

216 SQN – The TRISTAR HISTORY GLEANED FROM F540 (Operations Record Book)

Ac purchases:

6 from BA, 3 from Pan Am

4 of the BA ones were converted to K1 tankers, first flight 9 Jul 85

2 of the K1s and the remaining 2 BA ones were converted to KC1, delivered Dec 88.

1985

Feb - the strengthening work to the runway at Ascension was completed. Before this, the aircraft staging to the Falkands had to slip in Dakar.

9 Mar - first flight with an entire RAF crew. Flew several thousand first day covers on behalf of the RAF museum.

Apr - BA were to fly the first few months of trooping flights from May although 216 would fly the inaugural proving routes. The last BA captain flew on 2 Apr, ending some 18 months of BA presence on the Sqn.

May - 5 flights to MPA this month. Stanley was destination until...

First flight onto MPA's new runway left UK on 30 May and arrived 1 Jun. The ac was flown by the OC who stated: 'The reception given to the ac and crew by everybody, both civilian and military left no doubt at all the establishment of a direct and regular air link between the UK and the Falkland Islands gave a tremendous boost to the morale of both the civilian and military personnel, as the Islands are now only a matter of 18 hours from the UK.'

This flight saw 6 speed records being set:

BZZ-ASI8 hrs 21 min

ASI-MPA.... 8 hrs 19 min

BZZ-MPA... 18 hrs 27 min

MPA-ASI..... 7 hrs 18 min

ASI-BZZ8 hrs 29 min

MPA-BZZ.... 17 hrs 20 min

Jul - ZD950, the first converted K1 flew on 9 Jul.

Sep - First Pan Am ac collected, ZE704, previously 'Clipper Bald Eagle'.

Nov - first use in RAF aircraft of in-flight entertainment with audio tapes and headphones provided for passengers.

Dec - took over the 3-weekly MPA schedule from BA on 1 Dec. Crews were staying in the 'coastel', some 2 hrs away from MPA.

1986

Jan - accommodation at MPA finally opened.

Mar - second K1 variant arrives - ZD949.

May - Heavy landing made with ZE705 on a trg sortie on 6 May. Second K1 arrives - ZD951 - 8 May. Flew first AAR trail 28-30 May to Akrotiri.

Dec - OC 216 handover, Filby to Kearney.

1987

Jan - current MPA schedule is 3 tasks per week, but talk of reducing this to 4 flights per fortnight.

Apr - on 7 Apr task RRR9430 in ZD951 gave support to a record-breaking direct London-Perth flight by a VC10 of 101 Sqn. The Tristar provided the second bracket over Colombo and then proceeded via Perth to Whenupai for a static display at the RNZAF 50th Anniversary air show. Exercise Pup?? Was a Defence Sales led AAR demo to the Far East.

May - no trails due to a RAF cutback on fuel usage!

Jun - twice weekly MPA schedule now in force. First Op TANSOR for the Sqn on 12 Jun 87.

Jul - all crews now AT and AAR qualified.

Oct - first trans-Atlantic trail flown to Ex Red Flag.

Dec - with 101 or 10 Sqn having broken the record for the fastest time to MPA on 19 Dec (15:45), the Sqn received notification on 24 Dec of a need to deliver a mobile renal unit to MPA for a critically ill patient. Just 22 hrs after the request was made, the unit was in MPA with a flight time of just 15 hrs 50 mins from BZZ-MPA. The VC10 was a deliberate record attempt with an FAI timer on board. It is also a false record as it states for unrefueled flight when it was refuelled at least twice!!

1988

Jan - visit by AOC 1 Gp who flew MCT and then operated to MPA.

Feb - Flew Cyclone Trail - 2 Tristars, 8 F3s plus all the fighter sqn's support crews and equipment, demonstrating the aircrafts versatility. Flew International Defence Systems prover flight to the Far East with training approaches into Kai Tak airport.

May - cell rated the Sqn's 70th anniversary on 21 May at Brize. Flew 600 ex members and held Dining-In Night with DCinC Strike Command, Air Marshall Sir Brendan Jackson as guest speaker.

