



No 216 SQUADRON
Royal Air Force
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Your reference

Our reference

216S/300/6 ORG.

Date

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Dear Association Member

1. Welcome to the 1997 newsletter of the 216 Squadron Association. It has been a considerable time since a newsletter has been circulated and I know several amongst you have written over the past year to enquire if the Association still exists. The answer is yes, but the highest levels of tasking experienced since the Gulf War in recent times has led to the Association lying dormant. However, it is my intention to re-introduce annual newsletters and reunions. This year's reunion is planned for 24 October 1997 and will allow the Association to find its feet before the 80th anniversary of 216 Squadron next year.

2. It has been both a challenging and rewarding year for 216 Squadron, with several changes in the Air Transport (AT) and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) tasks that the Squadron undertakes. The split between AT and AAR works out at approximately 80% AT to 20% AAR. Although the Squadron's AAR task has reduced over the last few years, we still maintain an AAR detachment in Palermo, Sicily, supporting NATO aircraft enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia, as part of Operation DELIBERATE GUARD. Additionally, we provide AAR training on towlines over the North Sea.

3. However, since the TriStar is capable of lifting such huge loads, the Squadron is increasingly tasked with AT flying. Over 40% of the Squadron's flying is carried out in the South Atlantic; twice weekly passenger flights and a monthly freighter to the Falkland Islands still produce the 'bread and butter' flying for the Squadron. Other schedules take us to such destinations as Germany, Croatia, Kenya and Canada. We have recently been heavily involved in exercises in the Far East, and at the time of writing, many crews are operating on routes to Australia - a truly global commitment.

THE YEAR JUNE 1996 TO MARCH 1997

4. The period started on 15 June 1996 with the Queen's Birthday Fly Past over Buckingham Palace. A Tristar KC1, flown by Squadron Leader Dick Graham, formed alongside 2 VC10s and an E3D Sentry, to provide the airborne element of Trooping the Colour. June also saw several flights to Canada, Alaska and the USA. On one such flight from Brize Norton to California, the Squadron flew its longest flight ever. The TriStar flew for 11 hours and 20 minutes, with a capability for a further one hour's flying, plus its diversion fuel. This record was established whilst carrying the load of 2 Hercules aircraft. The ex-Dakota and Comet boys amongst you will easily recognize an unashamed tendency to wax lyrical about a wonderful transport aircraft!

5. The next month, July, saw the highest tasking since the Gulf War in March 1991, when the Squadron flew a total of 978 hours. The increase in tasking was mainly due to 216 Squadron's support of several exercises in North America. Two of the exercises involved routes to 3 Alaskan destinations, Eielson and Elmendorf Air Force Bases and Anchorage International. Although this level of tasking is not sustainable for a Squadron with only 16 crews, the range and variation was very enjoyable and highly productive for those involved. During one such trip on 12 July 1996, just after take-off from Eielson AFB, TriStar ZD 953 suffered a No 2 engine failure. The crew, captained by Flight Lieutenant Steve Aston, carried out a safe landing back at Eielson. The Squadron was then faced with the problem of recovering the aircraft back to Royal Air Force Brize Norton. Specialist stands are required in order to safely change the No 2 (tail) engine. Unfortunately, the Squadron's own stands had been sent away for refurbishment only 6 weeks earlier, so they had to be hired from Marshall Aerospace. These stands, together with a spare engine, were carried to Alaska by C130 Hercules. An engine change team from Marshall's of Cambridge was despatched to carry out the work. On 31 July 1996 the work was completed and, 19 days late, ZD 953 arrived back at RAF Brize Norton.

6. Fortunately, August, saw very light tasking and Squadron personnel took the opportunity for some well earned leave. However, we still supported UK, NATO and UN forces worldwide. The following month saw a TriStar, captained by Flight Lieutenant Jules Marshall, from the 216 Squadron AAR detachment in Italy, pass the 1000th mission milestone of Operation DECISIVE EDGE, (now known as Operation DELIBERATE GUARD). Also in September, Squadron Leader Jeff Glover, one of the Squadron's most colourful captains, completed his last flight in the RAF. He joined the Squadron from the fast-jet world, but soon proved himself an equally capable transport pilot. Despite his time with the Red Arrows, flying the Harrier as the display pilot and being a prisoner of war of the Argentinians after being shot down during the Falklands War, he will doubtless look on his time with 216 Squadron as the highlight of his career!

7. Yet again, October was a demanding time for 216 Squadron. We continued our support for NATO operations in Bosnia through the detachment in Palermo and trooping flights into Split, Croatia. Support for Army exercises in Canada and Kenya, as well as for Exercise RED FLAG in the USA, provided the rest of the tasking. At one stage during the month, the Squadron was involved in 3 slip patterns in addition to the Palermo commitment and the routine South Atlantic detachments on Ascension Island (where detached crews fly the aircraft to and from the Falklands). With a maximum of 16 crews to call upon the Squadron was at full stretch, and one Tristar C2 unserviceability 'broke the camel's back'. Several sorties were delayed, and some tasks were transferred to VC10s. In fact, this busy period did not let up until December.

