

## **RIAT 2007**

### **ROYAL INTERNATIONAL AIR TATTOO FAIRFORD UK**

Main Eevent for USAF tribute

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#### **RIAT 2007, main event for USAF tribute**

The Royal International Air Tattoo attracted as much visitors as ever. No one doubts this should be, because the event is considered the world's biggest air show. Every year there are a few themes. This Year being the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the USAF, and the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of USAFE or U.S. Air Force in Europe (initially the air force and army were unified, but later USAF and U.S. Army were separated in 1947). As a second theme, spotlights were also directed at trainer aircraft and OCU aircraft with the motto: 'the Agile and Adaptable'. Of course many aircraft of the USAF were present as they always are on the RIAT, but this year it was the USAF celebration and they decided to bring in their own stunt- team from Nellis Air Force Base; the Thunderbirds.

#### **Every year something interesting**

However, in the past more aircraft found their way to the RIAT, still many are invited today and participate on static or flying displays. The organization tries to attract every year again new highlights in order to bring a good show to the public. RIAT is so much more, a real happening and one must not forget that the organiser of the show, the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust Enterprises tries to raise money from the event and bring in as much funds as possible to support a variety of projects. Big sponsors like BAe Systems are thereby helping the organization. More than last year's 160.000 people visited Fairford air Base and enjoyed not only the aircraft but also the many shops and even car shows and pop concerts. Attractions, for children and for people with other concerns on the exhibition grounds besides airplanes, even received a prominent place on the concrete. In total more than 320 aircraft from 24 countries, representing 37 air arms took part in the Air Tattoo. Some participants saw themselves a first appearance on the RIAT. Especially the Indian Air Force received a very central exhibition place. A big Ilyushin Il-78 Midas tanker stood proudly between to Sukhoi 30MKI Flankers, a highlight on this show.

The 78<sup>th</sup> squadron of the Indian Air Force from Agra came with six Su-30MKI Flankers, two Ilyushin IL-76 Candid cargo aircraft and two IL-78 Midas tankers under command of group captain Saini to RAF Waddington after stops in Qatar and Greece. They were invited to Waddington for Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT). While their stay was three weeks and parallel to RIAT there was a nice occasion to show presence here. On Saturday, the Flanker demonstrated its ability however crewmembers were a little bit disappointed that the Flanker pilot was not allowed to perform the famous slow speed manoeuvres, the Flankers perform extremely good.

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## **Miscellaneous exhibits on the ground**

In Europe some aircraft are shortly in service and therefore is their appearance appreciated by the public, always looking for something new. New Typhoons of the own RAF and from the Spanish Airforce with new Gripens from Hungary are such examples. To meet the item of trainer aircraft some of them were two seat conversion trainers. Good oldies like the Northrop NF-5B trainers from Turkey or HH-3F pelicans, the latter with an example in special colours were a welcome sight too. Some airplanes were also missed by the public when it appeared that there were no Orion's ( the Pakistani Orion was cancelled) or Nimrods. Instead, the new Royal Air Force AEW aircraft Sentinel R.1 stood on the static. This aircraft is a new star in the RAF fleet and very promising having the same capability like a USAF E-8 J-stars and adding great help in battlefield management. Another debut of an AEW aircraft came from Brazil with the Embraer R-99A AEW. Brazil has five of this own build aircraft in service with an Ericson phased array radar on the back. The pilot came from Anapolis nearby Brasilia and made stops at the Brazil border, Canary Islands and Lisbon on his way to the U.K. During our walk a British naval officer Moose Roster explains how their Lynx helicopters will be upgraded to the Future Lynx or Wildcat with lower radar cross section, upgraded engines, semi-glass cockpit, advanced 360 degrees surround radar, optimized thermal imaging and other missiles. The lynx in the back is used for 'trooping' and has 50 caliber machinegun and Sea Skua missiles on attack missions or a hoist installed when used for ship inspections called 'boarding parties'.

On the central part of the exhibition were classic jet fighters standing together in a jet trainer setting mixed with modern trainers like the Hawk, one of them a latest version of the Indian Air Force. An Aero L-39C in Russian colours, a blue Hunter trainer and a bright yellow Folland Gnat T.1 were other examples. The Gnat showed under the cockpit edge the name: pilot: A.N. Other, yes very funny indeed. Some unmanned aircraft pointed the future in which we are going; the Predator but also the Global Hawk, which is even bigger than many manned jet aircraft were present on the static. On a special compound were future trainer aircraft located like the PC-21 and Aermacchi MB326 while the mock up of the JSF was centrally placed and approachable by the public. Finally very loyally was there the pavilion of Jordan next to their C-130 Hercules and when entering this you get the local atmosphere, if it is like you are in the Jordanian dessert yourself. Jordan was not the only participant from the Arabic world because Oman sent a BAC-111.

## **60 years USAF**

The USAF is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> year anniversary and so they were eager to present itself in a special way on the worlds biggest military air show. Besides the home-based 420<sup>th</sup> Air Base Group, several sister units with a wide range of military aircraft were present to took part in the largest USAF Tribute in a RIAT ever. USAF and RAF are in close harmony and this was marked by the presence of the RAF's Chief of the Air Staff, Ai Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy and Chief of the U.S. Air Force, Geneal T Michael Moseley. Air Tattoo director Tim Prince described the contribution of the USAF to all RIAT's in the past as crucial forming a major part in the exhibition. In this

years tribute there were displays of the B-52, B1, F-117 and of course the Thunderbirds. This aerobatic team of F-16's is a seldom seen appearance in the UK or elsewhere in Europe. Flying in a very elegant formation very close to each other with pinpoint accuracy is very nice for picturing and that is what they do. Another beautiful aerobatic manoeuvre is the mirror in which one F-16 is flying above another but upside down and when the opposing solo dive in the middle of the group is very nice to watch also. The Thunderbirds can perform approximately 30 different aerobatic figures with their fighting falcons depending on slot time and the weather circumstances. Their show was good this time as ever and not everybody is aware of the fact that two pilots are women. The team pilots are commander/leader Lt. Col. Kevin J. Robbins, left wing Maj. Chris Austin, right wing Maj. Nicole Malachowski, slot Maj. Scott Poteet, lead solo Maj. Ed Casey and opposing solo Samantha Weeks. Samantha is announced to be leading solo pilot in 2008.

### **Will RIAT stay's the same?**

RIAT 2007 satisfied the public however some expected participants could not come. In this matter it was a pity that the Vulcan XH-558 from the Vulcan to the Sky team was not ready in time. Despite huge efforts to speed the restoration process to its end the Vulcan appearance was beaten by the clock. Perhaps next year will the Vulcan be proudly one of the main attractions of the RIAT. Nevertheless there were many interesting things to see for those who love modern airplanes but also of the world war II with a heritage of Dakota's, Mustangs and an Aircobra on the static and 4 spitfires together in the air. Even Civilian airplanes took part in the show when a Boeing 747 van Oasis from Hong Kong showed what this aircraft can perform in the air in terms of agility by the hand of pilots Douglas Millerin and Trevor Cox.

By the way, they were assisted by their ground crew of three pretty stewardesses promoting the airline in their orange outfit. RIAT is however being the main event for military aviation developing in more diversity and in the centre of the showground, it was clearly visible with new attractions to interest and occupy the less aviation-interested members of the audience. Real aviation minded people hopes RIAT will continue to bring the best and most special items in aviation instead of becoming only a more mainstream event with main focus on aviation.

**Wim Das & Kees Otten**

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