

**INDIVIDUAL HISTORY**

**HANDLEY PAGE VICTOR K. MK.2 XM717**  
**(NOSE ONLY) MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 1996/0166/A**

Ordered as part of the 4th and final Victor production contract, No.6/aircraft / 15566/ for 30 Victor B.MK.2 aircraft, but production terminated after five aircraft, XM714 - XM718, delivered. Built by Handley Page at Radlett, Herts.

27 Feb 63            First flight.

12 Mar 63            Awaiting collection from Radlett after four manufacturer's test flights

13 Mar 63            Delivered to RAF Wittering, Cambs.

14 Mar 63            To No. 100 Squadron at RAF Wittering.

    Jun 63            Shown at Paris Airshow. Photo- The Handley Page Victor Vol 2 (Brooks) p.52.

    20 Mar 64          To Handley Page, Radlett for retrofit of modifications as B2R (manufacturer's designation) with uprated RR Conway engines.

15 Dec 64            Test flight from Radlett, recorded in logbook of Handley Page engineer Ray Funnell; pilot P. Murphy.

                        Further flights 30 Dec and 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> January 1965; total of nine HP test flights post conversion.

25 Jan 65            Loaned to Ministry of Aviation.

2 Feb 65             At Handley Page for investigation into defects with drop tanks and engine performance against contract KD/4/049/CB6 (a).

08 Feb 65            Allotted to Nos. 100/139 Squadrons which formed the Blue-Steel stand-off missile equipped Wittering Wing; delivered following day.

03 Aug 66            To Handley Page for modifications-wing strengthening.

21 Dec 66            Test flight from Radlett (Funnell logbook-pilot J W Allam, 1.15hrs).

22 Dec 66            Returned to Wittering Wing.

19 Dec 67            To Handley Page for Cat.3R repairs.

26 Mar 68            Test flown; pilot H W Rayner, 50 minutes.

27 Mar 68            Returned to Wittering Wing. Photo 1968 with Blue Steel fitted and Wittering Wing markings - Flypast Oct. 93 p.38.  
No. 100 Squadron disbanded 1 Oct 68, followed by No. 139 Squadron 31 Dec 1968. Colour photo, June 1968 – Handley Page Victor (Butler & Buttler) p.139.

    Sep 68            Flown to Jamaica by Flt Lt Nelson, with S/Ldr V A Pheasant in the crew as AEO (logbook extract on file), as one of three aircraft sent to the island for the last

Squadron visit to the island prior to the disbandment of No 139 (Jamaica) Squadron. Flew in formation at low level around the island on the Saturday.  
The aircraft left Wittering for Goose Bay on 10 September, and flew on to Palisadoes the following day, returning to Goose Bay on the 16 September and back to Wittering the following day.

- 07 Jan 69 To No. 543 Squadron, RAF Wyton operating in the strategic reconnaissance role though still a B.MK.2-used as a training aircraft for crew conversion and continuation training, and the Blue Steel support equipment was removed shortly after arrival, returning the aircraft as far as possible to a conventional bomber, although also used for reconnaissance sorties. At Wittering XM717 had latterly also normally been on loan to the Victor Training Flight, which also moved to RAF Wyton. Photo with 543 Squadron; Brooks Vol 2 p.71.
- 04 -11 May 1969 No. 543 Squadron entered 2 crews and 2 Victors in the Daily Mail Transatlantic Heathrow - New York race to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Alcock & Brown transatlantic crossing.  
On 6 May, XM 717, piloted by Flt Lt Pete 'Nobby' Clark flew the Atlantic westbound in a race time of 6 hours 16 minutes and 55 seconds (flight time 5hr 49 minutes and in a flight time of five hours 28 (race time 5hr 55 min 31s) eastbound over the 3,450 miles, the eastbound leg being from Floyd Bennett NAS, New York to Wisley, captained by Flt Lt T Bradley. This was the Victor leg of the actual trip from the top of the Empire State Building in New York to the top of the Post Office Tower in London. XM717 was standby aircraft to the primary aircraft, which suffered a compass failure. Flying clean without drop tanks, pilot Terry Bradley reached Mach 0.98 at 45,000 feet on the eastbound trip on 8 May, in a 5hr 55min flight at 638mph. Details in file letter from AEO Squadron Leader V. A. Pheasant; co-pilot was Flt Lt Mike O'Donovan.
- 18 Sep 71 Displayed at RAF St Mawgan, Cornwall for Battle of Britain Display.
- 12 Mar 74 Allotted to Hawker Siddeley Aircraft, Woodford for conversion to K. (Tanker) Mk.2 standard as one of the 21 K. Mk. 2 conversions from B.Mk.2 (bomber) and SR Mk 2 (strategic reconnaissance) standard, the first of which flew at Woodford 1 Mar 1972; delivered by Flt Lt Mike O'Donovan and crew the following day.
- 24 May 74 No. 543 Squadron disbanded at RAF Wyton ending Victor SR 2 service.
- 13 Nov 74 Stripping for conversion commenced.
- 22 Aug 77 Complete engine runs.
- 8 Sep 77 First flight following conversion; 2.15hrs, pilot J Cruse; nine manufacturer's test flights.
- 01 Nov 77 Delivered to No. 55 Squadron at RAF Marham, Norfolk by H. Fisher (30 minute flight) Squadron had operated the Victor K.MK.2 since July 1975. After the disbandment of No. 214 Squadron in Jan 77 Nos. 55/57 Squadrons provided in-flight refuelling services to Strike Commands' Buccaneers, Harriers, and Jaguars, later supplemented by VC 10s and Tristars as Victor numbers gradually diminished.
- 13 Apr 82 Deployed to Goose Bay, Canada in support of 8 Harrier GR.3's en route from RAF Wittering to Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Alberta for a 'Maple Flag' exercise.
- 15 Apr 82 Returned to RAF Marham.
- 30 Apr 82 Flown non-stop to Wideawake Island. Photo at Wideawake - Falklands - The Air War (016864) p.397.

