

Press Notes

FIRST NON-STOP FLIGHT TO RHODESIA

Since the beginning of the year No. 214 Squadron, R.A.F. Bomber Command, has been carrying out a number of training exercises involving air-to-air refuelling. On the 7th April, for example, a Valiant captained by Flt.Lt. B. Fern, refuelling in flight over the Mediterranean, covered a distance of 4,350 statute miles from R.A.F. Marham to Nairobi in 7 hours 40 minutes at an average speed of 567 m.p.h. - an unofficial record.

The distance of the flight to Salisbury, Rhodesia, scheduled for Thursday morning, the 16th April, is 5319 statute miles. Captained by the Squadron Commander, Wing Commander M.J. Beetham, D.F.C., the Valiant is due to take off from Marham at 0200 hours, refuel in flight at about 0510 hours from a 214 Squadron tanker Valiant based for the exercise at Idris, Tripoli, and reach Salisbury at about mid-day.

The purpose of these flights, which will continue to increase in range, is to perfect operating procedures, especially rendez-vous techniques and signals communications.

A rendez-vous point and time are decided in advance. To make these exactly without delay calls for the most accurate navigation. From the rendez-vous point both the tanker and receiver Valiants join a common track with the tanker ahead. The tanker sets up its equipment and trails its ninety feet of refuelling hose.

As soon as it sees the tanker visually, the receiver aircraft manoeuvres into position behind it and aims its probe into the drogue of the hose at a closing speed differential of about 4 miles an hour. The probe opens the fuel valve and pushes back some thirty feet of hose around the hose drum unit to come into the ideal refuelling position.

In the tanker the panel operator - the navigator, radar - starts the fuel pump and keeps the hose at the right tension for the flow of fuel. Meanwhile, in the receiver aircraft the co-pilot checks the flow receipt of the fuel and by his selection of tanks helps the pilot to keep the aircraft trimmed.

When the required amount of fuel has passed between the Valiants, the tanker operator turns off the pump and the receiver shuts the valve. The receiver aircraft then reduces power and withdraws its probe from the drogue of the hose.

No. 214 Squadron reformed as the second Valiant Squadron in February, 1956, and began the operational development of flight-refuelling practice in 1958. That year it gave a public demonstration at the S.B.A.C. show at Farnborough with a fly-past of two Valiants linked for flight refuelling.

Station Commander. Group Captain W.J. Burnett, D.S.O. D.F.C., A.F.C., was previously at R.A.F. Marham as Officer Commanding No. 148 Squadron of Valiants. After two years as Group Captain, Training, at H.Q. Bomber Command, he returned to Marham last month as Station Commander.

Valiant Crew, Marham - Salisbury

Capt. Wg.Cdr. M.J. Beetham, D.F.C., Epsom, Surrey. Co-pilot. Flt.Lt. A. Fisher, Stockport. Nav/Radar. Flt.Lt. S.R. Coupland, Spalding. Nav/Plotter. Flt.Lt. J.E. Taylor, Eltham, London. A.E.O. Fg.Off. M.J. Baker, Portsmouth. Crew Chief: Chief Technician J. Prior, Newport, Essex.
Reserve Aircraft: Capt. Flt.Lt. B.E. Fern, Barton, Hants. Co-pilot: Flt.Lt. R.W. Fox, Yeadon, Leeds. Nav/Radar. Flt.Lt. C.A. Turner, Derby. Nav/Plotter. Flt.Lt. K.J. Hewson, Bournemouth. A.E.O. F/Sgt. D. Gastrell, Portsmouth.
Captain of Tanker Valiant at Idris: Sqn.Ldr. J.H. Garstin of Tankerton, Kent.
Reserve Tanker: Sqn.Ldr. R. Mc. A. Furze, A.F.C., of Bishops Cleeve.