

Sir John Denton Pinkstone French

Sir John Denton Pinkstone French (1852-1925), Earl of Ypres, was born in 1852 in Ripple Vale, Kent. After joining the navy in 1866, French transferred to the army in 1874.

French was promoted to Field Marshal in 1913 following a varied and distinguished career to date, which included the Sudan Campaign of 1884-85 and notable service as a cavalry officer in the Boer War. He served from 1912-13 as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

After being appointed Chief of Staff of the British Army in 1911, French was given command of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) which was deployed to Europe in the opening days of the war, August 1914.

French was temperamentally unsuited to command of the BEF, becoming so depressed at the prospects of success following the Mons campaign that his chief concern came to be the safe welfare of his troops, to the cost of his French allies. It required an emergency visit from Kitchener, the Secretary of War, in September 1914 to stiffen French's resolve.

Once the war of manoeuvre ended French's mood switched to one of over-optimism, until by Autumn 1915 he was once again reluctant to co-operate with the French and had to be urged into action.

In the campaigning which followed, his incapability again became evident, coupled with poor judgement, which compelled his replacement in December 1915 by his then deputy, Douglas Haig.

Relieved of his command French served as Commander of the British Home Forces from 1915-18 (including responsibility for dealing with the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916), and was subsequently awarded the title of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1921. Upon his retirement French was awarded a grant of £50,000 by the British government.