
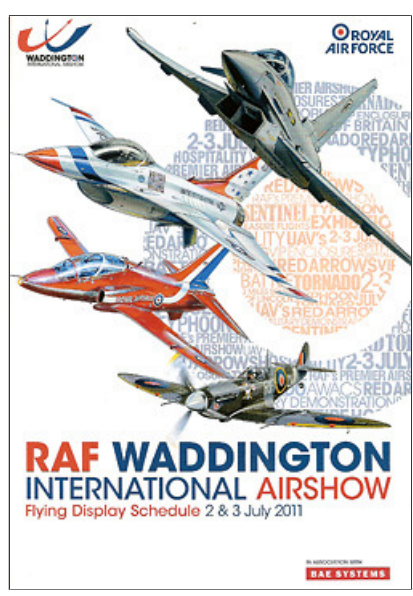




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**2011 UK Airshows : REVIEW**  
**RAF Waddington International Airshow**

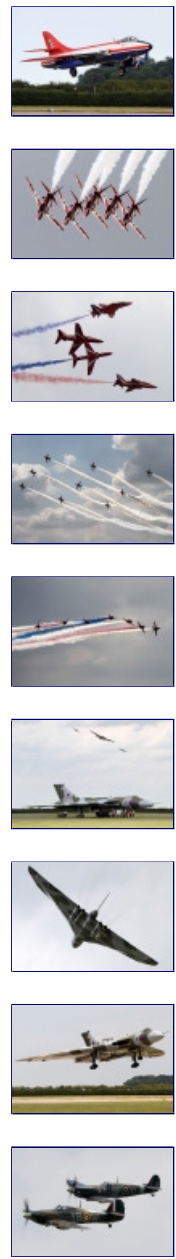


RAF Waddington International Airshow is the first very large military airshow of the year. 2011 is a tough year for military airshow participation which is set against the long running operation in Afghanistan, the NATO led operations in Libya and European wide defence spending cuts. The Lincolnshire base itself is home to the RAF's 'ISTAR' assets which themselves have been affected by the cuts with the very recent retirement of the Nimrod R1, and the rationalisation of its other roles which will see the relatively new Sentinel R1 retire in 2015 or when UK operations in Afghanistan are deemed complete.

The 2011 show did however see some major highlights included the solo UK appearance in 2011 of the United States Air Force

**Demonstration Team, the Thunderbirds who were on a European tour.**  
**Paul Johnson/Flightline UK reports. Photography by Paul Johnson/Flightline UK and James George.**

Waddington is one of the UK's largest airfield based airshows of the year and largest organised by the Royal Air Force. It is therefore held in high regard by enthusiasts and the public that attend. This year, the show came in for mixed comments before and after the event. Many of the pre-event comments were related to what appeared to be a slightly weaker line-up than in previous years. This was perhaps true, but was not without very good reasons as the vast majority of people are very understanding of. The size of military air arms all over the world are shrinking as are their budgets. With airshows being a very low priority, particularly those outside of a countries border it is perhaps unsurprising that the numbers





attending Waddington were down. UK participation was also down following several retirements, squadron disbandment and an increase in operations; the latter meaning there were no examples of RAF transport aircraft on show.



The comments expressed since the event have mainly concerned the organisation of traffic management during the event. For an event that has been consistently been praised in previous years, it has to be said that Saturday was particularly poor. Good weather, and some good headline acts in the flying display clearly contributed to huge crowd numbers, but even so getting in did seem unnecessarily slow compared to previous years. A much tougher line on gate opening also contributed too creating much longer delays outside the airfield. It was noticeable that Sunday was a significant improvement thanks to some welcome rethinking on the part of the organisation and perhaps the feedback left on various online outlets.



The thinner line up was particularly obvious in the static park. The usual long line of fighters and military trainers was nowhere to be seen and in its place was an eclectic mix of civilian and historic types also with occasional smaller military aircraft. However, there were some really exciting military participants and for the most part they were parked in much more photogenic locations which was a most welcome gesture by the planners!



The Belgian Air Component contributed their stunning tiger scheme **F-16AM Fighting Falcon** from 31 Tiger Squadron. Staying with the fighter theme there was an impressive gathering of **Eurofighter Typhoons** with a pair of Luftwaffe and Italian Air Force examples joined by a solitary RAF two seater complete with a weapons load.



The "home team" were represented by a **Sentry AEW1** and **Sentinel R1** on the ground with the latter unable to take part in the station flypast. The Tuesday before the show saw the last flights by the **Nimrod R1** aircraft and both airframes were also on static display alongside the Sentinel.



Other nice additions to the static park included a pair of **Pilatus PC-7 Turbo-trainers** and a **McDonnell Douglas KDC-10** tanker from the Royal Netherlands Air Force, one of the



Thunderbirds support **C-17A Globemasters** from the USAF, Polish Navy **M-28R Bryza** and a French Air Force **Alpha Jet**.



The flying display was opened by the traditional station flypast, though on this occasion it was just a single **Boeing E-3D Sentry**. However, it was followed by a further flypast representing one of Waddington's future assets, the **RC-135W Rivet Joint**. The participating aircraft was jointly crewed by USAF and RAF crews from 51 Squadron.



