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**Command and Leadership Series**

**Field Marshal Douglas Haig,  
1<sup>st</sup> Earl Haig**

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# Field Marshall Earl Haig

## Introduction

A British commander on the western front during World War I, Haig was born in Edinburgh, and educated at the University of Oxford and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. Having served as chief of the general staff in India before the war, Haig, a lieutenant general, was given command of the 1st Army Corps of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France and Belgium when hostilities broke out there in 1914. Later in the year he was promoted to full general and given command of one of the two armies of the newly expanded BEF, under the supreme command of General John French. Heavy losses at Loos-en-Gohelle in 1915 increased discontent with French's direction of the war, and Haig was subsequently appointed commander in chief of the BEF. Although he directed the British forces in France for the duration of the war, Haig's handling of the major campaigns, particularly on the Somme in 1916 and at Passchendaele in 1917 was harshly criticized by Prime Minister Lloyd George. After the war Haig assumed the post of commander in chief of home forces and later devoted his energies to the welfare of ex-servicemen. He was created Earl Haig in 1919 and Baron Haig of Bemersyde in 1921.

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This bibliography has been designed to provide a guide as to where to find information on Field Marshal Haig. Please note that the list of references below is a selection of the more relevant titles and information on the subject. The list is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive but is an introductory guide to some of the resources available.

## Books

### Biography

There are many comprehensive biographies relating to Haig's background. One such example is **COOPER**, which offers a comprehensive study of his personal life and background and is an alternative to those texts that refer mainly to Haig in the military capacity of commander. **DE GROOT**'s "Douglas Haig" comprises of a more balanced account of his personal life, personality and military career, while **CARVER** and **WARNER** both feature more on Haig's personality and development and the subsequent outset of his military career. For a more intimate picture of Haig, then **COUNTESS HAIG**'s biography of her husband should be consulted.

### Haig and Warfare

The view that Haig was a butcher who without regard sent thousands of soldiers to their deaths is documented by many authors, including **WOLFF** who offers a critical assessment of British generalship, esp. of that of Haig, and **CLARK**, who provides a provocative analysis of the high command of the BEF. A study of the Western Front in 1915, **CLARK**'s book is a stinging indictment of incompetent generalship. The author explores the "truth" of the observation that British troops were "lions led by donkeys" and shows how appalling losses almost completely destroyed the old professional army. This sparked a great debate with **TERRAINE**, who suggested that while the First World War, saw battles of attrition with terrible casualties suffered in some of the worst fighting in history, an alternative picture has emerged of British generals remote and detached from the reality of the trenches. This book takes a more objective approach to the figure of Haig: the supreme commander of the British Army. **DAVIDSON** also demonstrates an objective viewpoint and focuses on Haig as one of the leading strategic commanders of the First World War. In addition, **MARSHALL** tries to offer an unbiased view and draws on original source material to argue how Haig's judgment was warped by faulty presentation of the facts concerning German manpower and morale, which affected his decision to persevere with the Somme and Passchendaele offensives. It

shows a balanced account of Haig's career and achievements. Most recently, **BOND** provides an excellent reevaluation of Field Marshal Haig and his role in the Allied victories of 1919. Here is a collection of essays resulting from collaboration between the Douglas Haig Fellowship and the British Commission for Military History. It attempts to dismantle the disfigured reputation of Haig as the 'donkey' leading the 'lions' during the bloody conflicts on the Western Front, and focuses on the superiority and excellence of the British Army after 1917. This text is reviewed as an objective work that also does not brush over the shortfalls of command. For a more personal interpretation of Haig's command, the library houses a copy of his "Despatches" within the archive collection.

### **First World War – General History**

There are many general histories of the First World War located at 940.3 in the library. **TRIVERS'** "The Killing Ground" is an excellent overview of the battle tactics used and investigates the strategies adopted and how the commanders adapted to the new technological warfare. **GRIFFITHS** also covers this aspect of warfare. With regard to more general overviews that reflect on Haig's leadership, **TRIVERS**, "How the War was Won" explains the role the BEF played in bringing the First World War to an end and how Allied Victory was achieved. The book provides new arguments about the origins of mechanical warfare, the role of Douglas Haig, and the near-collapse of the German army by July 1918. Travers argues that, despite poor leadership, the British army ultimately wore its opponent down by using increasing amounts of technology. **BRISTOW** on the other hand, offers a very pessimistic view and investigates the munitions scandal and the battles of Aubers Ridge and Vimy Ridge. He argues that the British part in this enterprise turned out to be a bloody fiasco; with inadequate artillery support, Haig launched his regular battalions in attack after attack against positions heavily defended by machine guns. Men were scythed down in most cases before they even reached the enemy wire so Haig was forced to abandon the battle after losing nearly 12,000 men in a few hours and running short of shells. The texts by **LIDDLE**, and **WOODWARD** all give evaluations of the British High command and the various leadership conflicts that ensued between military commanders and politicians.

### **Periodical Articles**

There are many articles that outline Haig and his strategy in the First World War. **PASCHALL** gives an overview of Haig's plan to invade Belgium, whilst **PRIOR** and **WILSON's** article gives a reassessment of the Somme offensive and of Haig's reputation. **GREENHALGH** (1988) demonstrates how Haig's strategy on the Somme actually balanced the military relationship between France and Britain, more effectively in 1916. The politics of the First World War is addressed by **HUSSEY**, who considers whether Haig was in panic and close to admitting defeat when the personal intervention of General Foch stopped the retreat and put courage back into the British High Command? However, **MARBLE's** article discusses the possibility that Haig was not actually fighting an attritional war, but sought an attack to breakthrough the enemy line. As a broader history, **THORNE** ponders whether Britain could have been more prepared at the outbreak of war and that lessons were not learnt from previous campaigns.

### **Websites**

World War One: Trenches on the Web and First World War.com both have excellent coverage of the whole war. Different sections break down the individual battles, campaigns, and more social issues too. Both sites have good biographical details of Douglas Haig. The BBC website has a good First World War archive and biography section. Military History Encyclopaedia on the Web has more detail about strategy, weapons and tactics of the war.

## Monographs

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First World War  
<http://www.firstworldwar.com/>

Military History Encyclopedia on the Web  
<http://www.historyofwar.org/>

Trenches on the Web  
<http://www.worldwar1.com/>

### Any Queries

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