8. The first half of December saw a heavy flying programme, often complicated by poor weather at RAF Brize Norton. However, as Christmas approached, tasking reduced and the festive season was enjoyed to the full. Just before Christmas, the South Atlantic freighter suffered the major problem of the month, when an engine failed on departure from the Falkland Islands. Flight Lieutenant Geoff Wilson subsequently returned to RAF Mount Pleasant after dumping fuel. A replacement engine was sent south by Hercules, and ZD 952 returned to RAF Brize Norton 2 weeks late, on New Year's Eve. The job of replacing the engine had been extended to allow the engine change team to return to the UK for Christmas with their families. They then returned to Mount Pleasant on the first schedule after the break.

9. The New Year was greeted with more excitement in the form of another engine failure on 24 January 1997. The aircraft, ZE 706, had just departed northbound from Ascension Island when the failure occurred, forcing it to return to Wideawake airfield. The emergency was particularly well handled by the crew, captained by Squadron Leader Ray Walters, who even managed to put the passengers at ease by offering refreshments whilst jettisoning fuel! A replacement aircraft was despatched from RAF Brize Norton less than 8 hours later, which returned the passengers to the UK only 24 hours late. Thus ended an extremely rare period of engine unserviceabilities.

10. The flying in February represented the 'lull before the storm'. The next few months were to be exceptionally busy in support of 2 major exercises in the Far East. March again demonstrated 216 Squadron's ability to transport large loads over long distances. The 2 exercises, involving all 3 Services, took place in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, and boosted the Squadron's flying hours to well over 1000 for the month for the first time in a long while. One TriStar, having routed to Brunei to support one exercise, continued east to support another. The aircraft, captained by Wing Commander Fred Harbottle, the Commanding Officer at the time, staged through Hickham Air Force Base in Hawaii, before picking up troops in the USA. The crew then continued to the UK, completing the Squadron's first global flight for several years.

11. Due to the high work load of the AT tasking, AAR took something of a back seat, with only one North Sea towline being flown. There was, however, a sharp increase in flying hours for the Palermo detachment, due to the average towline over the Adriatic Sea lasting in excess of 6 hours per day.

12. March also saw the partnership between British Airways and 216 Squadron come to an end, with the advent of the long awaited RAF TriStar simulator. Since the Squadron's reformation in 1983, RAF TriStar crews had carried out bi-monthly simulator sorties with British Airways. After 15 years, crews are now able to walk to the simulator instead of driving at 'breakneck speed' down the M40 to Cranebank, Heathrow.

THE TRISTAR

13. No 216 Squadron still has 9 Lockheed TriStars of varying marks and configurations. Four of the ex-British Airways TriStars were converted to KC1s, with a huge cargo door on the left side. These aircraft are capable of passenger, freighter and AAR roles or a combination of all 3. Two more ex-British Airways TriStars were converted to K1s; which are similar to the KC1s, but have a limited freighter role due to the absence of a cargo door. The 3 ex-Pan Am aircraft were left almost untouched to fulfil the passenger role. Two were called C2s and one was called a C2A because of the differences in its flight deck avionics systems.

14. Of note in the Squadron's TriStar history was the despatch of the C2s to Marshall's of Cambridge during December 1996 for some major changes to their flight decks. Both aircraft had their digital auto-pilots and flight management systems replaced by the same analogue equipment fitted to our KC1, K1 and C2A aircraft, the result being an almost common flight deck across the fleet. This conversion of the C2s was to be the last major work for Marshall's of Cambridge, as the new maintenance contract was won by Gulf Air Maintenance Company (GAMCO). GAMCO is based in Abu Dhabi in the Middle East, which will allow 216 Squadron crews to enjoy the delights of yet another new destination. The few crews who have already been to GAMCO favourably compare the comfortable flight and exotic location with the rickety MT bus from Cambridge at the height of the rush-hour.

15. One such trip to GAMCO was carried out by a 4 engine Tristar! When civilian commercial aircraft are designed, like the B747 and the TriStar, they usually have a facility to carry an extra engine. This is to allow engines to be ferried around the world without the need for large freight aircraft such as the Hercules or Belfast. Unfortunately, the TriStar KC1 cannot squeeze a Rolls-Royce RB211 engine through its cargo door (a minor oversight at the design stage). RAF TriStars, therefore, have had to revert back to the external carriage of the engine. The 4 engine ferry was trialled by several instructor aircrew, and was proven to be a valid way to transport engines across the world, although a somewhat slow one due to the extra drag.

16. Further upgrades to the TriStar are due some time in 1997, with the advent of laser-ring gyro navigational equipment. The Litton 92 Nav computer will allow more accuracy in world-wide operations than the stalwart triple Inertial Navigation System (INS). Initially, the TriStar will only have one Litton 92 per aircraft, the remainder being loaned to the Hercules fleet because of the impending demise of the Omega navigational system, which will leave the Hercules with no global navigation equipment.

