

## **John Charteris - Chief Intelligence Officer**

John Charteris (1877-1946) was Sir Douglas Haig's Chief Intelligence Officer at the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) headquarters from 1915-18.

Following attendance at Woolwich Charteris was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1896. In the years prior to World War One he struck up a close working relationship with Douglas Haig, a friendship that stood his career in good stead during the war years.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 brought Charteris successive appointments in Haig's staff, each time in intelligence positions, although Haig also routinely consulted him on wider military strategy, regarding Charteris as something of a confidante.

Thus Charteris served with Haig at I Corps (when Sir John French was BEF Commander-in-Chief), at First Army and then as his Chief Intelligence Officer from December 1915 upon Haig's appointment as French's replacement. The appointment brought Charteris a notable promotion to Brigadier-General.

Given Charteris' rapid promotion, and his obvious good standing with Haig, he found himself labelled with numerous unflattering tags, including Haig's "evil counsellor" and as his "Principal Boy", labels that owed something to Charteris' wide unpopularity.

Generally vilified today for his role in misadvising Haig with regard to the likely success of operations during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) and at Cambrai, Charteris was certainly guilty of being overly optimistic with regard to the Allies' chances of success at both set-piece battles, as was Haig; optimism that adversely informed his advice to Haig.

In routine intelligence matters however Charteris proved a sound intelligence officer, accurately briefing Haig as to (for example) the current German order of battle.

Among his many enemies Charteris alienated the Minister of War, Lord Derby, who never forgave Charteris for his failure to censor an interview the Commander-in-Chief gave to French journalists in 1917. What subsequent embarrassment there was (upon publication) applied to Haig and Charteris alike; and Derby's well-known favourable views of the high command specifically excluded Charteris.

Consequently, once the British had demonstrated failure at Cambrai in November 1917 Derby pressured Prime Minister David Lloyd George to bring about Charteris' dismissal. Haig, who continued to regard Charteris highly, was duly obliged to replace him in January 1918.

Haig nevertheless continued to consult Charteris on intelligence affairs, with the latter correctly predicting a large-scale German attack during Spring 1918.

He retired from the army in 1922 and subsequently served in parliament between 1924-29.

He died in 1946.