



Scots who made their mark in.....

The Armed Forces



Douglas Haig, 1st Earl of Bemerseyde

Edinburgh born Douglas Haig is famous for two reasons, as Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Flanders from 1915 to 1918 and, in his retirement, as founding President of the British Legion where he had a particular interest in organising Poppy Day sales for benefit of ex-Servicemen. (GB, Jersey 1971, IoM 1981)



elegant Charlotte Square. (GB 1975). Haig maintained a home in the capital throughout his lifetime.



This 1999 issue notes Haig's Sandhurst years

Having lost both parents by his late teens, Haig studied at Brasenose College, Oxford in the early 1880s enjoying horse-riding (and polo in particular) and socialising, as a member of the elite and controversial Bullingdon Club. He began officer training at Sandhurst, older than most of his fellows because of his time at university and gained a commission as Lieutenant in the 7th Hussars early in 1885.

His first overseas posting, the following year, was to India where he quickly established a reputation as a stickler for order and discipline, being an excellent administrator with a good analytical and theoretical eye for improvements to military organisation. By January 1891 he had made Captain.

Failing to gain a place at the Staff College at Camberley because he had failed (but only just) the mathematics paper, despite glowing testimonials, Haig returned to India before eventually gaining that coveted staff college posting in 1896.

His reputation for hard work was sustained here and he was not particularly popular. Nor it seems was he an original thinker being very ready to accept the traditional doctrine that attrition was simply a prelude to victory, adopted since Napoleon's days and to be used by Haig in the Somme in 1916, a century later.

In 1898 Haig joined Kitchener in his Sudan Campaign and joined the large group of British Officers already helping to staff the Egyptian Army. He distinguished himself in action and commanded a squadron at Omdurman.

By now a Major, Haig was next appointed Chief Staff Officer to Sir John French to whom he was well known having served under him and he helped French rewrite the Cavalry Drill Book. He supported French in the Boer War from 1899 to 1902.

In 1901 with the conventional war won and with the Boers resorting to guerrilla tactics Haig was appointed local Brigadier General patrolling Cape Colony with 2,500 men at



In the first of these two roles he was commander during the Battle of the Somme, the third Battle of Ypres and the final offensive which led to the Armistice. In the second half of the last century his reputation began to suffer badly from revisionism and he gained the soubriquet "Butcher Haig" because of the two million casualties which occurred during his tenure as C.i.C. Such an approach characterised him as a supreme example of "Lions Led by Donkeys" used by military historian Alan Clark in his scathing estimation of the generals which suggested that many of them including Haig were upper class, out-of-touch commanders along the lines of Major-General Stanley, who sang in *The Pirates of Penzance*.....

"In fact, when I know what is meant by "mamelon" and "ravelin"

When I can tell at sight a Mauser rifle from a Javelin,

When such affairs as sorties and surprises I'm more wary at,

And when I know precisely what is meant by "commissariat"

You'll sayI am the very model of a modern Major-General".

However, there has been a counter reaction to this critique with later biographers suggesting that Haig did indeed adopt new tactics, acknowledge new technologies and eventually was crucially responsible for victory.

Haig was born, in June 1861, into comfortable surroundings, his father head of the Haig whisky firm with a residence in



This S.A. 1999 Anglo-Boer war commemoration issue depicts Boers leaving their families for *kommando* operations, and British soldiers

his disposal. The British tactics of using a scorched earth policy regarding former Boer settlements and incarcerating their families in concentration camps were very controversial and required ruthless application which Haig was able to deliver. At the same time Haig was given command of a cavalry regiment, the 17th Hussars.



Overall Haig had "a good war", being mentioned in dispatches four times and given the considerable responsibility of locating and bring Boer Commando leader and later Prime Minister of South Africa J. C. Smuts (S.A. 1975 left) to the peace negotiations at Melrose House, Pretoria where the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed: see opposite top.



When the 17th Lancers returned to England Haig appointed an *aide-de-camp* to the new king Edward VII from 1902 to 1904 when he vacated the post for a posting back in India at which point, aged 43, he was youngest Major-General in the Army.