27. To aid in passenger comfort onboard the RAF's premier AT fleet on South Atlantic schedules, numerous video units have been purchased. These Sony hand-held video units come with a selection of newly released films for passenger entertainment. Currently only available to First Class passengers aboard major airlines, they are free to all RAF passengers. This innovation, along with the new bar service, allows increased levels of comfort on what is a long and tedious 16 hour journey to the Falkland Islands.

THE BOSS - WING COMMANDER DAVE WILLIAMS

28. It has been a long time since a newsletter was written, so long in fact that the Squadron has changed hands. My predecessor, Wing Commander Fred Harbottle, completed his 2½ year tour with 216 Squadron and is posted to the Joint Services Staff College at Bracknell. I replaced Fred on 9 May 1997, and after a little over 2 months in command, I am starting to get a good feel for the Squadron. It is traditional in such circumstances to introduce oneself with a potted history, and this newsletter is no exception!

29. I joined the RAF in November 1978 on a Short Service Commission, having flown as a student for 3 years on the University of Wales Air Squadron. After pilot training at RAF Cranwell and RAF Finningley, I converted to the Hercules at Lyneham and joined 24 Squadron as a copilot in March 1981. I flew throughout the period of intensive AT operations conducted by the Hercules force during the Falklands War and on the subsequent South Atlantic airbridge. In 1982 I transferred to a Permanent Commission, and in 1984 underwent instructor (QFI) training at the Central Flying School at RAF Leeming. On qualification as a basic

instructor on the Bulldog, I was posted to Queen's University Air Squadron, Belfast. I finished my tour as Chief Flying Instructor before returning to RAF Lyneham in 1987 to qualify as a captain on the Hercules. This was followed by a posting to 30 Squadron and, having qualified in the Hercules tanker role, I completed a detachment in 1989 to 1312 Flight (Hercules tankers) at RAF Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands.

32. After returning to the UK on promotion to Squadron Leader in 1990, I was retoured on 30 Squadron as Flight Commander Operations. I qualified as a training captain and became the Squadron's AAR instructor, and also flew on AT operations during the Gulf War and the subsequent Kurdish refugee relief effort in Turkey and Northern Iraq. This was followed by a further detachment to RAF Mount Pleasant in command of 1312 Flight in 1992. After attending the 1993 Advanced Staff Course at Bracknell, I took up a staff appointment at Headquarters Strike Command, RAF High Wycombe, on the AT/AAR Plans Desk. I was promoted to Wing Commander in December 1996 and, following conversion to the TriStar, took command of 216 Squadron in May 1997.

216 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

35. Ever since the 216 Squadron Association was founded, several attempts have been made to organise a committee made up of associates rather than current serving personnel. This would not only alleviate the problems of past years, but allow more functions to be organised. As you will by now appreciate, life on 216 Squadron is routinely hectic, with much of the Squadron's strength dispersed to the 4 corners of the Earth at any one time. This makes it very difficult for current personnel to organise reunions. My last squadron, 30 Squadron, has an extremely lively and robust association. However, as a transport squadron, 30 Squadron faces the same problems as ourselves. Its successful association is due largely to the long term efforts of ex-squadron members, with current personnel becoming involved in the short term organization of functions and events.

36. What I propose is that **you**, the members, form a proper committee, as has been done with 30 Squadron's Association and so many other successful squadron associations, so that **you** have a say in what happens to **your** Association. This would leave Flight Lieutenant Steve Cox, my Association Officer, to liaise between the Association and the Squadron, helping to organise reunion dinners and host visits to 216 Squadron and producing newsletters. In the first instance, I would envisage that you would require a chairman, a treasurer and a membership secretary to start the ball rolling. If you would like to play an active part in the committee, then contact me or Flight Lieutenant Steve Cox on 216 Squadron 01993-897216.

SUBSCRIPTION


38. The 216 Squadron Association currently has £254-00 in its account, which has not been touched for several years. This year's reunion will probably require this money for the reunion's buffet lunch (approximately £2-00 per head). What I propose is that, after this year's reunion, new members joining the Association should pay an initial joining fee of £10-00, allowing more funds to be readily available. From then on, each visit will be budgeted and a pay-as-you-attend system will exist. This will stop members paying for functions they do not attend.

39. If you have reservations about this, then feel free to contact me at the above address or telephone number. If I do not hear from you, I will assume that this system is acceptable for new members. As you can see, if there were a proper Association Committee, monetary matters could be handled and voted for by yourselves.

CONCLUSION

40. 1997 will be a trial year for the Association, and will allow us all to meet prior to the bigger events celebrating the 80th anniversary of 216 Squadron in 1998. If the Association is to survive and become like other squadrons' associations, the members will need to take on an active role. The workload on an ever shrinking RAF effectively prevents any other course of action. It would be very sad if the largest Squadron in the Royal Air Force could not create an Association to match other smaller squadrons' associations. I look forward to this year's reunion in the hope that it will be the first of many, and would urge you all to consider getting actively involved, and forget momentarily the old Service adage never to volunteer for anything! I look forward to meeting you all, and comparing notes on Dakotas, Hudsons, Comets, Valencias, TriStars, Buccaneers et al.

Yours

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dave Williams". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a long, sweeping horizontal line.