

John de Chastelain

(Alfred) John (Gardyne Drummond) de Chastelain was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1937. He was educated in Edinburgh before he emigrated with his parents to Canada in 1955. He became a Canadian citizen in 1962.

In 1960, John de Chastelain graduated from Royal Military College (RMC) in Kingston, Ontario, with a degree in history and a commission in the Canadian Army. From 1970 to 1972, he commanded the Second Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. As a colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces, he commanded CFB Montreal for two years, then led Canada's contingent in the United Nations Force in Cyprus.

Promoted to brigadier-general, de Chastelain commanded RMC, and later the Fourth Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in Germany, before serving as Deputy Commander of the Canadian army and then as the assistant deputy minister of defence responsible for personnel.

In 1989, he was promoted to general and appointed Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS). During his tenure, the Canadian military was involved in the Oka crisis, as well as overseas engagements in the first Gulf War and in Somalia.

In 1993, de Chastelain transferred to the Canadian Forces Reserves and served as Canada's Ambassador to the United States. In the following year, he returned to the regular forces and was reappointed CDS. He retired from that post in December 1995. By then, he was already involved with the peace process in Northern Ireland.

General de Chastelain has served since 1997 as Chair of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. He helped forge the Belfast Agreement, the blueprint for peace in Northern Ireland signed on Good Friday, 1998. This culminated in elections to a Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2007, which were followed by the formation of a new government based on a power-sharing arrangement involving the principal parties.

General de Chastelain was named to the Order of Canada in 1993. He has also received numerous Canadian and international awards, decorations and honorary degrees in recognition of his public service.