

5 March 2018

New 2018 lecture series launches with the unsung Cold War strategist

Date: 16 March 2018

Time: 12.30pm

Cost: FREE

Location: National Cold War Exhibition lecture theatre at RAF Museum Cosford

On 16 March, the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford will be hosting the next Cold War Lunchtime Lecture with a talk entitled 'Air Marshal Sir John Slessor: An Unsung Cold War Strategist and His Role as the Architect of British Airborne Nuclear Deterrence'. In this talk, Mr Bill Pyke, an independent Cold War researcher with an MA in Air Power Studies will look at the influence of senior military leaders and the pivotal role they played in making British nuclear deterrence a physical reality during the Cold War.

Within this lecture, Mr Bill Pyke will look at how a declared policy of strategic nuclear deterrence has been at the heart of British defence thinking since the early 1950s. Prior to this time, Clement Attlee's post-war government had sanctioned the development of Britain's atomic bomb programme in January 1947.

The lecture will discuss how the means of nuclear weapons delivery: the development of the revolutionary four-engine jet bomber, did not proceed at the same pace. In any event, at a time of continuing post-war austerity, some senior politicians from both sides of the political spectrum were not in favour of an independent British nuclear deterrent, preferring to leave it all to the Americans.

This talk will focus on Air Marshal Sir John Slessor as a Cold War strategist and his role as the architect of Britain's airborne nuclear deterrent. Slessor was Chief of the Air Staff between January 1950 and December 1952 at a time of heightened Cold War confrontation. Many Cold War historians have focused primarily on the key politicians, international crises, and the threat of nuclear weapons. However, little attention has been paid to the influence of senior military leaders, of whom Slessor was a notable example. Slessor played a pivotal role in making British nuclear deterrence a physical reality. His involvement through strategic vision, leadership, courage, and dogged persistence ensured the implementation and build-up of the RAF's complement of strategic jet bombers (the V-force) designed to deliver Britain's nuclear weapons. That policy of defence through nuclear deterrence established the bedrock of British strategic defence thinking that continues to the present day.

This FREE lecture will be held in the Museum's National Cold War Exhibition lecture theatre at 12.30pm on Friday 16 March 2018, lasting approximately one hour. As spaces are limited, organisers advise visitors to book their tickets in advance via the Museum's website www.rafmuseum.org/cosford to avoid disappointment.

The Cold War Lunchtime Lectures are delivered by emerging and established researchers. They explore key events and air power developments from the Cold War period. **'Air Marshal Sir John Slessor: An Unsung Cold War Strategist and His Role as the Architect of British Airborne Nuclear Deterrence'** is

the first lecture taking place at Cosford this year, with more planned throughout 2018. The series forms a part of the RAF Museum's Research Programme for 2018 which also consists of the Trenchard Lectures in Air Power Studies, First World War lunchtime lectures at the Museum's London site and conferences.

For further information about the Museum's research programme or to book your FREE ticket to the lecture, please visit the Museum website www.rafmuseum.org/cosford. The Museum is open daily from 10am and entry to the Museum is FREE of charge.

Ends...

Notes to Editors:

- For more details about the RAF Museum's Research Programme, please email the RAF Museum's Archive, Library and Research Manager Nina Hadaway at nina.hadaway@rafmuseum.org

- **About Bill Pyke:**

Mr Bill Pyke completed an MA in Air Power Studies in late 2016 at the University of Birmingham, under the guidance of Air Commodore (Retd) Peter Gray. The talk is based on his dissertation and article published subsequently in the Royal Air Force's Air Power Review in Spring 2017.

Bill previously had 42-year career in the oil industry when he worked in the U.K. and internationally on numerous oil and gas exploration and production projects.

He has always maintained an active interest in air power. He continues as an independent Cold War researcher focusing on the reasons and value of British air reconnaissance activities between 1945 and 1960.

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- Admission to the Royal Air Force Museum is free of charge.
- RAF Museum Cosford images & logo available at: <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/about-us/media-vault.aspx>
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