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Command and Leadership Series

MRAF Sir John Slessor

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Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor (1897-1979)

Introduction

'Jack' Slessor was born in India in 1897 and joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1915 after being unable to join the Army due to the effects of poliomyelitis during childhood. Slessor was a student at the RAF Staff College in 1924 and on the staff at the Army Staff College in the early 1930s. It was at staff college that he first developed his enthusiasm and considerable skill for writing on air power and defence issues in general. After narrowly surviving the Quetta earthquake in 1935 while in command of a Wing in India, Slessor returned home to spend the rest of his career in successive positions of high command. He was the RAF's Director of Plans at the start of the Second World War and in 1940 represented the RAF during an American tour during which he helped to procure new aircraft for the RAF in huge quantities. Slessor was a Bomber Command group commander and ACAS (Policy) prior to becoming C-in-C Coastal Command in 1943 at the height of the Battle of Atlantic.

In January 1944 Slessor was appointed C-in-C in the Mediterranean and Middle East where the Allied air forces made a huge contribution to the war in Italy and the Balkans. After the war Slessor, as Air Member for Personnel, oversaw the mass demobilization of RAF personnel and the subsequent recruitment and training programmes designed to fit the RAF for the new era of peace. On 1 January 1950 Slessor was appointed Chief of the Air Staff and saw the Service through some critical events such as the Korean War, the large-scale introduction of jet aircraft, the development of NATO, and, most dominant of all, the early years of the Cold War. After retiring in 1952 he continued writing and participating in the defence debate earning the reputation as one of the RAF's most cogent thinkers on air power, defence policy and strategy.

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