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# **THE ROYAL INTERNATIONAL AIR TATTOO**

August 17<sup>th</sup> 2004

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## **IS RIAT STLL RIAT ?**

The Royal International Air Tattoo. Since many years this huge military aviation show is the biggest event of it's kind in Europe, organised at Fairford in England. With a small interruption of 2 years the show was temporarily transferred to Cottesmore due by construction works at Fairfords runway, however since 3 years the show is back on the nest ! Before we take a close look at the RIAT happening celebrated this year at 17-18-19 july we will ask ourselves the specific question: Is RIAT still RIAT ?

After critical reconsidering the answer must be yes. After all where do you find a F-117 Stealth Nighthawk, B-1 Bone, B-52 Buff and a B-2 Spirit all together and flying in one airshow ? The critics moan that it was announced as the "Hercules meet", but unfortunately most European countries didn't send just one C-130.

Only a few years ago there were about 300 VIP's (Very Interesting Planes). Among this a contribution of Eastern Europe countries, even Russia and the Ukraine with their Bears and Backfires, even several exhibitions from exotic countries outside Europe find their way to Fairford. Sadly rising costs, lack of funds and even defence cuts resulted in decreasing interest to make a "full blown" appearance. Some countries disappeared from the annual event and some countries minimized their contributions. Other countries like the hostland itself and the U.S. are dominating on RIAT as every year. One could easily say they are RIAT. Today some 150 VIP's (planes) joined the exhibition on RIAT and off course the word VIP as mentioned above values on the specific interest of people. There was a very attractive oversigth of many old warbirds, Spitfires, Mustangs, Dakota's, B-17 bombers etc. and even an English WW-II airbase was simulated with all kinds of detailed accessoires from that time, tents, machineguns against enemy plane-attacks, etcetera. It were better if the organisation had called it only the ' World War II' memorial.

## **WHY RIAT, WHAT IS RIAT ?**

The goal of this huge event is to raise money for the RAF Benevolent Fund. But when you see that the entrance fees heve risen to about 55 \$ for just one day and about 30 \$ only to see the planes depart, while the 'confirmed' list shows enormous gaps compared to the 'invitation list' perhaps some words of critic are at their place. And we didn't talk about the prices of the 'Grand Stand' yet. But so far for the moaning. the weather is an aspect that is not to be arranged and where the visited sunday was a bit cloudy, the monday gave us a very beautifull day to realize sunny shots. This family event was visited by about 130.000 people and most of the faces seemed to be looking very contempt. They should be, because there are all kinds of nice spots to buy things related or non-related to the aviation world. Some things are typical targets for the kids or the wives who are joining the father/husband with the family-day but

have different interest. Ofcourse there is enough choice to buy yourself all kind of food (or non-food) like water, juices, hamburgers, fish and chips, all kinds of candy icecream and all sorts of other things. For the aviation enthusiasts there are all kind of things to buy, postcards, posters, slides, clothing, sunglasses, various parts such as helmets, clocks, even old life-saving chairs or parachutes, construction kits and the world on aviation books. Also all sorts of photographic accessoires, camera's, and even foldable chairs for about 6 dollars each to install yourself next to the runway and face alle the incoming and participating planes who do their demonstrations. When you want to see it all, you will be walking around at the minimum of about five kilometers or even more to get around the field. Sometimes doing so, with a filled up backpack and a case full of press photo equipment visiting RIAT looks more like a military exercise...

All kinds of services have been well arranged from small information desks to ambulances and firebrigades and even blisters are no problem for the first-aid team. When you didn't make a reservation for an overnight place to stay several months earlier somewhere in the neighbourhood of Fairford, you really do have a problem, you won't find any ! All hotels and guesthouses are fully booked. No joking you'll have to sleep in your car or in the open air ! For those who are interested in joining the military there are several points where the RAF shows its activities on video screens. this all to attract the youth to become airman or ariwoman. The information includes also more details about the RAF Benevolent Fund.

## **ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

Traditionally the elements of the Royal Air Force (RAF), Fleet Air Arm (RN), Army Air Corps (AAC) and joint services present their equipment in the static show in as much different types as possible. After presence of many years some types could be there for the last time. Serious defence cuts could affect further existence of some types. The Jaguar, Puma and Harriër are mentioned by some high-rank military officials. The decision however has still to be made. It should be such a pity to miss the Harriër in air exhibitions because it is always such an impressive sight to see a fighter hovering like a helicopter. Finally this year we could aware the shape of the Eurofighter "Typhoon" on the static surrounded by the well known blue/white and Green/white plastic markings (Madonna boobies) to mark restricted area. Also new this year where a Brazilian Hercules, Canadian Hawk and aircraft from Estonia (L-410 Estonian Border Guard) and Lithuania (L-39ZA & An-26RV from Lithuania Air Force). Among the French and Italian Static line-ups some unusal types were found as well. A French Mirage IV P, PC-6B Turboporter and Super Frelon are not ot be seen very often. Italy showed a veteran Piaggio P166 and a army Dornier D0-228-212. For Aircraft-enthusiasts this kind of types are really highlights to see once and maybe never again. Finally as mentioned before you start to admire the impressive US-part which was for the first time after 11th september on full strength. Some prices where there to win in the runner up concours d' elegance Fighter 04. The BAE Systems Trophy for F-16A 115104 of 201 Escuadron Portugese lar Force and the winner Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16 AM J-016 of 322 sq won the Page Aerospace Trophy.

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For the concours d'elegance Hercules 50 the runner up receiving the EADS-trophy was C-130H 345 from 3 Sq Royal Jordanian Air Force and the winner LC-130H 83-0493 "Pride of Scotia" from 139 th AS/NY-ANG took the Page Aerospace Trophy home. About the displays many people in the crowd agreed that the beautiful painted U.S. Navy Super Hornet performed the very best performance, in an attempt to find the limits of the airplane it was really challenging and beautiful to spectate.

## **THE FUTURE**

If RIAT, being still the biggest event in airshows will stay Faifords pride depends on several circumstances. The main issue are the costs, and when these rise to much, RIAT could be in the dangerzone. Certain is that major defence cutbacks did and will decrease the number of participants. The ending of the former 'cold war' years ago still now results in the latest announcement of President Bush implicating the withdrawal of about 70 % of US-forces stationed in Europe. Therefor the RIAT decrease proces will only be boosted. But the event will remain, and as long as a one day visit is not enough to see and experience it all, it makes RIAT still worth while !

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Wim Das & Kees Otten

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***Dutch Aviation Support.***