening within the French Army.





It was Sir Herbert Plumer that Haig turned to spearhead his attempted breakout from the Salient. He only had a short time span in which to divert the Germans away from the opposing French forces, Accordingly Plumer led the British Second Army into the prelude to an offensive which was designed to break the grinding stalemate on the Western Front. The tactical objective of the attack at Messines was to capture the German defences on the ridge, which ran from Ploegsteert (Plugstreet) Wood in the south,

through Messines and Wytschaete to Mt. Sorrel, to deprive the German 4th Army of the high ground south of Ypres. The ridge commanded the British defences and back areas further north, from which the British intended to conduct the Northern Operation, an advance to Passchendaele Ridge and then capture the Belgian coast up to the Dutch frontier.



British forces had put careful planning into the Battle of Messines Ridge due to its strategic position overlooking the whole Salient; it was regarded as one of the German's most important strongholds on the Western front, as it gave them complete observation over it. For the previous 18 months soldiers had worked into place nearly one million pounds of explosives in tunnels and the German

Positions, which extended some 2,000 feet in length, some to a depth of 100 feet below the surface of the ridge, where the Germans had long been entrenched.

At 3.10am on June 7th a series of simultaneous explosions rocked the area, the noise of the blast being heard as far away as London. German losses that day included more than 10,000 men who died instantly and some 7,000 prisoners,



men who were too stunned and disoriented by the explosions to resist the infantry assault. Immediately on the explosion of the mines our guns opened up and the infantry assault was launched with the effect that the enemy's first line system was carried on the whole front attacked. The troops pressed on with scarcely a pause up the western slopes of the Messines - Wytschaete Ridge and within three hours of the commencement of the attack had stormed the entire crest line from south to north. Shortly afterwards the whole of Messines was capture and before midday the

capture of Wytschaete village had been accomplished. Although regarded as a relatively limited victory it had considerable impact on the conduct of the War. The Germans were forced to retreat to the east, a sacrifice that marked the beginning of their gradual but continuous loss of territory on the Western Front. It also secured the right flank of the British thrust towards the much fought over Ypres region. Over the next month and a half British forces continued to push the Germans back towards the high ridge at Passchendaele which on the 31 July saw the launch of the 3rd Battle of Ypres or, as it is better known Passchendaele.

In 1941 the Australian Official Historian recorded II Anzac Corps losses from 1–14 June as 4,978 casualties in the New Zealand Division, 3,379 casualties in the 3rd Australian Division and 2,677 casualties in the 4th Australian Division

Using figures from the *Reichsarchiv*, Bean recorded German casualties for 21–31 May, 1,963; 1–10 June, 19,923 (including 7,548 missing); 11–20 June, 5,501 and 21–30 June, 1,773. German Official Historians recorded 25,000 casualties for the period 21 May – 10 June including 10,000 missing of whom 7,200 were reported as taken prisoner by the British. Losses of the British were recorded as 25,000 casualties and a further 3,000 missing from 18 May – 14 June.

The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry was deeply involved in the battle and whilst the casualty figures for Dewsbury during the month of June were

comparatively light (seventeen men lost their lives) four of the Townsmen were killed on the 7th June, two on the 8th and one on the 11th.

The offensive at Messines forced the Germans to move reserves to Flanders from the Arras and Aisne fronts, which relieved pressure on the French.



From the Front

Part 11

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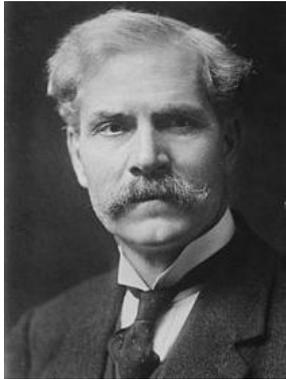
From Petrograd as we now call St Petersburg the former imperial capital, comes confirmation that the group known as the Russian Council of Workmen's



and Soldier's Delegates, now appears to be setting itself up to directly challenge the Official Provisional Government. It has now decided to summon an international Socialist Congress at Stockholm commencing on the 8th June 1917. More alarming is a statement of the principles on which the

proposed congress is to be based. The statement calls for mobilization of the proletariat, in other words, of the Socialist parties of all countries with the object of putting an end to the war. An attempt is to be made to give life to the dream of an international proletariat united against war, a dream so utterly shattered by the present war and particularly by the attitude adopted by the strongest Socialist organisation in the world i.e. that of Germany. The British, French and Belgian Socialists, who are to be invited to the conference will be asked to decide on a radical change of attitude, they will be asked to transfer their energies from the work of active participation the war to that of a

reassertion of the class principle as a means of securing peace. This will place the Allied Socialists in a very difficult situation.



Meanwhile the Leeds Socialist Convention has appointed Ramsey MacDonald and F.W. Jowett, M.P. for West Bradford, as delegates to go to Stockholm and Petrograd. However, when they reached their British port of embarkation they met with huge surprise. They found that the crew of the vessel on which they had booked their passage refused to sail so at present they are being held up in this country.

