

RAF soar over Buckingham Palace for HM The Queen's Birthday

On Saturday, 17 June 2017, 29 Royal Air Force Aircraft soared over Buckingham Palace, Central London, in an impressive flypast to mark the annual Queen's Birthday Parade.

15 types of RAF aircraft took part in the Flypast, including two of the RAF's world-class display teams – the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) and the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team – the Red Arrows.

✘ The formation flew over the Palace at 13:00BST, divided into eight elements, in roughly 30 second intervals.

Squadron Leader Jim Furness, Formation Lead and flying in one of the Tornado GR4s, said: "It's an honour to take part in Her Majesty's Birthday Flypast. Extensive preparation has taken place over several weeks and months to make sure that the different aircraft from all over the country deliver a safe and successful flypast over London – made more challenging by it being one of the busiest airspaces in the world."

Air Vice Marshal Gerry Mayhew CBE MA RAF, the Air Officer Commanding No. 1 Group, said: "It is an honour for the Royal Air Force to mark HM The Queen's 91st birthday with a flypast. The magnificent sight of over 25 aircraft flying over Buckingham Palace is another example of the superb efforts being made by the men and women of the Royal Air Force, who should be proud of their achievements both at home and overseas."

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The flypast was led by a Chinook and a Puma helicopter, representing the backbone of the UK's tactical troop-lifting capability. Currently deployed in Afghanistan the Puma has recently undergone a fleet upgrade programme, hugely enhancing its capability in supporting the Afghan National Army in Kabul.

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Following the helicopters was the unforgettable sound of Merlin engines powering a Supermarine Spitfire and two Hawker Hurricanes from the BBMF. Today these aircraft represent the rich 99 year history of the Royal Air Force and the sacrifices made by a great many of its personnel. This year BBMF are celebrating their 60th anniversary, having been formed in July 1957.

BBMF were followed by a Shadow R1 – an Intelligence, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition Aircraft which was taking part this year for the first time. The Shadow was flanked by two King Air B200s. The King Airs from RAF Cranwell represent training aircraft from across the RAF but are specifically employed in multi-engine Pilot and Rear Crew training.

Next up were four of the RAF's transport aircraft – demonstrating the RAF's

global reach and its ability to project air power around the world. First up, the C-17 Globemaster III, the RAF's hugely capable strategic heavy-lift aircraft. With its cavernous cargo hold it is often found supporting the UK across the globe, flying long distance sometimes at very short notice. Behind it was the BAe 146. This aircraft provides transport to members of the Royal Family, senior Government Ministers, and Ministry of Defence personnel.

The second Air Transport element consisted of the state of the art A400M Atlas, only its second time in the flypast, and the C-130 Hercules. Whilst being able to employ impressive strategic reach, the Atlas is set to take over more of the tactical airlift role from the C-130. Both aircraft are based at the RAF's largest base at Brize Norton, which is celebrating its 80th birthday this year.



Next followed the Sentinel R1 – a long-range battlefield surveillance aircraft. This key capability is providing vital support to operations in the Middle East. Following the Sentinel R1 was four multi-role Typhoons. With control of UK sovereign airspace a vital task these agile, capable multi role fighters secure our skies 24/7. Currently deployed on operations in Romania, Cyprus and the Falkland Islands, Typhoon is the core of the Royal Air Force's Combat Air capability.

The penultimate element consisted of the Voyager and Tornado GR4. The Voyager is the Royal Air Force's largest aircraft and one which has provided a step change in strategic freight and troop carrying capability. It also is capable of air refuelling a variety of aircraft and is currently supporting operations at home and around the world. The Voyager was flanked by two Tornado GR4s from RAF Marham. This superbly capable aircraft continues to perform outstandingly on operations today, over 45 years since it first flew. Tornado GR4 crews tirelessly support our coalition partners in the Middle East.



Finally, the iconic nine-strong Red Arrows, flying in a 'Big Wing' formation in their distinctive red Hawk aircraft, ended the flypast. The Red Arrows' 53rd season is now underway, with the team expected to display more than 60 times across the UK and beyond. Since 1965 – which was the Red Arrows' first season – more than 4,800 displays have been performed in 57 countries, which is equivalent to a quarter of the world.

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Images: Sgt Mackie, Cpl Chapman, Cpl Hawke, Cpl Laurence, SAC Egan

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