

RAF Hercules commemorative fly-past passes special memorial bench for its ground engineers killed in service put in place by VIVO

3 years ago



As part of a fly-past commemorating the RAF Hercules, the iconic aircraft passed over a memorial bench for three of its ground engineers killed in active service put in place in the past few weeks by colleagues from VIVO Defence Services and Beard Construction.

The crew of the flying workhorse – which first started with the RAF in 1966 and retires this month – made sure they flew over the memorial event held at MOD Lyneham for the fallen engineers yesterday (Wednesday, June 14, 2023) during their historic four nations farewell flight.

The commemorative bench was put in place at the memorial garden outside the REME museum by colleagues from VIVO Defence and Beard Construction to remember the three service men.

Prior to that, it was outside the ground engineers' office at RAF Brize Norton, where their section supported the RAF's four Hercules squadrons – 24, 30, 47, 70. Ground engineers would often sit on the bench to reflect and think about their fallen comrades during moments of solace.

One of the ground engineers was lost when a C130K Hercules crashed at Blair Atholl during a flight over Scotland in 1993 resulting in the loss of nine crew. A further two were lost during a C130K flight over Iraq in 2005 resulting in the loss of eleven crew.

With the aircraft retiring from duty, the bench needed a new home and former Hercules ground engineer

Mark Gzowski, who now works as a project manager with VIVO, acted quickly to get together a team to build it a permanent home in time for yesterday's fly-past.

Former flight sergeant Mark, who served with the RAF for 33 years, had been contacted by RAF colleague Simes Handley, also an ex-C130 Hercules Ground Engineer who is now at the School of Army Aeronautical Engineering at MOD Lyneham.

Together they worked with Lyneham's Camp Commandant and the REME museum director there to find a fitting permanent home for the bench in the memorial garden outside the museum, which commemorates servicemen lost on active duty and the role RAF Lyneham played repatriating them.

When Mark learnt of the Hercules fly-past, he arranged for his colleagues at VIVO Defence Services and their contractors Beard Construction to move quickly to make sure everything was completed in time for the aerial tribute.

When VIVO asked westcountry-based Beard Construction they were more than happy to help and offered to do the work at no cost to show support for our armed forces.

Mark said: "One of our engineers had originally built the bench to remember three of our comrades lost in service and it was placed outside our offices so we could sit and reflect the fallen. Now that the Hercules is being retired it seemed fitting to move it to the memorial garden at Lyneham where the Hercules was based from 1971 to 2011. The bench now sits outside the REME museum which is a public space for service personnel and the public to visit and pay their respects.

"When we realised there was going to be a Hercules national fly-past, including an overfly of Lyneham, we got a team together, including my colleagues from VIVO Defence, to get the bench moved and fixed in place in time as the moment seemed perfect. I want to thank everyone involved."

Major (Ret'd) Rick Henderson, Museum Director at the REME Museum, Lyneham, said he was pleased the bench was put in place in time for the fly-past.

He added: "MOD Lyneham and the REME Museum are extremely excited and really proud to be the custodians of this important memorial bench. To have the bench on MOD Lyneham soil for the Hercules fly-past makes it all the more special.

Lt Col Mick Patey, of the Garrison Support Unit at RAF Lyneham, added: "It is so important we remember the legacy of RAF Lyneham and now that the Hercules is being retired, it seems very fitting to move the memorial bench to the memorial garden at Lyneham where the Hercules was based for 40 glorious years."

Jerry Moloney, Managing Director at VIVO Defence Services, said: "I am really proud that our team has moved this important memorial bench to such a visible spot in time for the Hercules fly-past. We at VIVO work solely for the UK military and its partners, around thirty per cent of our people have a link with the military, having either served or come from a military family, and our country's military heritage is really important to us."