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Command and Leadership Series

**MRAF Charles Portal,
1st Viscount Portal of Hungerford**

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Marshal of the Royal Air Force Charles Frederick Algernon Portal 1st Viscount Portal of Hungerford (1893-1971)

Introduction

Charles Portal was the Chief of the Air Staff of the Royal Air Force during most of World War II succeeding Sir Cyril Newall in October 1940. Portal, known as Peter to his friends, had joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, having initially served in World War One as a Dispatch Rider with the Royal Engineers, and went on to reach the rank of lieutenant colonel with both a Military Cross and a Distinguished Flying Cross. Having flown more than 900 operational sorties in the fighter, reconnaissance and bomber roles during the War, Portal remained in the newly formed Royal Air Force during the 1920s and focused upon improving bombing accuracy and pilot survivability rates. After being appointed commander of British Forces in Aden in 1934 he played a major role in carrying out the RAF's policy of air policing as a means of pacifying the Protectorate without the need of a large number of ground forces. He returned to the United Kingdom and the Imperial Defence College to become an Air Vice Marshal as Director of Organization in 1937 and Air Member for Personnel in February 1939.

At the outbreak of the Second World War he was promoted to Air Marshal at the age of 46, being appointed AOC-in-C of Bomber Command in April 1940. Significantly, on 25th August 1940 Portal ordered the bombing of German cities, including Berlin. This tactic developed into 'area bombing' and its use has been the cause of much subsequent debate. Despite the debate and the early RAF defeats during the campaigns in Norway and France, Portal greatly impressed Churchill who referred to him as "the accepted star of the Air Force". Churchill's faith in Portal was demonstrated in October 1940 when he was promoted to Air Chief Marshal and appointed as the RAF's Chief of the Air Staff. He was now responsible for the overall strategy, plans and resource allocation of the RAF and, as such, had to work closely with his own commanders together with those of the Army and Navy and the Allies. Portal was adept at winning battles in Whitehall to maintain a strong, centrally controlled RAF and he was greatly admired by many of the American commanders, particularly General 'Hap' Arnold and Dwight Eisenhower.

Following the end of the war Portal was created a Viscount in 1946 and became the Controller of Atomic Energy from 1946 to 1951. In 1960 Viscount Portal was elected Chairman of the British Aircraft Corporation being involved in the TSR-2 and the Concorde projects.

This bibliography has been designed to provide a guide as to where to find information on MRAF Portal. 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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Any Queries

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