

'Tartan 41, turn right heading 020, set up TOW line at FL230.' We are a little south of the Faroe Islands and are awaiting a pair of Tornados operating out of RAF Leuchars that will require refuelling. You may wonder how I've managed to be party to this activity.

The Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators is a Livery company of the City of London and has a membership cross section from all areas of the aviation industry. One of the benefits of being a Guild member is the opportunity to participate in organised visits to a wide range of aviation businesses, locations and facilities.

Our destination today, 24<sup>th</sup> July is RAF Brize Norton, home of the RAF tanker fleet and the hub of the Air Forces global transport commitment. An early start was required; report by 08:00 the paperwork said. So at the appointed hour we gathered in the visitor car park to be met by our host for the day, Squadron Leader Cat Thompson. She soon rounded us up and delivered us to 99 Squadron's briefing room for coffee and an introduction to Brize Norton given by the station commander and the OC of Ops Wing.



As most of you know, RAF Lyneham will close by 2013 and the remaining Hercules aircraft will transfer to Brize, so with new tanker aircraft and the A400 coming in a few years Brize will gain aircraft and become the main transport base for the RAF and coincidentally, the largest RAF base in the UK. Gradually we shall see the VC10s retire as age catches up with them and like wise the Tristar fleet will go. The other type to be seen at Brize is the Lockheed C17.

The station briefing gave a good insight into what goes on now and what is expect to happen in the next decade or so. Although it might appear that Brize is fairly quiet when you drive or fly past in reality it is a very busy station. Following the briefing we transferred to 101 squadron for the highlight of the day, a flight in a VC10 to observe in-flight refuelling.



Our task was to route from Brize to the North Sea to support Typhoons, Mirages and Harriers at various times over a 2 hour period. We got airborne at 11:20 and routed via Shawbury, Pole Hill and Middlesbrough before reaching our first refuelling area. Lunch was served en-route, typical airline style catering with as much tea, coffee or soft drink as anyone wanted. On arrival at the refuelling area it was announced that the Typhoons had cancelled, so there was an hour to kill before the Mirages showed up. The crew decided (and got authorisation) to transit to Waddington do some

circuit training whilst waiting. So off we went, attempting to spot familiar landmarks from the small windows. Flew over Wickenby, Scampton and Lincoln before setting up an approach at Waddington. Then – all change.

Power on, gear and flaps up and off we go heading north. Word comes down from the cockpit that there's a Russian Bear (TU-95) being shadowed by Tornados from RAF Leuchars somewhere north of Scotland and we've been tasked to go and refuel the Tornados. So tracking north from Waddington the cloud eventually reveals central Scotland with a splendid view of Loch Ness and the Highlands. We coast out over Cape Wrath with Stornoway off to the west and continue north until instructed by Boulmer ATC to set up a race track pattern for refuelling. This we do near the Faroe Islands and shortly after received the first Tornado.



It appears off our left wing and then slips into position behind the refuelling hose, engages and takes several tonnes before going on his way to meet the Russian. Tornado number two appears shortly after and repeats the process but from the right wing. By the time the refuelling is complete we're about 40 miles away from the Bear but due to cloud have no chance of seeing it. We've gone a bit further north as well, so we are north of the Faroes before a turn is made to point back towards the UK.

Refuelling done it's time to go home. Our return flight takes us over central Scotland with some good views of the Moray Firth, over Glasgow, down the west coast of England to Wallasey then a small left turn to over fly Shawbury and route direct to Brize to land on 08 after a .flight of 5 hours 25 minutes.

The day was rounded off with a briefing on the role that 101 Squadron plays and the capabilities of the VC10. Although a bit long in the tooth now it is expected that the last VC10 won't retire from the RAF until 2018.

It was a privilege to see the RAF at work (almost in anger) and thanks go to all who played a part in organising a very interesting and informative visit. More information about GAPAN may be found at [www.gapan.org](http://www.gapan.org).