

CILIBERTI'S AVIATION TALES



It was 2001, a whopping 26 years later, when the subject of the Vulcan crash came up with the airshow's commentator, the late Wing Commander Brian J Essex. I had known Brian for ages and he became the voice of the Malta Int'l Airshow with his immense knowledge and calming voice needed for any large outdoor event.



Brian flew Victors and Nimrods and was based in Malta with 203 Sqn when the Vulcan crashed over Zabbar. He was appointed to sit on the

board of inquiry for the incident. My photo of the Vulcan with its missing wheels featured on the newspaper 'Il-Ħajja' the day after the crash and I was contacted by the RAF to have a look at my photo to help the service with its findings. As a 16 year-old I was over the moon to be asked by the RAF to help. The meeting was planned for 7:00pm by the bus stop under the approach to RW 24.

My dad didn't drive and insisted to come with me, hence why we agreed on a place at a bus stop! Dad, as ever very protective, insisted that unless I am given an SLR camera for helping out I should not let the photo and negative out of my hands. We duly made it to Luqa in the dark to meet the RAF officers. We were slightly early but soon enough, an RAF Land Rover stopped by and two officers came out. My dad insisted that the young lad (me!) should be given a camera for helping the RAF for giving them the photo and the negative but the officers insisted on giving me only a set of binoculars.

They had a good look at the photo in hand with their little torch lights. This went on for about 5 minutes, after which my dad said 'enough, are you going to give Joe a camera?' and they politely again confirmed a set of binocular was all they were approved to give away. My dad told them 'in this case hand me back the picture' and we walked away holding the photo and negative but without the binoculars.

Fast forward 26 years and Brian and I were having a G&T after the 2001 show (which was one of the toughest I had as it came just a few days after the September 11th terrorist attack) and I brought up the story of when I was a kid and met these two officers to hand them the Vulcan photograph. Brian put his glass down on the table and said 'don't tell me anything else, let me continue with your story'. He went on to tell me that he was one of the two officers my dad and I met on that late evening!

I looked at Brian with a total disbelief. He went on to tell me exactly what happened that evening to which I retorted 'you two made a total Scrooge on me. Why didn't you even at least give me the binoculars?' to which he replied 'you insisted on the camera and we were happy to just see the photo as during the inquiry we (the two officers) were witness to each other on what we saw in your photo'!

Totally outsmarted by the RAF there! I got back a lot from the RAF during the many airshows we held in Malta, and squeezed every bit of energy off Wing Commander Brian Essex when he spent over 15 years doing our commentary. Brian did his last airshow commentary for us in 2016 at Smart City when he had already been diagnosed with a terminal illness, but insisted he would not let me down and went on to do what he loved to do and what we all always appreciated. RIP Wing Commander Brian J Essex.

Joe Ciliberti
NOVEMBER 2023