Jun - Tristar was to have led the QBF flypast on 11 Jun, but unfortunately was cancelled due to bad weather. Replacement standard presented by CinC Strike Command, Air Chief Marshall Sir Peter Harding and consecrated by the Chaplain in Chief.

Aug - Ex Golden Eagle, 2 Tristars and 4 F3s to Malaysia and Australia to demonstrate the F3s capability.

Oct - Tristars recovered the Ex Golden Eagle fighters by taking them east from Australia, the first time that fighters had circumnavigated the world.

Dec - first KC1 delivered??

1989

Jan - KC1 proving flights.

Feb - first KC1 task - MPA freighter.

Mar - old Sqn standard laid up in St Michaels Church, Lyneham.

1990

Jan - arrival of ZD953 brought strength to 7 aircraft. Runway resurfacing at Ascension caused problems with air bridge, so had to route via Banjul. AOC 1 Gp trained as a line pilot!

Feb - took Sec of State for Defence to MPA (Tom King). Did AAR compatibility trials with E3D in Seattle.

Mar - Major deployment and recovery of 4 F3s and 2 GR1s to RAAF Butterworth in Malaysia. Led by AOC 1 Gp as a tanker captain!

Jun - flew 878 hrs to 33 different locations. Not enough AAR tasking to maintain all crews current, so reduced AAR cadre formed.

Aug - beginning of Op GRANBY. Flew 1234:55 hrs with first sortie on 12 Aug delivering essential NBC equipment to the Gulf. For the remainder of the month ran 2 KC1 sorties per day to and from Cyprus with weapons out load. By end of Aug, 112 sorties and 389:30 flown on Op GRANBY alone. There were 6 sorties trailing F3s into Theatre and engineers were detached to Wildenrath, Akrotiri and Bahrain to speed up turnarounds. KC1s routinely carrying 40T at a time delivering 72 CBLUs or 9 double pallets of JP233. Crews routinely flying 19 hrs crew duty days with reduced crew rest in between. Managed to keep the impact

on extant tasking to a minimum and completed large roulement of Army units to and from the Far East. Eng shift pattern adopted 24/7 pattern.

Sep - still busy on Op GRANBY with 425 of the 1032 hrs flown. Crews detached to Akrotiri to smooth the flow.

Oct - flew 1397 hrs with Op GRANBY taking 65% of it. 60 engineers drafted in from other Sqns to cope with the workload.

Nov - 1310 hrs.

Dec - 1150 hrs. Christmas very much affected. Five crews undertook AR5 Trg and ac fitted with Havequick, Mk 12 IFF and AR5 oxy equipment in preparation for operating in a chemical environment.

1991

Jan - flew 1143:40 hrs on Op GRANBY plus 330.30 hrs AAR. With other tasking, total some 1549:25 hrs! MPA schedule finally went to Britannia Airways. One Tristar and 2 crews deployed to KKIA for Desert Storm on 6 Jan. both K1s got toned down pink paint scheme (Pinky & Perky). In one month, clearances came through to refuel F14, F18, A4, A6, A7, Mirage 2000 and Mirage F1.

KKIA = King Khalid International Airfield, Riyadh.

Feb - flew 1235:55 hrs with no other AT tasking due to Op tasking. Recorded first excursion across Iraqi border on 26 Feb in response to F3 requirements. The KKIA Det flew 90 sorties, gave away 3140T of fuel, dumped nothing and did 433 hrs with only 2 lost to unserviceabilities. The KKIA Det lasted 6 Jan-3 Mar.

Mar - flew 1051 hrs. The end of the financial year with the Tristar having flown 13337 hrs vice an AFT of 10005. From the OC: 'The successful conclusion of the ground war and the pleasant task of repatriating fighting units has given the Sqn a sense that the effort was all worthwhile. Many Sqn crews came under direct attack from Scud missiles and the deployed aircraft CAP'ed right up to the edge of known enemy anti-air defences. 216 Sqn has a long and proud Service history, Op GRANBY has added a Tristar chapter.

Apr - hostilities over and repatriation of UK forces continues in earnest. Sqn maintains one crew and one ac on 24 hr readiness for DP Haven in Turkey. Sqn had 2 days free of tasking for Op GRANBY debrief, Sqn photo and all-ranks party.

May - resumed MPA airbridge.

