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Command and Leadership Series

**Air Chief Marshal
Sir Leigh-Mallory**

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Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory (1892-1944)

Introduction

Trafford Leigh Mallory holds the tragic distinction of being the highest ranking Royal Air Force commander to be killed during the Second World War when his aircraft crashed en route to the Far East where he would have taken up his position as Air Commander-in-Chief of South East Asia Command (SEAC). Born in 1892, Leigh-Mallory had attended Magdalene College reading law and had been accepted to the bar when the First World War broke out. He spent the first months of the war completing his officer training and was then wounded in an attack on Ypres in the spring of 1915. After convalescing he joined the Royal Flying Corps in January 1916. He flew reconnaissance missions during the Battle of the Somme before becoming a squadron commander. After a spell commanding a training squadron in the UK he then returned to the Front in command of 8 Squadron which helped to direct British artillery and tanks during the Battle of Cambrai. At the end of the War Leigh-Mallory was mentioned in dispatches and received the DSO before returning briefly to a legal career. However, his ambition saw him choose to return to the RAF as he realised he had fallen too far behind his contemporaries at the bar. This ambition and drive was seen to be of a selfish bent by many who he worked with.

During the interwar period he rose to the post of Group Captain via attendance at the Imperial Defence College and a stint as the senior staff officer in Iraq, and was appointed to be AOC 12 Group, Fighter Command as an Air Vice Marshal in December 1937. 12 Group covered the east of England and was seen as key given its proximity to Germany prior to the fall of France. However, once Britain stood alone and French airfields had been captured, it was Leigh-Mallory's rival, Keith Park in charge of 11 Group, who faced the main thrust of the Luftwaffe. The pair's rivalry centred upon Leigh-Mallory's belief in the 'Big Wing' concept, while Park sought a piecemeal response designed to engage the Germans but also preserve his pilots. Following the removal of Park's protector Sir Hugh Dowding after the Battle of Britain Leigh-Mallory replaced Park at 11 Group and became responsible for the air component to the failed Dieppe landings of 1942. Subsequently he was the Commander-in-Chief for Allied Expeditionary Air Forces during Operation Overlord. In this position he came into conflict with Air Chief Marshal Tedder's vision for the mission and was briefed against by his own staff to the Americans. Nonetheless, his ruthless efficiency meant his forces were at Eisenhower's disposal during the operation. As the battle for Normandy culminated, Leigh-Mallory was appointed AOC-in-C of South East Asia Command. In November 1944 he and his wife set off for Ceylon in an RAF York transport aircraft. Wreckage of his aircraft was found in June 1945 in the Alps and poor weather conditions were blamed for the accident which killed all on board.

This bibliography has been designed to provide a guide as to where to find information on Leigh-Mallory. 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.

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