As with most days for an MSO, the day begins in operations. Speaking with tanker plans, we collect today's refuelling plan (Dot sheet), active danger areas, flight plans, weather and aircraft information pack-up. Heading into the AAR briefing room we distribute the paperwork between the three crew members, the Captain, Co-Pilot and ourselves, the MSO. After some initial planning and cross checking of calculations, the Captain will ask if we're ready to brief, we're good to go and now it's time to confirm our "trade" for the day:

The role of an MSO is very different to that of a purser. The MSO is not only the third set of eyes and ears on the flight deck, but we also control the air-to-air refuelling (AAR) console, monitor the receivers as we clear them to move from the wings to the hoses and away to the wings again, the expert on the new Multifunction Information Distribution System (MIDS), the backup or the lead for fuel calculations as they are required and sometimes when the co-pilot is busy we will make cups of tea and coffee! There is plenty of radio work, systems monitoring, crew co-operation, some high level navigation and plenty of flight deck exposure.

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“Between 1000 and 1030, 2 Typhoons, 8 tonnes of fuel, then between 1030 and 1100, 4 Tornados, 20 tonnes of fuel, be aware 2 of those are convex (pilots training to do air-to-air refuelling), then a transit to the south west to pick-up a Hercules at 1200 for 1 hour of training. Should be back at Brize for 1430ish”

A typical day of tasking, but as with all things in life, a plan never survives first contact with...well not the enemy, but you get the idea.

Onto the aircraft, once the checks are complete, the paperwork signed, the doors closed, we’re ready to launch and head off to the East and pick up our first trade. On arrival into the pre-briefed refuelling area, we finalise some checks and trail our hoses, for the Typhoons and Tornados, this means the wing hoses. The centre line hose (FRU) will be saved for the Hercules later. The MIDS is switched into transmit mode and we all have a picture of everything that is airborne around us in the UK. It’s a fantastic situational awareness tool, that will really come into its own on operations.

The refuelling of the Typhoons goes as planned, they arrive on our left wing, I clear them to go behind the wing hoses, monitoring their movement on the 3 fixed panoramic and the 2 adjustable inspections cameras all the time. They move forward and plug in, taking the fuel from us at approximately 400kg/min.

Once the Typhoons are complete and depart, we start to hear the Tornados asking air traffic control if they can join us. The Captain takes over the radios and clears the Tornados, as he does so air traffic are asking for our spare fuel. Chances are a unplanned receiver is looking for some fuel, sure enough we get asked if we’re able to accommodate another 2 Typhoons straight after the Tornados. After some quick maths and checking of timings, we all agree it’s achievable.

After the Hercules is complete we return to Brize Norton and conclude with a crew debrief discussing the days tasking and if there was anything we could do better. But it isn’t always Brize Norton we return to, we have 1 MSO always in the Falklands as part of the 24-hour cover we have for quick reaction and medical/compassionate moves, there are also 2 MSOs in Cyprus supporting refuelling operations in Iraq (Op SHADER) and 1 MSO on 24-hour standby at Brize Norton in support of Op TANSOR. On top of those commitments, we also support world-wide operations and exercises as we trail fast jet aircraft to their required locations, to places such as Minhad, UAE; Thumrait, Oman; Penang, Malaysia; Las Vegas, USA; or Akrotiri, Cyprus for example.

FS Baz