

London, June 15, 1918

Note de
Robert Borden

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Memorandum by
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We arrived in London at three o'clock on Saturday the 8th instant and were met by Kemp and Perley and by representatives of the British Government. That evening I had a long talk with Kemp as to the Overseas Force and I realise more fully than before the great difficulties with which he has contended and the really fine results which he has accomplished.

Sir Clifford Sifton, who called on me a few days afterwards, and who was much concerned as to the conditions of the organisation here, told me that Kemp has managed wonderfully well and that his administration has been good.

On Sunday we took up work of immediate urgency; and in the afternoon I attended a Memorial Service at St. Columba (Church of Scotland). There was a very representative gathering and about two hundred Canadian soldiers were present whom I inspected after the service.

On Monday I had an interview with Long as to the arrangements for the Conference and, in the afternoon, a long interview with Lloyd George as to the military situation and the work of the Cabinet. On that and other days I also discussed the military situation with General Smuts.

We attended the first meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday and the Prime Minister made a very important and impressive statement which did not minimize the difficulties and even the danger of the present situation. By reason of information which reached me from various sources I thought it desirable to send for General Currie who came to town on Wednesday and with whom I discussed the campaign of last year, and especially the German offensive during the past three months. The report which he gave me was very depressing and I am convinced that the present situation is due to lack of organization, lack of system, lack of preparation, lack of foresight and incompetent leadership. If the British Army Corps had made the same preparation to meet the German offensive as did General Currie and the officers and men of the Canadian Forces, the German offensive could not possibly have succeeded as it did. Their losses would have been so appalling that they would have been obliged to stop. The British offensive of last year was obviously a mistake. Robertson and Haig urged it against the protests of the Cabinet. I have read the records of the Cabinet meeting of 21st June, 1917, at which Lloyd George examined with great ability the reasons pro and con and stated the opinion of the Cabinet that no such offensive should be undertaken. He said, however, that they must be guided by their military advisers and would defer to them if, after hearing all that was urged, they still thought the offensive should be undertaken.

It will be remembered that the Canadians took Passchendaele at a cost of 16,000 men. At the end of the offensive Currie tells me, and I believe he is right, that it had no useful result, as the British Army immediately went on the defensive and the campaign ceased for the year. No advantage in position was gained and the effort was simply wasted.

Currie reports that the conditions in front of Passchendaele, when the Canadian Corps were ordered to take it, were simply indescribable. I cannot enter into the particulars which I placed before the War Cabinet on Thursday, but when you hear them you will realize that we are being defeated by our own methods.