

## Visit to Royal Air Force Brize Norton

### As Guests of 216 Squadron



We looked out of the windows of the Lockheed L-1011 TriStar tanker aircraft to see two Tornado jet fighters sweeping (vectoring in) to take on fuel. a wonderful sight as they rapidly take up station on our left wing tip an altitude of approx 30,000 ft. were so close to each other and to as though we would all touch but very professional and capable care Squadron who were our hosts during our visit to RAF Brize Norton, the largest Station in the Royal Air Force.



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as we cruised at  
The Tornados  
us that it looked  
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of 216

The day started with our cars lined up in true Service style at 9am on a misty September morning just outside the base at Carterton, Oxfordshire, where we were met by Coachmaker colleague, Angus Deas and Flight Lieutenant Chris Rothwell.

We were driven into the base for an informal reception with Wg Cdr Al Green and some of his fellow officers in 216 Squadron before a welcome briefing from Station Commander Group Captain Dom Stamp. The base employs some 3900 Service personnel and over 600 civilians with a mission 'To project Air Transport and Air-to-Air Refuelling and support deployed operations and exercises' and a vision which is 'Excellence in Rapid Global Mobility'. The Station which acts as The Defence Gateway to Operations and is home to the RAF's strategic air transport and refuelling fleets and military parachute training is currently undergoing a transformation and building programme in preparation for the provision of additional aircraft and the relocation of RAF Lyneham to the Base.



There followed a fascinating tour of several units around the Base such as No 1 Parachute Training School's facilities, which carries out parachute training for all three Services and where we were guided by an instructor through their programmes and the amazing amount of kit with which they usually have to carry when they 'drop' into theatre, and a Boeing C-17 Globemaster operated by 99

Squadron which combines transcontinental range with the ability to operate from short runways.

The C-17s which have been the strategic airlift in support



major contributors to of operations in Iraq

and Afghanistan have the ability to deliver a huge capacity of equipment such as a Chinook helicopter or thirteen land rovers or mixed freight loads of up to 160,000lbs. Standing inside one of these aircraft the incredible carrying capacity becomes very apparent as does its troop carrying ability each side lined with special seats that can be extended out so parachutists have room to sit with their bulky bergens prior to jumping either through the opened rear of the aircraft or through specially designed doors on either side.



with

After lunch in the Officers' Mess and a pre sortie briefing by Sq Leader Steve Pollard, who was to captain our aircraft, we were taken out to the tarmac to board the TriStar, which can carry a total fuel load of 139,700kgs for use either by itself or given away to other receiving aircraft. When we took off at 15.30 it was to be the start of a very memorable flight and one to be cherished for a very long time.

We refuelled 9 aircraft in total, 7 Tornados and 2 Typhoons. They would form up in pairs on the left hand and then drop back to refuel from one of the hose-and-drogues fuselage under the aircraft. This viewed via a video controlled by a cockpit. They would then reappear on the right hand side flying off into the



side of our aircraft one by one to two centreline trailing from the rear wing of the procedure could be camera which was joystick in the then reappear on before finally distance. A truly

awesome sight to see the versatility of these aircraft as they approached, refuelled and then took off again in perfect formation and at considerable speed.

After having been looked after so well by Sq Ldr Steve Pollard and his very able



crew, who could not have been more patient as we had the run of their aircraft and asked numerous questions, we landed back at Brize in the dark at 20.30. It was a privilege to be given such a practical view of the flight and an insight into an operation completely out of our normal zone of experience.

Our visit to Brize Norton was so unusual and fascinating and apart from the in depth and interesting briefings we were struck by the commitment, enthusiasm, technical knowledge and ability of everyone with whom we came into contact during the day. Everybody we met was willing to give of their time to patiently explain to the uninitiated the way Brize is organised and how it works as a cohesive unit.

Very many thanks to Angus Deas for arranging such a memorable and interesting day, to Sq Leader Leonie Boyd for shepherding us around the base and for eloquently answering so many questions and to all the other RAF personnel who made our day so complete.

Text Chris Moyle  
Photos Martin Payne