

The formation will consist of the following elements:

Element 1: This will consist of five historic aircraft of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF), with the Lancaster leading two Spitfires and two Hurricanes. The Flight, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, flies a total of five Spitfires, two Hurricanes, a Dakota and two Chipmunk trainers in addition to the Lancaster and appears at many events each year as a flying memorial to RAF's involvement in all the campaigns of WWII.

The pilot of the Lancaster is Flight Lieutenant (Flt Lt) Mike Ickey, who is in his eighth season with the BBMF. After joining the RAF in 1988 he flew mainly Canberra aircraft until they retired from service two years ago.

One of the Spitfires is being flown by Group Captain (Gp Capt) Stuart Atha, Station Commander of RAF Coningsby and the Typhoon Force Commander. He flew Harrier aircraft from 1990 including combat missions over the Balkan and Iraqi theatres. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 2003 following his command of 3(Fighter) Squadron in Iraq. This is his second season flying with the BBMF.

One of the Hurricanes is being flown by the Officer Commanding BBMF, Sqn Ldr Al Pinner. With over 4,000 flying hours to his credit during six flying tours on Harriers, including more than 100 operational missions over the Balkans and Iraq, and Canadian Defence Force F-18 Hornet aircraft on an exchange tour in Quebec, Canada. This year is his sixth season with the BBMF and his third as its OC.

Element 2: A C-130J Hercules transport aircraft from RAF Lyneham, Wiltshire, will lead the second element, representing the four squadrons of these versatile aircraft based there. It will be accompanied by two King Air 200 multi-engined trainers of 45(Reserve) Squadron, based at the RAF College at Cranwell, Lincolnshire, the first time these aircraft have participated in the Queen's Birthday Flypast.

The Hercules Aircraft Captain will be Birmingham-born Flt Lt Pete Astle, 53, who joined the RAF in 1974. He served as a non commissioned aircrew member on Nimrod aircraft for some 18 months, but was later commissioned and transferred to the Hercules fleet, and is currently a qualified flying instructor on the C-130J fleet.

His co-pilot, Flt Lt Ed Tudge, was born at Shrewsbury in 1971, and joined the RAF in 1992. After flying training he graduated into the Hercules fleet, and like Flt Lt Astle, is a qualified flying instructor on the C-130J fleet.

The King Air to the right of the Hercules is being flown by Sqn Ldr Jad Reece (correct), who is Officer Commanding 45 (R) Sqn. He was born in Wolverhampton in 1971, and joined the RAF in 1994 and went on to fly Nimrod operationally in Iraq and Afghanistan. After a spell as a flying instructor on Tucano aircraft, he assumed command of his current squadron, which trains all RAF and Army multi-engined pilots.

The other King Air is being flown by Flt Lt Nelly (alias Neil/Neal) Cottle, from Sunnybrow, County Durham. He flew Hercules transport aircraft after joining the

RAF in 1986, and in 2004 he became a Qualified Flying Instructor on Jetstreams, which have recently been replaced by the King Air.

Element 3: The RAF's newest fighter aircraft, the multi-role Eurofighter Typhoon, will be represented by nine of these highly capable jets representing each of the four squadrons based at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, numbers 3 (Fighter), XI, 17 (Reserve) and 29 (Reserve) Squadrons. The Flypast Leader will be Wing Commander Johnny Stringer, Officer Commanding 29 (Reserve) Squadron, the Typhoon Operational Conversion Unit, who will be flying the lead Typhoon.

Born in Sale, Cheshire, he joined the RAF in 1990 and flew Jaguars from 1993 for ten years including operations over Iraq and the Balkans. After some staff appointments, including as Military Assistant to Director General Typhoon, he assumed command of 29 (R) Sqn in September last year.

Element 4: The fourth element will be led by a VC-10 in-flight refuelling tanker aircraft from 101 Squadron based at RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, flanked by two Tornado F3 fighter aircraft representing 43(F) and 111(F) Squadrons based at RAF Leuchars, Fife, Scotland. Closely following the VC-10 will be a Boeing E-3D Sentry airborne early warning aircraft simulating in-flight refuelling, representing 8, 23 and 54 (Reserve) Squadrons from RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire.

The VC-10 is being flown by Flt Lt Phil Burlingham. Born at Emsworth and educated in Ayrshire he joined the RAF as an Air Loadmaster in 1985 on Wessex helicopters, later retraining as a Search and Rescue winchman on Sea King helicopters at RAF Lossiemouth, Moray. He commissioned as a pilot in 1992 and flew Puma helicopters in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Bosnia, Norway and on flood rescue duties in Mozambique. He crossed over to VC-10s in 2001 and has flown air-to-air refuelling missions over Iraq, Afghanistan and the Falkland Islands. He has amassed 7,400 flying hours.

The E-3D Sentry is being flown by London-born Wg Cdr Stuart Reid, who joined the RAF in 1978. He has flown Jaguar and Tornado aircraft with the RAF in Germany, and served as a flying instructor in the UK and USA. He has flown the E-3D from RAF Waddington since 1997. He is also "Bomber Leader" with the BBMF, training pilots to fly the Lancaster and the Dakota; this is his ninth season with the BBMF.