Naturally, all of the RAF solo displays took part in the flying display with appearances from the **Tutor T1**, **Tucano T1**, **Hawk T1** and the ever impressive **Tornado GR4 role demonstration**. Waddington was also notable for the first flying display outings for the RAF's **King Air B200** and **Chinook HC2** displays for 2011. The King Air had the start of its season delayed by a late decision by 22 Group to provide a display and other operation reasons. For 2011 Flt Lt Leon Creese returns for his fourth display season.



The **Chinook HC2** will only be making a few appearances during the summer at some of the larger events. 2011 marks the 30th Anniversary of the RAF Chinook force which has provided such good service during it career. Unlike the 2010 role demo, the 2011 display is a much more dynamic handling display as seen in previous years. We hope that 2012 will see the Chinook making even more appearances as it's such an impressive display machine.



The solo displays were joined by the **Red Arrows**, **Battle of Britain Memorial Flight** and the **RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team**. The BBMF display was



particularly noteworthy presenting the fighter pair of **Spitfire V** and **Hurricane IIC** as a synchro-pair.

Another helicopter display making very few appearances in 2011 is the **WAH-64D Apache AH1** from the Army Air Corps. The aircraft was making its second public appearance of the year with a dramatic solo display. The Royal Navy also had an impressive contingent with the **Black Cats** Helicopter Display Team and a solo demo from a **Westland Merlin HM1**.

2011 sees important anniversaries for two iconic British types. The 75th anniversary of the Spitfire was marked by a solo display by Paul Day in MSB Aviation's **Spitfire IXT** which is based at RAF Waddington now following refurbishment by the OFMC at Duxford over the winter which has seen the aircraft's fuel tanks restored to their original configuration.

**Team Viper** made their second UK appearance of 2011 with their new five-ship of **Hawker Hunters** marking the 60th anniversary of the classic jet. There were further classic jets from the Royal Norwegian Air Force Historic Squadron's pair of beautiful **Vampires**, both single and twin seater which put on the most elegant of routines. **Vulcan XH558** also made a welcome and finally trouble free visit to Waddington with two very popular appearances during the weekend.

Two historic and very different American historic types also participated in the flying display with **B-17G Flying Fortress** Sally-B making her first flying appearance of 2011 and a stunning display by Tony de Bruyn in his **North American OV-10B Bronco**. The Bronco is a rugged twin engined aircraft initially developed for close air support and reconnaissance. The B-variant was bought by the Luftwaffe for target towing duties, but retains all the agility and 'STOL' performance of its more aggressive sister! Tony clearly relishes displaying the aircraft for a crowd and for me; it was one of the stars of the flying.



Aerobatic displays were provided by three very different displays. Nigel Wilson flew his colourful **Yak-52** in an entertaining display while the **Royal Jordanian Falcons** and the **Blades** display teams provided formation routines.

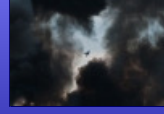
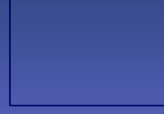
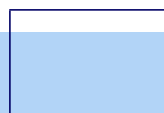
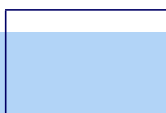
Despite both teams flying four very similar versions of popular **Extra 300L** both teams present very different displays providing a welcome break from all the noise of the jets.

However, it is the international military displays that are the stars of any big military show. Unsurprisingly international military acts were slightly fewer this year. 'Mitch' Beulen make a stunning return to Waddington flying the Belgian Air Component's **F-16AM Fighting Falcon** wearing a modified version of the 'Vortex' paint scheme to celebrate the air arms 65th anniversary this year.

However, it was undoubtedly the United States Air Force **Thunderbirds** display team that were the stars of the weekend. Flying six powerful **F-16C Fighting Falcons**, you cannot really compare their display to that of the popular European teams who mostly fly larger formations of more nimble jet trainers. The Thunderbirds clearly place noise and close formation flying very high up on their list of priorities for developing a sequence and may not put as much on continuous action as do the Reds or the Frecce Tricolori for example. The European audience may 'not get' the hyped style commentary nor the presentation style but their display is always worth watching.

Their display at Waddington did cause a few problems for the organisers who were forced to make sure the southern car parks were cleared of people during their display to permit the team to complete some of their figures that otherwise would have over-flown spectators! The Thunderbirds were in the UK as part of a European tour which started at the 100th Anniversary of the Turkish air Force airshow and will conclude at the 65th Anniversary of the Belgian Air Force show a few days after Waddington.

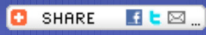
Despite the harder times now faced by the Waddington Airshow organisers, 2011 was certainly a huge success showcasing the RAF and other UK military arms. A huge crowd of over 145,000 enjoyed the show over two days which was certainly evident from the packed crowd-line. The flying display was particularly enjoyable with a hour or two of show-stopping acts in the middle of the day in quick succession which topped off a great weekend in Lincolnshire. RAF Waddington International Airshow 2012 will be held over the weekend of 30th June-1st July.





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