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Introduction: Julian Byng was a British Army Officer who commanded the Canadian Corps at the Battle of Vimy and later became the 12th Governor General of Canada.



Field Marshal, the Right Honourable Viscount Byng of Vimy, GCB, GCMG, MVO, DSO

Early Life:

Julian Byng was born 11 September 1862 at Wrotham Park, in Hertsmere, the 7th son and 13th and youngest child of the Earl of Strafford. He was descended from Admiral John Byng, famously executed after failing to

defend Minorca. He attended Eton College where he first received the nickname "Bungo" to distinguish him from his elder brothers "Byngo" and "Bango". His time at the college was undistinguished, and he received poor reports. Indicative of his attitude towards academics, he once traded his Latin grammar book and his brother Lionel's best trousers for a pair of ferrets and a pineapple. Byng later claimed that he had been the school's most undistinguished boy.

Early Military Career: On 12 December 1879 Byng was commissioned as a militia second lieutenant in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and was promoted to lieutenant three years later. During this period, Byng also developed a liking for theatre and music halls, and by the age of 20 had taken an interest in the banjo.

In 1882, Prince Edward, Prince of Wales, upon hearing that Byng had not yet found a permanent career, offered a place for him in the Prince's own regiment, the 10th Royal Hussars. Unfortunately, this was the most expensive regiment in the army. The Earl of Strafford could only afford to give Byng 200 of the necessary 600 pounds he would need each year. However, Byng was delighted at the opportunity and by raising finances through buying polo ponies cheaply, using his excellent horsemanship to train them, and then selling them for a profit, he was able to transfer to the 10th Royal Hussars on 27 January 1883, and less than three months later joined the regiment in Lucknow, India.

It was while the regiment was en route home to the United Kingdom in 1884 that the Hussars were diverted to Sudan to join the Suakin expedition. On 29 February, Byng, with the rest of his regiment, rode in the first line of the charge at the Battle of El Teb. The attack, which resulted in the deaths of both the squadron's other officers, was unsuccessful, and fighting continued, with Byng's horse being killed under him on 13 March at the Battle of Tamai. The rebels were then dispersed and, on 29 March the regiment re-embarked for Britain. They arrived on 22 April and proceeded to their new base at Shorncliffe Barracks in Kent. For his services in Sudan, Byng was mentioned in despatches.

In June 1885 the regiment was relocated to the South Cavalry Barracks at Aldershot. Byng was appointed as the regimental adjutant on 20 October 1886, only nine days before the death of his father, who left Byng a watch and £3,500. The regiment then moved again in 1887 to the barracks at Hounslow, where, after suspecting that contractors were selling him inferior meat, Byng spent several

early mornings at the Smithfield market to learn the meat trade. He eventually proved his case and had the contractors changed. It was also at this time that Byng became acquainted with the Lord Rowton, who, along with the Guinness Trust, was trying to improve housing for skilled workers in London. Byng accompanied Rowton around the poorest areas of the city and suggested that retired senior rank army men be hired to maintain order in the Rowton Houses, thus starting a long-lived tradition.

Byng was promoted to captain at the beginning of 1889, and in 1892 he sat and passed his entrance exams into Staff College. While at the Staff College, he found among his fellow students men with whom he would be closely associated more than two decades later: Henry Rawlinson, Henry Hughes Wilson, Thomas D'Oyly Snow, and James Aylmer Lowthorpe Haldane. In 1894, while en route to visit a friend at Aldershot, Byng travelled with a cadet at the nearby Royal Military Academy Sandhurst: Winston Churchill.

By December 1894, Byng graduated from the Staff College and was immediately appointed to command the A Squadron of the 10th Hussars. Three years later he was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General (DAAG) of the Aldershot Command and promoted to the rank of major.

Early Commands and World War I:

Byng was deployed in November 1899 to South Africa where he was given the local rank of lieutenant colonel and tasked with raising and commanding the South African Light Horse during the Second Boer War. Byng thereafter served on the front lines, during which time he ended up in command of a group of columns, was mentioned in despatches five times, and in November 1900 was promoted to brevet lieutenant colonel and in February 1902 to brevet colonel.

He returned to England in March 1902 and married Marie Evelyn Moreton the following month. In May of the same year he was appointed to the Royal Victorian Order as a member 4th class. Later in the year, he was sent back to India to command the 10th Royal Hussars at Mhow and was appointed to the rank of a substantive lieutenant colonel in October.

In his first two years of marriage, Byng's wife suffered several miscarriages and thereafter was unable to bear children. In January 1904, Byng, while playing polo, had broken his right elbow so severely that it was feared he would have to quit the army. However, after four months' treatment in England he was pronounced fit for duty and in May became the first commandant of the new cavalry school at Netheravon. The posting was to be only a brief one, as, in May 1905, Byng was made commander of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade at Canterbury, with the simultaneous temporary rank of brigadier general and substantive rank of colonel. After appointment as a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1906, he was again back in Aldershot, in command of the 1st Cavalry Brigade.

In October 1910 Byng became commander of the British troops stationed in Egypt, where he remained until the outbreak of the First World War. He returned briefly to the UK to take command of the 3rd Cavalry Division before going with the British Expeditionary Force to France and the First Battle of Ypres. His actions there were rewarded in March 1915 with appointment to the Order of St. Michael and St. George as a Knight Commander, the second highest level in the order.