Two years later Haig became Director of Military Training at The War Office in Whitehall. A complete rethinking of preparation for war brought about a plan for formation of the Territorial Army, realised in 1907 but once again Haig had proved poor at negotiating with people he did not know, though brilliant at administration and organisation. This would prove to be the case when the Expeditionary Force was formed to go to France in 1914. In rehearsing for that Haig gave high priority to cavalry and less to artillery and his own records of training indicate little interest in technical gunnery matters.

With war with Germany looming Haig, now knighted, was reluctant to be sent to a very senior post in India, though he did go with the express intention of mobilising Indian troops to take part in a European war.



Back in Aldershot by 1912 Haig now Lt General became G.O.C. and when war broke out he was more than ready to help organise the B.E.F. commanded by his old "friend" Sir John French with Haig given command of half of the troops. Haig initially thought the

Another Famous Scot at Armistice Talks ?



South African issue of 2002 shows General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum with General de Wet (Acting President of the Orange Free State) at the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging on 31st May 1902 to which Haig had to escort Jan Smuts.

But just above and to the right of Kitchener's head is there an image of Dr Arthur Conan Doyle? Notes I made ten years ago suggest there is, but I wonder if Conan Doyle was in South Africa at the time of the Treaty. About that time he was returning from a holiday with his sister Ida, via Venice, the Italian Lakes and Switzerland. This was just before his Knighthood in October, so he might have paid a flying visit to Africa, but it would be tight! There were about 150 people at Conference and with his work as a volunteer doctor and book and pamphlet writer, he was a good candidate to be one of them.

This S.A. 2000 stamp shows Doyle (and Churchill) with the Queen's South Africa medal given to all who served on the British side during the war. Already famous as a writer, Doyle spent four months as a volunteer doctor in



South Africa in the first half of 1900 and wrote two books about the war on returning to England. He later was a member of the War Propaganda Bureau, a group of writers assembled to promote British causes in the WW1.

war would be a short-lived affair as did many with the "home by Christmas" spirit pervasive.



In 1914 he was appointed *aide-de-camp* to George V and openly confided in him his doubts about French's temperament and suitability.

In the opening weeks of the war in France there was much distrust amongst the Allies with Haig being particularly irritated by the high-handed behaviour of French



commander Marshall Joseph "Papa" Joffre (France 1940) who completely unrealistically refused to accept that the British could act and fight independently of his countrymen.



Meuse. In the background there is a suggestion of light coming from the bombardment, as the city being on a salient was surrounded on three sides by

German forces.



The second issue, in 1956, marking the 40th anniversary, is extremely dramatic showing French forces dug in and firing, with smoke and a huge explosion on the horizon. Also issued in the same year is a

tribute to Lt-Col Émile Driant (1855–1916) a French nationalist writer, politician and army officer who was the first high ranking casualty of the battle. The design of this stamp also shows devastation in the form of burnt forests and ruined buildings at the village of Fort Douaumont.



The 1966 commemorative depicts the “Angel of Verdun” miraculously protecting the city whose towers at Porte Chaussée defiantly fly the tricolor.

A single French helmet lying amongst laurel leaves poignantly commemorates the hundreds of thousands of casualties.

Coping with major disagreements from his political bosses (notably Lloyd George who thought him “insolent”) Haig directed the British part of the Somme offensive which took place between 1 July and 14 November 1916 in the department of France from which it takes its name. The battle consisted of an offensive by the British and French armies against the Germans who, since invading France in August 1914, had occupied large areas. By the time fighting had petered out in late autumn 1916 more than a million casualties had been sustained, making it one of the bloodiest ever.

The 2006 Lest we Forget was the first of a series of three “poppy” issues, commemorating events in The Great War, in this case the Battle of the Somme, available initially only within a souvenir sheet format alongside four 72p regional stamps, representing soldiers across the U.K. but happily later in a strip along with the related issues for 2007 and 2008. Seven beautiful tall red flowers seem to weave their way plaintively into the sky and then we notice that that their stems are in fact made of barbed wire, creatively a moving metaphorical statement.



On the first day of the fourth year of the War Haig was created Field-Marshal receiving the King’s best wishes for his promotion on behalf of the country. However the year did not progress well with Lloyd George giving command of the joint forces to the new French CiC Robert Nivelle whose first offensive, which Haig was required to support, failed in April.



