

## **Sir Noel Birch**

General Sir James Frederick Noel Birch (1865-1939) served as Sir Douglas Haig's chief artillery adviser in France from May 1916 until the armistice.

Birch received his commission into the Royal Artillery in 1885, and served in Ashanti and in South Africa. With Douglas Haig's elevation as Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front Birch was brought in as his chief artillery adviser and promoted to Lieutenant-General.

Haig was a firm supporter of the energetic, hard-working 'Curly' Birch and his innovative methods, and was willing to extend his remit as opportunity provided. Birch, while working to develop artillery capability during the war, nevertheless stressed the necessary independence of infantry commanders in determining the appropriate forward strategy: in short, he was not of the belief that artillery alone could win the war - a view commonly held by many commanders earlier in the war (and disastrously implemented with great faith at the Somme).

By the war's close Birch held additional responsibility for Tank Corps gunnery and chemical weapons. Although widely regarded as an expert in horses he never allowed his fondness for all matters equine interfere with his scientific prosecution of the war in modern battlefield conditions. The horse had little place on the Western Front (early experiments to the effect had demonstrated the point).

Following the war Birch was Director General of the Territorial Army in 1921 and later served as Master-General of the Ordnance.

He died in 1939.