Beginning in May, 1915 after three months as commander of the Cavalry Corps he was made a temporary lieutenant-general. Byng was then off to Gallipoli to head the IX Corps and supervise the successful British withdrawal

from the ill-fated campaign. For this, he was elevated within the Order of the Bath to the rank of Knight Commander, but was not allowed much rest, as he spent the next month commanding the Suez Canal defences before returning to the Western Front to lead the XVII Corps.



LGen Sir Julian Byng, April 1917

Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng commanded the Canadian Corps on the Western Front from May 1916 to June 1917. He forged the Canadians into an elite fighting formation, leading them through the battles of Mount Sorrel, the Somme, and Vimy Ridge. His Canadian troops called themselves the "Byng Boys," a testament to their commander's popularity. Byng's greatest glory came when he, along with his subordinate commander, the Canadian Major-General Arthur Currie, led the Canadian victory in April 1917 at the Battle of Vimy Ridge. This was one of the best-planned victories of the war and an historic military milestone for the Dominion that has remained an inspiration for Canadian nationalism to this day.

In June 1917, and holding the temporary rank of general, Byng took command of Britain's largest army, the Third Army, until the cessation of hostilities and approved and planned the British attack at the Battle of Cambrai (20 November – 7 December 1917) the first major tank

battle in history. This was later considered a key turning point in the war and Byng was honoured on 24 November 1917 by having his temporary rank of general made substantive, as well as being made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath in the 1919 New Year's honours.

On 7 October 1919 he was raised to the peerage as Baron Byng of Vimy, of Thorpe-le-Soken in the County of Essex. The next month, though he was offered the Southern Command, Byng retired from the military and moved to Thorpe Hall, which his wife had purchased in 1913 while Byng was in Egypt.

Governor General of Canada: On 2 August 1921 King George V approved the recommendation of British prime minister, David Lloyd George, to appoint Byng as his representative in Canada. Byng had not been Canadian Prime Minister Arthur Meighan's first choice. Byng was eventually chosen because he was both willing and available, and due to his wartime ties with the Canadian army, very popular with Canadians.

As Governor General he travelled the length and breadth of the country, meeting with Canadians wherever he went. He also immersed himself in Canada's culture and came to particularly love hockey. He rarely missed a game played by the Ottawa Senators. An annual NHL trophy, the Lady Byng Trophy is named in honour of Lady Byng. He was also fond of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, held each year in Toronto, and established the Governor General's Cup to be presented at the competition. Byng was the first Governor General of Canada to appoint Canadians as his aides-de-camp - one of whom was future Governor General Georges Vanier. He approached his vice regal role with enthusiasm, gaining him popularity with Canadians in addition to that received from the men he had commanded on the battlefields of Europe.



Viscount and Lady Byng

While it had been acceptable prior to the turn of the 20th century for Canadian Governors General to involve themselves in Canadian political affairs, Byng's tenure as viceroy of

Canada was notable in that he became the first to step directly into political matters since the country had gained a degree of autonomy from the United Kingdom following the First World War. In 1926 he found himself the central figure in an explosive constitutional issue in what came to be colloquially known as the *King-Byng Affair*. Prime Minister Mackenzie King, carrying on in the House with the aid of the Progressive party, faced a vote of censure and feared defeat. He asked Byng to dissolve Parliament so that a general election could be held. Byng refused and asked Arthur Meighen, the Conservative opposition leader to form a government. Meighen tried but was quickly defeated in the House. King held that Byng should follow the advice of the sovereign's Canadian Prime Minister. He was returned to power in the resultant election.

At the 1926 Imperial Conference, King used Byng and his refusal to follow his prime minister's advice as the impetus for widespread constitutional change throughout the British Commonwealth. Although Byng had acted within his royal prerogative, the events cast a cloud on his

term as Governor General. The *King-Byng* affair led to the role of Governor General of Canada being clearly defined as representative of the sovereign, rather than the British government.

Byng himself said of the matter: *"I have to await the verdict of history to prove my having adopted a wrong course, and this I do with an easy conscience that, right or wrong, I have acted in the interests of Canada and implicated no one else in my decision."*

Some 80 years later, one of Byng's vice regal successors, Michaëlle Jean, found herself in a similar dilemma when Prime Minister Stephen Harper advised her to prorogue parliament in order to avoid a non-confidence motion.

Later Life: Byng returned to England on 30 September 1926, and in January 1928 he was created Viscount Byng of Vimy, of Thorpe-le-Soken in the County of Essex.

Later that year he was appointed as the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Before his retirement in 1931 he introduced a number of changes to the force. These included a system of promotion based on merit, improved discipline, and retirement of inefficient senior officers. He also introduced irregularity to policemen's beats (which had previously allowed criminals to work out the system), introduced police boxes, and the extensive use of police cars and a central radio control room.

In July 1932 Byng was promoted to the rank of field marshal. He died suddenly of an abdominal blockage at Thorpe Hall on 6 June 1935.

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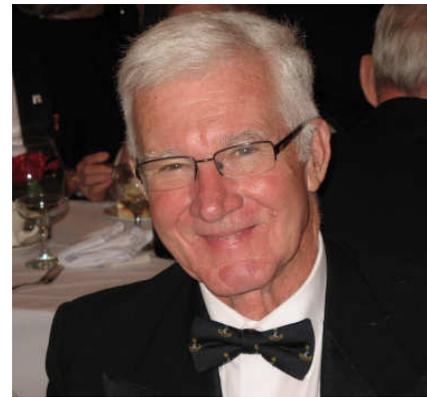
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