

# BEA VIKING UNDERGOES RESTORATION



## PETER F PEYER reports from Basel on the revival of an old British airliner

For more than thirty years, Vickers 610 Viking G-AIVG formerly operated by British European Airways (BEA), had lain dormant in a shed of the famous Musée Schlumpf d'Automobiles Nationale in Mulhouse, France. When the museum's management decreed that the shed would have to be torn down in order to accommodate the expansion of the museum, a new home was sought for the Viking. Thankfully, one was soon found at the nearby Euro airport of Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg, where a dedicated group of enthusiasts have taken on the demanding restoration project.

When, on August 12 1953, BEA Viking G-AIVG taxied out to the runway at Le Bourget Airport, Paris, with thirty passengers and a crew of four on board for a routine scheduled flight to London, no one would have imagined that this would be the last departure of such a young aircraft. During the take-off run the Viking's starboard wheel struck a metal object, causing the tyre to burst. The resulting vibration then caused the collapse of first, one, and then the other main undercarriage unit. In the moments that followed, the aircraft veered off the runway onto the grass, where the Viking skidded to a halt on her belly. Damaged beyond economic repair in the accident, she was stripped of all useable parts including her valuable Bristol Hercules engines, and deleted from the British register in October 1953. Only the wings, tail plane and fuselage survived, along with the empty engine nacelles.

It seems almost inconceivable that the same Vickers Viking, flown by BEA between 1947 and 1953, should have survived almost unnoticed in the annexe of the Schlumpf Automobile Museum in Mulhouse. As the years passed and airworthy Vikings faded from the skies, this rarity lived on in almost complete secrecy. No one in the museum remembers exactly when and why the Schlumpf brothers, whose dedication went almost exclusively into collecting valuable vintage cars, bought the remains of G-AIVG in Paris. Some restoration work was undertaken in the museum, the aim being to preserve the Viking in a static pose displayed high above the ground. A large round hole in the rear section of the fuselage suggests that the idea of a spiral staircase was envisaged allowing visitors to access the cabin of this former BEA airliner. But when the museum passed into the state's hands, interest in the Viking receded and for many years the relic lay dormant in a shed adjacent to the museum.

In the spring of 2004, the museum's management decided that it wished to donate this dinosaur of post-war civil aviation to a third party. Among the bidders was the Basel-based Experimental Aircraft Association Alsace (EAA). This group was led by two Swiss International engineers, André Goepfert and Wolfgang Neumann, both of whom had many years of experience in aircraft overhaul and restoration. They were the lucky winners! During late May and the early part of June 2004, the Viking was dismantled and loaded on to a special vehicle and transported 25 kilometres from Mulhouse to Basel Airport, a unique airport in itself as it is the only truly bi-national airport in the world, jointly operated by France and Switzerland. Some hasty actions had to be taken to find a secure place for the Viking parts, and they are now stored, sadly in the open, on a disused car park owned by Swiss International Airlines.

Thankfully, Basel Airport's local enthusiast community was ready to support the two EAA engineers and their exciting venture. A new club was founded named "Vintage Aircraft Club Basel Airport".

Currently counting 35 members, the club's main objective is the restoration of G-AIVG for static display at Basel-Mulhouse-Friburg, which is presently also the home of Breitling Super Constellation N73544.

EAA and the club's target is to finish restoration in 2007, and then repaint the Viking in the old Balair livery on one side, and in the livery of a French Viking operator on the other. The reason for this is not only due to the bi-national status of Basel Airport, but also because the Viking played an important role in developing holiday charter traffic at Basel Airport, with Balair operating two Vikings (HB-AAN & 'AAR) between 1957 and 1963.

Restoration work has advanced only slowly to date, as more volunteers are needed to work during the evenings and at weekends on this remarkable aircraft. However, the fuselage has been thoroughly cleaned and insulated, and the windows have been replaced by those made of acrylic glass in order to permit the original windows to be refurbished. The fuselage is presently being covered with a coat of silver paint to prevent any further corrosion. However, the needs of the Vintage Aircraft Club are not simply limited to manpower resources, they are also very happy to receive any financial support.

Further information can be obtained from the website at [www.save-a-viking.org](http://www.save-a-viking.org). Here, not only is the full history of G-AIVG revealed, but there is also a remarkable gallery of Viking photographs, many of them taken at Basel Airport. For the time being, this website is only in German, but an English summary is planned by this autumn.

The Vintage Aircraft Club Basel Airport is open for membership worldwide, especially those with a Viking background. As both main undercarriage units were destroyed in the accident in 1953, the club is also keen to obtain parts or a complete undercarriage, which might be lingering around somewhere unnoticed, just like G-AIVG for so many years. The club's address is:- Vintage Aircraft Club, Basel Airport, PO Box 253, CH-4030 Basel, Switzerland.

### HISTORY OF VICKERS 610 VIKING 1B G-AIVG

C/n 220. Registered to the Minister of Civil Aviation 11.11.46. Registered to British European Airways Corporation 16.05.47, first flown Brooklands-Wisley 20.05.47, C of A issued 30.05.47, delivered to BEA 30.05.47 named "Viceroy". In April 1950 the Viking suffered an accident at Frankfurt whereby minor damage was caused to the nose and tail section. On August 17 1951, G-AIVG was forced to return to Zürich Airport after experiencing problems with the port engine. Transferred to BEA's Admiral Class in 1951, seating capacity raised from 27 to 36 and renamed "Sir George Rooke". Damaged taking off from Le Bourget 12.08.53 and written off by BEA. Her subsequent history until acquired by the Schlumpf brothers is unclear, and further details would be most welcome.

*Vickers 610 Viking G-AIVG on the apron at Northolt during her brief service with British European Airways, showing off the livery worn whilst serving in the "Admiral" Class. The original Viking (G-AGOK) first flew from Wisley in the hands of 'Mutt' Summers on June 22 1945 when her initial taxi tests proved so successful that her maiden flight took place on the very same day.*  
(Aviation Photo News)