30 Apr 82 Refuelled first Vulcan B2 'Black Buck' bombing raid as one of a stream of 11 (from a total detachment of 14) departures commencing at 23.50 on 30 April. Captained by Sqn Ldr B.R.Neal, XM717 was airborne for 4 hours 20 minutes.

01 May 82 Photographed at Ascension Island - Falklands-The Air War (016864) colour p.xvi.

03 May 82 Refuelled 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Black Buck' mission.

07 May 82 Provided refuelling for a Vulcan B2 being redeployed to RAF Waddington.

11 May 82 Provided contingency cover for No. 809 Squadron Sea Harriers on alert on board the 'Atlantic Conveyer'.

15 May 82 Provided tanking for the first Nimrod MR.2P reconnaissance mission off the Argentine coast. Captained by Wg Cdr C.C.B. Seymour, the aircraft was airborne for 3 hours 45 minutes as one of 12 Victors needed for this mission.

17 May 82 Provided tanking for the return leg of the first Hercules C.1P air-drop mission to ships in the Total Exclusion Zone as one of three Victors involved in this flight.

30 May 82 Black Buck 5 (2.45 Hours by night) – short recovery sortie to tank the returning Vulcan – see Fl Lt P.R. McKernan logbook extract on A/C Dept Victor file.

01 Jun 82 Provided tanking for the deployment of two No.1(F) Squadron Harriers from Ascension Island to HMS Hermes in the TEZ. Eight Victors were needed to fuel this flight. XM717 was captained by Fl. Lt. Jones and remained airborne for 11 hours 35 minutes.

03 Jun 82 Provided tanking for the 'Black Buck 6' Vulcan B2 anti - radar sortie.

03 Jun 82 Returned to RAF Marham via Dakar.

07 Jun 82 To RAF St. Athan for major overhaul.

28 Jun 82 Recorded as returned to No. 55 Squadron at RAF Marham.

19 Sep 82 Logbook (on Victor aircraft file) of Flt Lt P.R. McKernan of No. 57 Squadron flew Airbridge Cadbury 109 (Pauline) – 5.15 hours, an air-air refuelling with a Hercules. These airbridge sorties were known as Cadburys since crews joked that they were delivering chocolates to the Falkland Islands; early 'Cadbury' missions also had a name, as here.