Jun - Tristar leads fixed wing element of Op GRANBY flypast over Mansion House.

Aug - policy raised to remove fuel probes to save fuel and reduce noise.

Sep - group go to Atlanta to look at Delta Tristar sim for possible purchase.

Nov - OC handover. Comments he has seen Sqn grow from 5 to 8 ac and from 14 to 22 crews. Eng manpower more than doubled.

1992

May - clearance gained to carry 4th engine, but never used in anger.

Jun - large slip pattern to MPA to allow large VVIP (65) party to MPA for 10th anniversary celebrations. Slip will stay till Sep.

Jul - increase in AAR in MPA as changeover of F3s vice F4s to MPA.

Aug - an ac placed on readiness for Gulf ops again.

1993

Mar - got ZE706 into fleet.

Jun - on 8 Jun 2 x K1 deploy to Milan for Op DENY FLIGHT in Bosnia.

Jul - ac deployed to Milan both flying 1 trip per day.

Nov - moved into 'new' accommodation in Hangar 66 at Brize.

1994

Nothing of significance to report.

1995

Jan - Op DENY FLIGHT ongoing in Palermo still 2 crews.

Jul - 3rd crew deployed to Palermo as hostilities increase.

Aug - NATO launch bombing missions with Op DELIBERATE FORCE.

Sep - NATO missions intensify with all 3 crews flying each day - ie 3 sorties per day. Flew RM contingent to Antigua to help island after devastating hurricane.

Oct - back to 2 crews and 1 sortie per day in Palermo.

1996

Jan - 29/30, first Royal flight on Tristar, HRH Princess Royal to MPA. ZE704 had specially designed accommodation fitted. Royal party commented favourably on the comfort, space and quality of service.

Sep - 1000th mission of Bosnian conflict. Arrival of Tristar simulator at Brize which marked the final break of BA training influence.

1997

Apr - first aircraft serviced by GAMCO returned to the Sqn. Sim cleared for training. First operational unit in the Armed Forces to be awarded the Investors in People accreditation.

Jul - first wholly RAF trained course on the Tristar starts.

Oct - Beachcombers (*Sqn Bar built by Cpl Andy Dawson and team*) officially opened.

1998

Jan - Op DELIBERATE GUARD moved from Palermo to Ancona.

Feb - Op BOLTON kicks off. 216 establishes slip pattern at Kuwait to start deploying Harriers and Tornado GR1s.

Apr - Op DELIBERATE GUARD suspended, Tristar back home on 6th.

Jun - following increase in tensions in Kosovo, Sqn re-establishes det in Ancona for Op DELIBERATE FORGE.

1999

Jan - ongoing det in Ancona.

Feb - Op AGRICOLA - first Tristar into Skopje.

Mar - on 24 Mar Op ALLIED FORCE begins with NATO air strikes against Serbia. Two Tristars targeted by Serbian Mig 29 intent on shooting down high value asset. Retrograde called. Two of the Migs shot down by NATI and one of them was a Dutch F16 that came to the Tristar very low on fuel. It was directed to the nearest boom tanker using basic df.

Apr - 3 Tristars allocated to Op ALLIED FORCE, very busy with several retrogrades. Congratulations signal from German airforce, believed to be the first signal between UK and German forces fighting on the same side since Battle of Waterloo in 1815!

Signal was from commander of German Combat Wing, Colonel Joe Both. Addressed to 216 Sqn Det Cdr, it reads: Subject - our common task in theatre.

Dear comrades and friends, it is always a special pleasure to work with you guys. Your situational awareness and professionalism is extraordinary and gives just that support to my aircrews they need for successful SAM hunting. Keep up the 'shit hot' work and leave us a space at your gas stations!

On 15 Apr a Tristar illuminated by SA6 radar, but it was the only tanker operating below the cloud and had EA6Bs due to return post-strike with very little fuel. Tristar remained on towline and as a result the first ever DFC awarded to a tanker pilot (S/L Stu Mitchell) in Oct.

Jun - on 22 hostilities ceased. In the 3 months, 216 had flown 225 sorties.