The 2007 Lest We Forget issue focussed on the Battles of Passchendaele, July-November in 1917. Haig conducted a further major offensive—The 3rd Battle of Ypres as part of the Passchendaele campaign and claimed “victory” —finally achieved by British and Canadian forces—in the first week of November. Three months of fighting produced nearly 600,000 Allied and German casualties and Haig’s decision to persist with the initiative is still a source of controversy.

The intense red of the flower dominates the design, almost like a pool of blood spreading from the bottom of the stamp, then a closer look at the black stamen of the poppy head shows a group of eight or nine soldiers going over the top, advancing away from us through what was a formerly a grove of trees, now just broken stumps. This is a very potent image indeed as we realise that they are leaving us, probably not to return.

Haig and Lloyd George continued to suffer from poor personal relations for the rest of the war with the Prime Minister openly criticising his strategic direction and being very worried about the Germans, who had reinforced their Western Front with 200 divisions released from the Eastern Front, where the war with the Russians was now over. Haig had at his disposal at the front line scarcely a quarter of the

Haig was appointed General four months into the war following the success of the First Battle of Ypres which concluded on 22nd November. Then when Sir John French's health began to fail Haig was sent to London to discuss with Kitchener the plan to reorganise the B.E.F. into two Armies.

In 1915 Haig's desire to act independently by pushing along the coast to Ostend was vetoed by Joffre. Haig was instead



entrusted by Sir John to direct the British offensive at Neuve Chapelle and in preparing for this he showed enthusiasm for using aircraft for reconnaissance and bombing as discussed with Major Hugh Trenchard (GB 1986) of the Royal Flying Corps.

At this point the conclusion of the war was expected by French and Joffre no later than mid-Summer 1915 but British progress was not good, their bombardment being more widely spread against better defences as the Germans had deduced Allied tactics after First Ypres and Haig's forces seemed to focus more on capturing ground than blowing the enemy away. Casualties were now accumulating in astonishing numbers: 16,000 in ten days in May at Festubert to gain less than four square miles forward.



Shortages of heavy ammunition and the failure of the Dardanelles attack which saw Admiral "Jacky" Fisher (GB 1982) resign on 15 May 1915 amidst bitter arguments with the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, (GB 1974) over Gallipoli, who also resigned.



The fall of the Liberal government followed in May 1915 and David Lloyd George (GB 2013) became Minister for Munitions in the new Coalition. Haig was greatly irritated with Sir John French who had been briefing the press about the shortage of munitions and

compared him to a man "living with a whore". After speaking with Kitchener and the King Haig offered his thoughts about the best time to dismiss Sir John. The thinking was now that the war would last into 1916: the Central Powers were doing well on several fronts and Allied attacks in Flanders were needed to relieve the German Eastern Offensive with a full-scale British attack planned at Loos.

Sir John was typically indecisive in his dealings with Joffre and Foch (France 1940). Haig was reluctant to agree to the British involvement at Loos but possibly the promise of use of poison gas swayed him towards agreement, though the attack was postponed again.



When it did begin on 25th September the British bombardment used fewer than a tenth of the guns (light and heavy) available to the enemy, possibly because of the shortage of ammunition. Haig himself organised the use of chlorine gas and the attack was successful but only in places, through a lack of resources to throw at it to complete the Allied initiative.

Haig Becomes C i C B.E.F.

Sir John French was now looking for appeasement to bring an end to the chaos and slaughter but Haig blamed him for his ubiquitous indecision and his weasel words in reporting reasons for the total lack of success. Haig and French were carpeted by Lord Haldane who was asked by the government to investigate the situation in Flanders. And so a major blame game erupted between the two men at the head of the B.E.F. with claim and counter claim of error. Then in late November 1915 Sir John who was sick and incapacitated was replaced by Haig as Commander in Chief. Churchill, recently resigned from the Cabinet, was given command of a battalion by the new Commander.



Haig continued to have major disagreements with Joffre who was losing men at an alarming rate and therefore pushing for an Anglo-French initiative at the Somme to relieve pressure on the French efforts at Verdun and Haig agreed to this but only just in time (on July 1st 1916) as Marshal Philippe Pétain (France 1944) who became known as "The Lion of Verdun", a national hero and Premier of Vichy France from 1940 when he was 84, feared that all was lost.