30 Apr 83 McKernan logbook records Airbridge Cadbury 300 (3.40 hours)

2 May 83 Airbridge Cadbury 302 (three hours – McKernan logbook)

4 May 83 Airbridge Cadbury 304 (3.5 hours – McKernan logbook)

13 May 83 Airbridge Cadbury 311 (2.20 Hours day, .10 hours night, McKernan logbook)

19 May 83 Airbridge Cadbury 315 (2.10 hours, McKernan logbook)

22 Jun 83 Navigator's Flying Logbook of Flt Lt John Weller records 3.45hr flight

23 Jun 83 3.10hr flight (Weller LB)

25 Jun 83 3hr Flight (Weller LB)

2 Jul 83 3.10hr Flight (Weller LB)

11 Aug 83	2.35 hr day/night flight (Weller LB)
9 Dec 83	4.35hr exercise flight (Weller LB)
19 Dec 83	Accompanied cross-country Jaguars via RAF Coltishall-3.50 hr flight (Weller LB)
13 Apr 84	4.40 hr training flight (Weller LB)
3 Jul 84	3.55 hr training flight (Weller LB)
28 Aug 84	2.35 hr flight via RAF Kinloss stopover (Weller LB)
19 Sep 84	2.20 hr flight (Weller LB)
25 Sep 84	9.30hr flight, Marham – Ellsworth AFB for exercise Prairie Vortex (Weller LB)
2 Oct 84	3.50hr flight for Strategic Air Command (SAC) Bombing Navigation competition (Weller LB)
18 Feb 85	To No. 57 Squadron, Marham.
06 Nov 85	To RAF St. Athan for major overhaul.
24 Feb 86	Returned to No. 57 Squadron, Marham.
14 Apr 86	To No. 55 Squadron Marham, the RAFs' last Victor unit.
Dec 90	<p>As the crisis in the Gulf over Iraqi aggression developed, from this month No 55 Squadron operated on detachment to Muharraq airfield, Bahrein - in all 7 Victors and 9 crews deployed making 299 sorties totalling 838 hours during the 42-day 'Desert Storm' campaign, XM717 flying 42 operational sorties from 16 Jan 1991 when the first RAF raids occurred.</p> <p>The initial six detached Victors all acquired characteristic nose artwork and No.55 squadron spear (in keeping with the units' tail emblem) applied by Corporal Andy Price with the names given being those of various crew chiefs' wives/girlfriends, XM717 becoming 'Lucky Lou'. Photos - Air Forces Monthly Gulf Special 1991 p.59, Flypast October 2008 p.107 and Aeroplane Monthly Dec.93 p.41; Scale Models International Oct.91 p.12. Also carried were black 'mission markings' in the shape of petrol pump symbols on the lower fuselage sides forward of the engine intakes. The Victors supported compatibly equipped aircraft of all allied forces as required. All Victors were fuelled to the maximum fuel load of 123,000 lb for take off to ensure available fuel for Tornado's returning from missions.</p> <p>Photo of XM717 fuelling two RAF Jaguars en route to the Gulf at the end of October 1990 - RAF Yearbook Gulf Special (1991) p.48 -49.</p>
18 Feb 91	Briefly back at RAF Marham by this date.
18 Mar 91	Both RAFM Victors - XH672 (Now at Cosford) and XM717 at Muharraq at this date.
10 May 91	No. 55 squadron 75th Anniversary Parade and display at RAF Marham - XM717 used as a parade backdrop. Photo - Air Pictorial Jul 91 p.125, with photo of 'Lucky Lou' nose art.
25 May 91	Appeared at RAF Mildenhall Air Fete. Photos - British Aviation Review Feb 96 p.138; Handley Page Victor (Butler & Buttler) p.139.

- May 93                    Colour photo in flight over Gulf zone – Handley Page Victor (Butler & Buttler) p.140.
- Latterly involved in operation ‘Southern Watch’ enforcing the no-fly zone south of the 32<sup>nd</sup> parallel. Photo – Aircraft Magazine February 2011 p.31.
- Sep 93                    Wing Cdr. Alaister Beedie achieved 5000 flying hours during a flight on XM717. Photo with nose detail - RAF News 10 Oct 93 p.12.
- 23 Sep 93                Press day at RAF Marham - Photo of XM717 touching down - Aeroplane Monthly Dec.93 p. 41. This was following XM717's participation in a farewell formation of 3 Victors over the North Sea - photo - Aircraft Illustrated Dec 93 p.42. At this stage, on the eve of the Victors' retirement from the RAF, 7 aircraft remained operational and all participated in exercise 'Elder Joust ' in mid September.
- 01 Oct 93                Last flight of XM717 - as 'Spartan 1 ' flew special refuelling sortie. Had flown 8243.55 hours - the highest of the last 7 flying Victors.
- 15 Oct 93                No 55 Squadron disbanded at RAF Marham. XM715 and XM717 formed the static backdrop to the parade ground for the disbandment ceremony . Photo - RAF News 12 Nov 93 p.12 -13. This ended the service of the Victor with the RAF.
- 16 Oct 93                On strength of Victor Disbandment Flight.
- Dec 93                    By this date the nose of XM717 was reserved for the RAFM.
- Photo as of February 1994, with nose ready for removal – Handley Page Association Newsletter September 2012 p.8.
- Photo of nose being removed in No 2 Hangar at Marham (October 1993)- Aircraft Illustrated Mar 94 p.7.
- Following being placed for sale for scrap on 4 November 1993, the rest of the aircraft was sold for scrap to Birds Commercial Metals Ltd of Stratford on Avon - (better known for previous scrapping of trains, trams and buses) along with four other Victors.
- 02 Mar 94                Nose section delivered to RAFM RC & RC Cardington for storage pending display at Hendon.
- As it was intended to display the nose section with the nose radome cut away to display the radar equipment, a replacement fibreglass radome was required to avoid cutting the original. The replacement item was acquired from a farm at Market Drayton, Shropshire where it had been used as a sheep pen. The item was acquired with the assistance of the Victor Association.
- 12 Feb 97                Nose section moved to RAFM Hendon and installed in Bomber Command Hall; Photos - Wrecks and Relics 17<sup>th</sup> Edition (colour). RADAR Issue 7, Autumn 2014 p.21.

**TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON**

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