Jul - on 4 Jul the first ever recorded case of military air-rage as a Polish seaman got violent and attacked a number of the cabin crew. Ac diverted to offload him in Tenerife. Also return home of Kosovo Det ac, although one still in Ancona.

Oct - tail plane fatigue problems on ZE705 which would subsequently affect the rest of the fleet. Mod programme over the next 3 months. One Tristar flew to Darwin to resupply UN forces in East Timor.

Nov - new OC.

2000

Jan - JTIDS introduced to 4 AAR ac.

Feb - Tristar crew arrested when diverted from Bahrain to Doha and refused landing permission!.

Mar - Op BARWOOD, Mozambique flood relief, took 33 Sqn personnel and kit from ASI to S Africa. Used to fly in blues up to now, but into flying suits now.

2001

May - TCAS fit begins.

Jul - last Op DELIBERATE FORCE sortie in Ancona flown on 27 Jul, ending an 8 yr presence in Italy. The Sqn operated with a superb mission success rate throughout and distinguished itself with the award of a DFC.

Aug - takes over Op RESINATE SOUTH det in Bahrain from VC10.

Sep - 911 happens. On 12 Sep, Tristar is on a VIP task and is the only ac allowed to fly into the US, flying all across the Atlantic on its own!

Oct - 3 crews and 2 ac deployed to Muscat on 8 Oct in preparation for ops in Afghanistan. Still Ex SAIF SAREEA II personnel around though causing crew rest issues.

2002

Jan - lay down in one ac in Bahrain and 2 in Seeb on Op ORACLE.

Mar - 27 Mar first flight into Kabul with Op JACANA taking 45 Cdo RM.

Apr - all AAR detts now move to Bahrain. Continued flying into Kabul which was wholly unsuitable for an ex-airliner. No instrument aids, visual approach only with a bomb-cratered runway and mines everywhere. Because of visual approach only 60% of tasks managed to get in, if they couldn't then they diverted to Karachi, but sensitivities were high. On one flight, the passengers were refused permission to disembark at Karachi and Bahrain. As a result, 150 marines suffered the journey BZZ-BAH, BAH-KAR (via Kabul), KAR-BAH and BAH-BZZ, some 29 hrs without leaving the aircraft! As the OC states: 'The deployment of troops on the ground in Kabul has been an interesting operation for a former civilian operated aircraft. The high altitude and high all-up weight meant that the Tristar was being operated close to its limits'. All in did 10 trips into Kabul.

May - OC handover from Atherton to RAD Green. More taks into Kabul.

2003

Jan - The start of Op TELIC and beginning of troop movements to Kuwait, Akrotiri and other locations. Most Tristars used in AT role, but 2 AAR ac remained in Bahrain.

Feb - all 8 AAR crews deployed to Bahrain. Massively busy pan at Kuwait with some offloads taking 5 hrs to start. Tasking in ME became the priority so MPA schedule chartered out to Luxair.

Mar - start of offensive action in Iraq. most AAR sorties were 10 hrs long with a give of 70 tonnes.

Apr - 12 Apr Baghdad falls. All AAR crews over the 130 hr limit. Offensive ops cease and 3 AAR crews lp Lreturn home for emotional homecoming.

May - still busy with AAR and AT - leave ban continues.

Jun - end of Bahrain det and all 216 Sqn personnel now home based for the first in a very long time. How long?? Tristar becomes first Brize ac to land at Basrah and starts a one aircraft per day slip pattern.

Jul - take on Op TANSOR and re-establish MPA schedule, flying 9 trips per month.

2004

Jan - holding Op TANSOR and MPA goes back to charter on 18 Jan.

2005

Jan - on 1 Jan deployed to Abu Dhabi for tsunami relief. Flew 12 trips from Abu-Penang. Received LAIRCM for direct flights into Basrah vice flagging Qatar. Now flying 5 trips per week. 7 Jan Rob Daft takes over from RAD Green.

Aug - another prover flight into Kabul to begin airbridge following month.

Sep - 18 Sep for start of Kabul airbridge. Deployed to Seeb for AAR det for one month.

Oct - Resumed SA schedule when charter 747 damaged Ian ground handling incident.

2006

Apr - deployed back to for AAR.

Sep - AAR crew servicing the Nimrod AAR task have been involved in the worst air disaster the RAF has known in modern time.