Of such importance was the Battle of Verdun—"the furnace" to France—that it has to date been the main focus of French WW1 commemoratives. As part of the "war of attrition", this epic battle was fought for throughout most of 1916 and ended with a French victory, of sorts, though on average there were 95,000 casualties—most caused by artillery fire—for *each* of the months it lasted so it became the longest and most devastating battle in the history of warfare.

The first French stamp to mark Verdun was issued in June 1939, so commemorating the 23rd anniversary. It shows the Porte Chaussée, the entrance to the ancient front line town, whose name appropriately means "strong fort", over the River

numbers the Germans had at this time. Throughout the early part of 1918 Haig continued to argue with Foch and with Pershing, the American commander. There was much talk of retreat to the Channel ports abandoning hard won ground, after a series of German victories.



However, as we know, the Allied forces held firm and in mid-Summer the Germans were defeated by the French, supported by American troops at the Second Battle of the Marne and by Commonwealth forces at Amiens, described by Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff (German poster stamp)

as "The Black Day".

In the second week of August Haig defied Foch and did not press on further to engage new German forces. Churchill (now Minister of Munitions) visited him in France to promise new resources of tanks and better poison gas which would probably produce victory by the Summer of 1919, but Haig felt he could finish the war that year. Politicians feared he would recklessly set out on another Battle of Passchendaele, however.

Haig pursued retreating German forces towards the Hindenburg Line, but with victory now in sight was beseeched not to take unnecessary casualties. Haig had always allowed his generals (like Plumer, Byng and Rawlinson) considerable scope for initiative and it is not clear to what extent he deserved the praise for the final victory, but he did receive much of it.

When the Hindenburg Line was penetrated at St Quentin at the end of September the Germans asked for terms and it

was agreed a ceasefire would come into place on 11th November.



The third and final issue in the Lest We Forget series came in 2008 and shows the most conventional image of the Remembrance poppy against the

same war graves photo as used in the 1999 issue, commemorating The Armistice between the Allies and Germany that ended the fighting. It was signed in a railway carriage in Compiègne Forest at 11 a.m. on 11th November 1918—the date noted in the cancel — and marked a

complete defeat for Germany, although not technically a surrender. The Germans were responding to the policies proposed by American President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points.

Post War

Within a month Haig received two snubs from Lloyd George, firstly being offered a viscountcy - the fourth rank in the British peerage system—which he rejected, as the same honour had been given to Sir John French, whose talents and achievements he considered much lesser than his own. Haig was then invited to the ceremony to mark the achievements of Marshal Foch, but not to the reception which followed, so he rejected the invitation.

However he did accept the offer—of an earldom (the third rank) and £100,000 (roughly £30m in today's money) —in March 1919. Throughout that year Earl Haig served as C in C Home Forces, in which role he insisted that soldiers were not used as policemen in cases of civil unrest where demobbed troops were returning to unemployment in a land that was not what Lloyd George had termed "a country fit for heroes to live in". Haig's Army career ended in 1920 and he devoted the remainder of his life to the welfare of ex-servicemen, with the British Legion formed in 1921 and the Haig Fund set up as a charity the same year to provide financial assistance. He travelled to Commonwealth countries to promote his ideas but plans for further travel did not materialise as he died from a heart attack at the age of 66 in January 1928.

Earl Haig was given a state funeral at which his coffin was borne on the same carriage that had carried the body of the Unknown Warrior to Westminster Abbey on 11th November 1920. In the procession which followed were many famous statesmen and soldiers including Marshals Foch and Petain. The coffin was then taken by train to St Giles Cathedral and he was finally laid to rest at Dryburgh Abbey where his headstone was the simple standard one of the Commonwealth Graves Commission, as seen on this Soldier's Tale stamp of 1999 which shows part of the War Graves Cemetery for Allied soldiers killed at The Somme, filmed under gloomy evening skies.



All of which suggests that within Royal Mail's five year commemoration of The Great War we should expect a stamp (in 1918 ?) for Douglas Haig along the lines of the 2014 issue for Private Tickle.....