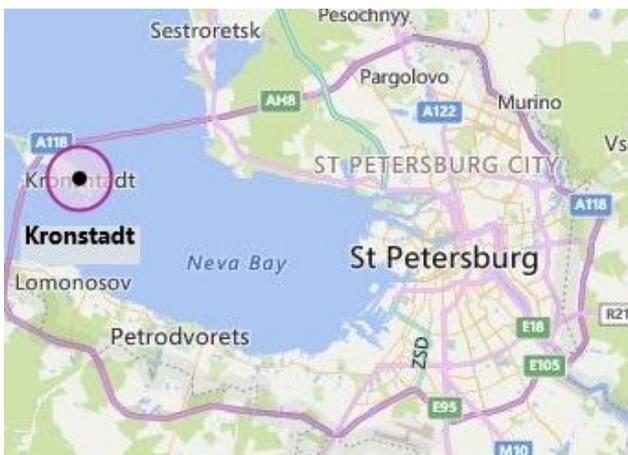
The news was announced in a telegram from a Captain Tupper, an official of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, which was read out, amidst great cheering at a large and enthusiastic representative demonstration in Trafalgar Square, "Have MacDonald and Jowett prisoners in --- Crew of --- refuse to sail with them".



Captain Tupper, was, you may remember, the delegate who was howled down when he suggested, at the Leeds Conference that the German's should be asked for reparations for the murder of British sailors on the high seas.



The Sailors' and Fireman's Union has won universal support for its stand and has even received a cable from Rotterdam from Dutch seamen thanking the union for its magnificent stand and vowed that the Dutch seamen would not carry peace delegates.



It has further emerged from that beleaguered country that the conflict between the Authorities in Petrograd and the Island of Kronstadt has again come to the fore. Following a compromise, in which the Kronstadt Council gave recognition to the

authority of the Provisional Government, for which the Council would have the right to elect the governor of the island, which lasted one day! As soon as the representatives of the Provisional Government had left the Maximalist agitators got to work and the decision of the Local Council was reversed and that the declaration of independence still stood.



Kronstadt is the rocky little island, crowned by the blue cupolas of the Cathedral, in the midst of far-spreading waters, a natural defence just at the point where the Neva broadens out into the Gulf of Finland. It has a population of 40,000 and consists of garrison, military and naval units as well as a considerable number of civilians.

At the outbreak of the revolution the sailors and marines of the island displayed great ferocity in contrast to the general humane character of the movements throughout Russia. They cruelly killed a number of officers and arrested and maltreated many more. This may have been the result of the fact that the Island had been used as a dumping ground for the



most worthless characters in the fleet. It now seems that if the Provisional Government is to survive it will have to imprint its authority and control over these excepted districts.





From the Front

Part 111

June 1917



News from other sources reveals some interesting and significant developments. From Brazil comes the tidings that the country has decided to enter the War on the side of the Allies. Reuter's Agency states that the Brazilian Minister saw Lord Robert Cecil at the Foreign Office last evening and formally communicated to the British Government the decision of his country to revoke her neutrality between the United States a Germany. The German u-boat

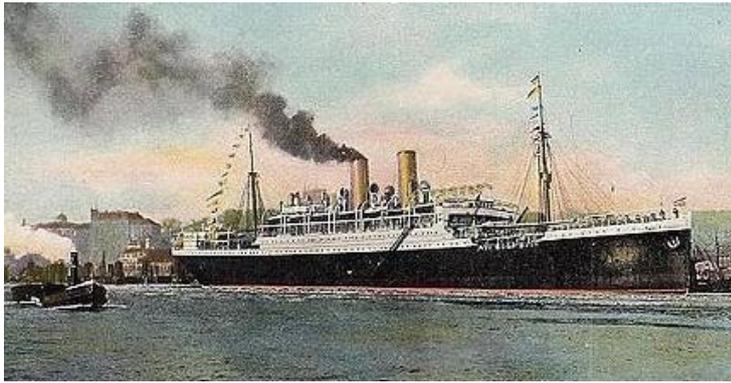
campaign against Brazil's merchant ships has left little room for doubt that there already exists a virtual state of War. For the Brazilian and its people have all along sympathised with the Allies but decided to maintain neutrality until

forced out of it. Senhor Nilo Pecanha, Minister for Foreign Affairs has sent to the Brazilian Legations for transmissions to the Governments to which they are accredited a note communicating the sanctions of President Wenceslao Braz to the revocation of neutrality and thus confirming the traditional friendship and identity of political views uniting Brazil to the United States in defence of the vital interests of America and international law



It can be regarded as certain that Brazil like the United States will go into the war with all her resources of men and power.





As a first step Brazil has seized the forty two fine German ships now in her harbours. It appears that the vessels are mainly of the tonnage most required and are practically undamaged and will immediately be put at the disposal of the Allies.

Furthermore, with a population of 26,000,000 Brazil should soon be able to raise an additional army which should prove of considerable assistance in the European theatre of war.

From Greece comes the equally satisfying news that the Allies have forced the abdication of King Constantine. The arrival of M. Jonnart the former Governor General of Algeria and presently the High Commissioner for the Allies has been followed by dramatic developments which, in view of recent events that have occurred since the beginning of the War, created no surprise.



As a result of demands of the Protecting Powers, France Russia and Great Britain previously put to him; King Constantine abdicated his throne, which he has held since the assassination of his Father, King George I at Salonika on March 18th 1913. The Powers have expressly barred the Crown Prince George from the succession on account of his pro-German sympathies and the ex-king has therefore nominated his second son Prince Alexander, who is in his 24th year, to follow him to the throne.



It appears ex- King Constantine accepts the decisions calmly and bows to the knowledge that the situation has been brought about by his own policies and



acts. Should he attempt to overthrow the decision M. Jonnart has several Allied forces at his disposal, Anglo French troops have entered Thessaly and have also occupied the Piraeus. The dethroned monarch, with his wife (who is the sister of the Kaiser) and the erstwhile Crown Prince will leave the country, their destination is presently unclear but Constantine has expressed a desire to go to Switzerland, via Italy on a British ship.



King George 1st of Greece



Crown Prince George



Prince Alexander