

THE LAST OF THE VULCAN'S HAS LANDED

Yes, this time it was final, the nuclear warhorse Avro Vulcan XH558 flew its last flight at the end of the were promised when the restoration was about to start, and this made it a plane that significantly flew more hours than any other aircraft of this type. The Charity Fund was absolutely aware of the responsibilities to all those people who had been contributing to the resurrection of the plane.

The 'Technical Authorities' of whom flying the aircraft was depending on (BAE Systems, Rolls Royce and Marshall Aerospace and Defence group) decided however not to continue the support again another season, mainly because the structure and flying hours were already over 10% than any other Vulcan and also the skills and knowledges were harder to keep up to date in the 'collective memories'. When XH558 landed on the Bruntingthorpe Aerodrome in Leicestershire on 23 March 1993 it marked the end of an era with operational service in the Royal Air Force. However it was kept in serviceable condition, performing fast runs along the main runway along with other fast jets during special organized events. Vulcan XH558 first flew in 1960 and was one of the few examples converted for the maritime reconnaissance role in 1973 and refit as an air-to-air refuelling tanker in 1982. In 1984 XH558 performed within the RAF as the Vulcan Display Flight until 1992.

ICONIC WAR BIRD

Of all British designed aircraft the Vulcan must be the symbol of English aircraft designing expertise and it is a truly iconic war bird. Thanks to its unique shape the Vulcan calls upon your imagination and is because of this heroic to many. Strange enough the appearance in battle zone was very limited with only exposure to war acts in the Falklands when Port Stanley was bombed. During this bomb raids called the Black Buck bombing raids the best 10 Vulcan's of remaining 32 examples were selected but XH558 was not among these. Nevertheless the type played a tremendous role in the cold war balance when the Vulcan was appointed to carry Britain's nuclear deterrent capability.

V-FORCE

Sadly when the nuclear role was transferred to the submarines the Vulcan was withdrawn from use in 1984 leaving a headache with many pilots to lose their magnificent shaped bomber. When looking at facts it was inevitable considering the Vulcan was big and slow and expensive to operate. Designed in 1948 by Roy Chadwick (prototype in 1952) the Vulcan was an immediate success in that time and formed together with the Handley page Victor and the Vickers Valiant the so called V-force. Despite the beautiful shape and powerful look and that the airplane exactly did where it was designed for no one could prevent the nearer end. Just old generation of avionics, limited performance in speed and the rapidly developing world of attack systems and threats made the Vulcan obsolete and it was shifted from its task following decommission.

BACK TO THE SKY

Like all things to be proud of also the Vulcan draw attention and a initiative was born in 1993 when the XH558 was sold to the Walton Family. A movement started resulting in a trust funds to bring the Vulcan back to the sky. The funds earned much publicity. With a main role for David Walton and the Walton family the Vulcan to the Sky Trust worked hard at Bruntingthorpe aerodrome in Leicestershire to restore XH558 into an airworthy and safe airplane again. The project to restore XH558 needed 7 million pounds and a composite of donors including the Walton family but also 2.7 million pounds from the heritage lottery fund and many, many, many people (20.000) with small donations finally reached the amount of money to complete the work in a 15 year period. According to Andrew Edmondson, engineering director of the Trust, the restoration of XH558 was 'the most complex return-to-flight project ever attempted in the world'.

Because of the great deal of the ordinary people donated, the aircraft is called 'the peoples aircraft'. Finally the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) gave permission to fly and XH558 became G-VLCN to go in the sky as a civilian aircraft! XH558 became a unique attraction and with flying permission different from the only two brothers in arms, the XM655 at Wellesbourne, Mountford and XL426/G-VJET at Southend which are capable and permitted to taxi runs only.

TREAT TO THE PUBLIC

Vulcan XH558 returned to flight for the first time on 18 October 2007, conducting three test flights. Finally in 2008 XH558 was ready to perform for public and conducted in the same year flying displays at several events in the U.K. including DCAE Cosford, RIAT at Fairford, and also that year for the first time abroad at Volkel air base in the Netherlands. Like in the old days the Vulcan 'howl' was heard from the four Olympus engines and displays by the hand of captain Martin Withers causing the 'Vulcan effect' on the public while watching the magnificent beautiful aircraft floating in the sky. The Vulcan howl appears when the engines are at approximately 90 percent power and this is caused by the arrangement of the air intakes. Thousands enjoyed the displays which revived nostalgic feelings and utterly proud with many of the spectators.

An estimated 3.6 million people saw XH558 in the summer of 2008 including 1.5 million at displays. It flew for several years on events, thanks to thousands of private donations. The number of air shows were reduced during 2009 to 30-40 hours in order to extend the life for the 2010 season. During 2010 the Vulcan XH558 was named 'Spirit of Great Britain'. In 2011 a leak in the fuel tank limited its appearance from August. In 2011, the Trust relocated to a new base at Robin Hood Airport, Doncaster, Sheffield. In 2012 an engine replacement was necessary.

AGAIN REVIVED

However it was highly costable to keep it in the air a decision at the end of 2012 to retire XH558 after the 2013 season was reversed after another feasibility study. A major funding drive was started to enable required engineering for 2014 and 2015 season. In March 2014 a major wing repair was done to ensure activity during this seasons. In civilian configuration XH558 only requires a crew of three including two pilots and the air electronics officer (AEO) When visiting other airfields a crew chief was added. This crew consisted at that time of former RAF personnel headed by Martin Withers, the Chief Pilot and Operations Manager.

TOURS OF FINAL

On 15 May 2015 it was announced that 2015 would be the last flying season for XH558. In the meanwhile the Vulcan was very much depending on the technical experts to ensure flight safety and receive approval from the CAA to continue flying. However three companies assisting in this (BAE systems, Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group and Rolls Royce) were not willing to continue support on the level required. They were entering uncertain territory regarding predicting future safe risks while XH558 had already flown 10% more flying hours than any other Vulcan. Also the engines were at their end of life and to ensure safety new Olympus engines would be necessary. After a 2015 season, renamed as Vulcan Farewell to Flight display season with many appearances at air shows including the biggest on Fairford, the Vulcan XH558 made his final flight at 28 October 2015 and landed at Robin Hood base. Martin Withers and his crew walked away from the aircraft for the last time. His memories were between the Black Buck raids in which he assisted and the years with the Trust flying displays. The 'Flying Shadow' XH885 will go to rest his life in a museum.

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