Flying Across the Atlantic Ocean

NOTE: THIS EVENT IS NOW SCHEDULED FOR SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12; ALL PARTICIPATING PILOTS SHOULD BE ON THE GROUND AT KBOS AT 6 P.M. EDT / 2200Z, AND LOGGED INTO TEAMSPEAK.

Flight Planning

I use – and recommend – SimBrief, a free-to-use online planner. Although free, you need to sign up for an account. If you don't have an account, sign up NOW; no sense in trying to learn how to use it when you're planning an event flight. You'll have to add your chosen airframe to the fleet roster, too. It may seem like a lot to do to set things up but it's well worth the investment.

If you have a Navigraph account to keep your FMC up-to-date, you can use the current AIRAC in SimBrief. If you don't have a Navigraph account, I'll post a flight plan in the Events forum, as a response to this briefing, that you can use. If you're using an old AIRAC, note this in your VATSIM flight plan comments – i.e., AIRAC 1218 if you're using the December 2018 AIRAC.

Routefinder is another flight planning option; it's also built into SimBrief.

North Atlantic Tracks (NATs)

North Atlantic Tracks are similar to airways we use in routes we fly across North America with one big difference: they change every day. If you want to see today's NAT, visit Blackswan.

Planning sites such as SimBrief and Routefinder automatically incorporate the current NAT in the flight plans they generate.

If you normally use FlightAware to get a real world route, the NAT incorporated into FlightAware's plan won't be accurate unless it was flown with the current day's NAT.

Boston Airport

If Boston has ATC, we'll use it. If not, the BVARTCC website shows suggested runways to use, based on current weather. In practice, I've found that ATC's runways often do not reflect what the website suggests. As well, there is real world weather and VATSIM weather; the latter usually a few minutes to a few hours behind the former. So, if you set up your weather app to show VATSIM weather (I usually fly online so that's how I'm set up…) and other pilots are looking on FlightRadar24 to see which runways real world planes are using, well there's obviously room for conflict, so be sure to state your intentions on 122.80 when there's no ATC.

P3D Scenery: FlyTampa Boston Rebooted

FS9/FSX Scenery: FlyTampa – legacy; no longer supported

XP11 Scenery: XPlane.org or MisterX6.

SELCAL

SELCAL operates on the high frequency (HF) or very high frequency (VHF) radio frequency bands used for aircraft communications.

The code is a sequence of four letters, written or transmitted as an ordered two sets of two letters each (e.g., AB-CD). The letters are chosen from a subset of the Latin script comprising A through S, excluding I, N and O. The letters within a given pair are written or transmitted in alphabetical order (e.g., AB-CD is an allowable distinct SELCAL code, as is CD-AB, but CD-BA is not). A given letter can be used only once in a SELCAL code; letters may not be repeated (e.g., AB-CD is allowable, but AA-BC and AB-BC are not).

DO NOT USE THE SELCAL CODE INDICATED IN YOUR AIRCRAFT'S FLIGHT DECK! If two pilots flying the PMDG 777-200 use the same SELCAL; both would get a call if ATC tries to contact one of them. In such a case, ATC would assign a different SELCAL to one of the pilots. Some events, such as Cross The Pond, issue a unique SELCAL to each participant.

ATC will test your SELCAL as part of issuing an Atlantic clearance.

If ATC is not online for the practice flight, all of this is moot but it's important to understand the concept.

Position Reports

While flying across the Atlantic (or the Pacific for that matter), you're outside of radar range so pilots transmit position reports as they pass each waypoint. The position reports are given in a specific style and order, and this is the stumbling block for many unprepared pilots.

I've uploaded a planning/reporting sheet to downloads; download it, print it and fill it in, you should be good to go. Note, it's based on an westbound flight; we're flying eastbound.

For that flight, the flight plan was: MEDIX RENKA UL610 BATTY UL608 SASKI UL179 FERIT M14 STOAT UL613 MOGLI UP6 RODOL UL28 PENIL UL70 BAGSO MALOT/M083F370 5420N 5530N 5540N 5450N/N0492F370 NEEKO CEFOU YSC SYR J59 PSB MAPEL2

For clarity, I've highlighted the Oceanic portion of the flight.

European Altimeter Settings

In North America, altitude is expressed in inches of mercury; in most other areas, it's in millibars.

So, instead of A3008 (setting altimeter to 30.08 on the ground), you'll see QNH1019. In a Boeing, turn the upper right knob on your EFIS to the right to switch over to the European measurement system, when you enter European airspace.

In North America, 29.92 is the standard pressure for FL180. In Europe, QNH1013 is standard pressure and the transition altitude is determined by ATC, based on the weather. If there's no ATC at our destination, Manchester (EGCC), we'll use 6000 feet as the transition altitude.

Manchester Airport

VATUK keeps all the information you could ever need about Manchester airport on its website.

For arrivals, The STARS that come via DALEY, aren't permitted on VATSIM UK; they're only used when the Manchester (MCT) VOR is out of service.

Aircraft are permitted to cross the SLP's (Speed Limit Points) at 250KIAS unless instructed by Air Traffic Control. Pilots are reminded that it is not mandatory to file a STAR designator in your flight plan (e.g., MIRSI1B). The initial fix on a STAR is usually where the flight plan comes to an end (e.g., for a flight from London Heathrow (EGLL) to Manchester (EGCC), the last way point in the flight plan will be the TNT VOR leading to the DAYNE2A arrival which will be confirmed by ATC).

FS9/FSX/P3D Scenery: UK2000 Freeware and Payware

XP11 Scenery: X-Plane Gateway or X-Plane.org