Element 5: The fifth element will be a Diamond-nine formation of Tornado F3 fighters from numbers 43 (Fighter) and 111 (Fighter) Squadrons at RAF Leuchars, Fife, Scotland. The Tornado fighters are in the process of being superseded by Typhoons and under current plans it is expected that three Typhoon squadrons will eventually be based at Leuchars.

In addition to the main Tornado F3 formation six other F3s are also acting as wingmen to most of the larger single aircraft in the formation.

Leading the Leuchars contingent is Wg Cdr Peter Cracroft (correct), OC of 111 (F) Squadron. He was born at Solihull and joined the RAF in 1986. After training at the RAF College at Cranwell he undertook flying training in the United States. Upon completion he joined the Tornado F3 force, where he has been ever since apart from

two ground Staff Tours. He has undertaken operational detachments to Bosnia, the Falkland Islands and Iraq. He is married with two children.

His navigator, Sqn Ldr Blyth Crawford, joined the RAF in 1993 and undertook navigator training at RAF Finningley before being posted to the Tornados of 111 (F) Sqn at Leuchars. He subsequently served as a Tornado instructor at Leuchars. Sqn Ldr Crawford spent over two years with NATO's Tactical Leadership Programme based at Florennes in Belgium, and was also attached to an operations centre conducting events in the Middle East. Back in the UK he served with 25 Sqn at RAF Leeming, North Yorkshire, until it disbanded earlier this year, and is now Executive Officer with 111 (F) Sqn.

Element 6: One of the RAF's five C-17 Globemaster III strategic transport aircraft will lead the sixth element of the flypast. The aircraft, from 99 Squadron, also based at RAF Brize Norton, will be flanked by two further Leuchars-based Tornado F3s. A sixth C-17 is expected to join the fleet imminently.

Flt Lt James Thurrell is flying the C-17 in the Flypast. Born at Kingston-upon-Thames in 1970, he joined the RAF as an Air Engineer, but changed branch to Pilot in 2000, and was posted to the C-17 Globemaster. Currently he instructs pilots within 99 Sqn's Operational Conversion Unit. He is married and has two young children.

Element 7: The Nimrods from RAF Kinloss, Morayshire, will be represented by an aircraft from 201 Squadron. The other Nimrod squadron, 120, is this year celebrating its 90th birthday. It will be escorted by two more Tornado F3s from RAF Leuchars.

Sqn Ldr Carl Melen (pronounced Meelen), 37, of 201 Squadron, "Guernsey's Own", is the captain of the Nimrod aircraft. Between June 2003 and July 2006 he was on exchange with the Royal Australian Air Force during which time he was awarded the Australian Conspicuous Service Medal (CSM) for displaying outstanding professionalism and leadership under pressure during a serious in-flight emergency at low level in June 2005. He has amassed over 3,500 flying hours, and this year is the second occasion he has flown over the capital for the Queen's Birthday Flypast, the previous occasion was in 2002.

Element 8: The RAF's strategic tanker/transport aircraft, the Lockheed Tristar, of 216 Squadron, based at RAF Brize Norton, will lead the eighth element of the flypast, flanked by two HS 125 liaison aircraft from 32 (The Royal) Squadron, from RAF Northolt, Middlesex. Both types have served extensively in the Middle East, the Tristar refuelling other aircraft and transporting troops, and the HS 125s providing high speed transport for senior military personnel.

The Tristar is being flown by Flt Lt Steve Margetts, who was born in Chelsea in 1979, and joined the RAF in 2001. He was posted to the Tristar squadron in March 2004, and after three years as a co-pilot is now an aircraft captain. He was married last month (May) to a Flt Lt also serving at RAF Brize Norton.

The lead HS 125 pilot is Sqn Ldr Dave Catlow, currently OC of C Flight, the HS 125 Flight, on 32 (TR) Sqn. He joined the RAF in 1992 and flew Hercules before becoming a flying instructor on Tucanos. He then served as an Air Advisor to a

Marine Unit in Iraq before returning to the UK for a short tour on Hercules, followed by a move to his current position. He has undertaken operational service in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and the Balkans, and is soon to become involved with the introduction into service of the new Airbus A400M Tactical Airlift Aircraft.

Element 9: The final element is the 16-strong formation of Tornado GR4 strike aircraft described above. The aircraft represent all four of the squadrons based at RAF Marham, Norfolk, and the formation will be led by Wing Commander Dave Waddington, Officer Commanding IX Squadron, with Squadron Leader Roger Smith, also of IX Squadron, as his navigator.

Among Marham's aircrew in the formation will be Air Commodore (Air Cdre) Phil Osborn, the Station Commander at RAF Marham until Friday 13 June, and his successor, Gp Capt Colin Basnett.

There is no participation this year from the other Tornado GR4 base, RAF Lossiemouth, Morayshire, Scotland, as those squadrons are currently preoccupied with continuing operations in Iraq.

Born in Bolton, Lancashire, Wg Cdr Waddington joined the RAF in 1985 and went on to fly Tornado ground attack aircraft after training. He was shot down in Iraq by a surface to air missile at low level during the first Gulf War, in January 1991, and was released six-and-a-half weeks later on his 25th birthday in March. He spent two years as an exchange officer in France, flying Mirage 2000s, and is approaching the end of his two year tour as OC of IX Squadron. He has yet to learn where his next posting will take him.