Nov - first proving flight into Kandahar.

Dec - direct passenger flights to Kandahar begin.

2007

Jan - hard landing in Kandahar results in considerable damage to no 2 engine on a C2.

Apr - support and involvement to Op TELIC ends with no further flights into Basrah planned.

May - 2 aeromedical flights flown to Basrah.

Jun - 25th anniversary of Falklands conflict, so 2 tasks flown flown to MPA to meet VIP commitment.

Jul - airbridge slip changes from Dubai to Seeb.

Aug - approx 19 trips a month into HERRICK plus 3 into Basrah. OC handover Daft to Chadwick.

2008

Jan - talk about going to 5 HERRICK tasks per week.

Mar - 5 trips per week!

Jul - airbridge routes via Akrotiri vice direct. OC quote: The trial routing appears to be improving visibility of the Sqn's commitment to operations, although it would seem that the whole of the Defence community has a view and is more than willing to share those views with me.'

Dec - still flying 2 tasks per month into Basrah.

2009

Jan - do no 2 engine change outside in Calgary in -20 degree cold.

May - one last Basrah?

Jul - handed over Seeb AAR Det to 101 Sqn.

Sep - Op SOUTH CHANGE, involving 2 Tristar, 3 VC10, one Nimrod and one C130 to get 4 Typhoons to MPA. On 23 came close to losing an ac with stick-shaker incident on approach into Kandahar.

Nov - back to Seeb for a month. Beer for the Boys started?

Dec - Seeb back to 101 Sqn.

2010

Feb - new OC Chadwick to Green.

Mar - first MMR aircraft flew with glass cockpit - ZD949.

Jul - first FTIS fitted aircraft arrived (fuel tank inserting system). All AAR activity halted by MAA due to fuel pipe proximity to hot air pipes.

Aug - AAR back on.

Oct - SDSR announces that Tristar will go out of service in Jul 13 vice Sep 16.

Dec - fleet aileron problem grounds fleet for 2 weeks until 27 Dec.

2011

Jan - prep for flights into Bastion.

Feb - first prover flight into Bastion on 19 Feb. Aircraft availability becoming poor with only 2 C2s and 1 KC1 available. In middle of month no of HERRICK tasks reduced to 3 per week.

Mar - Op ELLAMY kicks off on 18 Mar, but only one AAR asset, so it is Brize based. Flights into Bastion start.

Apr - Brize prepares for arrival of Lyneham. Still only one AAR tanker available for Op ELLAMY. Tristar.OSD extended to Dec 13.

May - 3 Op ELLAMY tasks flown.

Jun - 5 senior captains PVR due to BA recruitment announcement - all Trg Flt personnel hard to replace.

Sep - due to lack of flying, 4 co-pilots sent to 45(R) Sqn for extra flying currency. Still flying Op ELLAMY missions with quick turnarounds at Luqa. Both Sqn AARIs selected for redundancy!

Oct to be looked at.

Need DFC commendation write up.

TIMELINES

MPA

First flight 30 May 85

BA did most of the flights at start, 216 Sqn took over completely in Dec 85

Jan 91-May 91 to Britannia (Op GRANBY)

Jan 96 Royal Flight (HRH The Princess Royal)

Feb 03-Jul 03 to LuxAir (Op TELIC)

Jan 04 Goes back to charter for final time

But did Oct 05 when charter 747 damaged by Movers

Op GRANBY

Aug 90 Build up commences

Jan 91 Shooting starts

Mar 91 Hostilities cease

Apr 91 All over and all home

BALKANS

8 Jun 93 Deploy 2 x K1 and 2 crews to Milan under Op DENY FLIGHT. At some point moved to Palermo.

Jul 95 Increased to 3 crews.

Aug – Sep 95 NATO begins bombing under Op DELIBERATE FORCE.

Oct 95 back to 2 crews.

Dec 95 Op DENY FLIGHT finishes.

Dec 95-Dec 96 Op JOINT ENDEAVOUR

Jan 98 Moved det to Ancona

Suspended Apr-Jun 98 due to Op BOLTON (false Gulf War II)

Feb 99 Op AGRICOLA starts (UK name for Op ALLIED FORCE)