

## Hunter FR.10 Operations

The flexibility of the basic Hunter design was realised at an early stage and Hawker Aircraft decided as early as 1956 that fighter reconnaissance was one of the areas in which the aircraft could make a useful contribution, so Hunter F.4 WT 780 was modified by the company and its standard nose section, containing the ranging radar, was replaced by a five-camera nose. This was a private project and as such did not receive any government funding and at that time the RAF remained undecided as to whether the project deserved any support.

Apparently the Swift FR.5, the Hunter FR.10's predecessor, was never intended to be more than a stop gap, before, eventually, reconnaissance Hunters became available. The rather short range of the Swift and its increasingly difficult serviceability situation most likely convinced the RAF that a replacement would be needed sooner rather than later. Whether the idea, to convert Hunter F.4s as reconnaissance fighters was ever contemplated, is not known. The fact remains, that considerable numbers of this mark of Hunter were withdrawn from RAF service in 1957, partly as a consequence of re-equipment of the squadrons with Hunter F.6s and even more so as a result of the Defence White Paper of that year; despite low flying hours, after only some two years of service, many of these aircraft were simply scrapped.

In the event the RAF decided, by utilising much of the experience gained with Hunter F.4 WT 780, in favour of a three-camera trial installation, which was tested on Hunter F.6 XF 429 and first flown in November 1958. The eventual FR.10 of which deliveries to 4 Sqn at Gütersloh started in January 1961 and to 2 Sqn at Jever in March 1961, incorporated, apart from the camera nose, features such as a brake



*Hunter FR.10 XE556 'W' 2 Sqn, somewhere over the North German Plain, circa 1968 (RAF Gütersloh)*

parachute, the capability of carrying 230 gal. drop tanks on the inner wing pylons, UHF radio and a radio compass. Also Avon 207 engines, basically late standard Avon 203s as used on the Hunter F.6, were used. Gun blast deflectors were no longer needed as the aircraft was to be used mainly in low level operations. Finally the addition of armour plating under the cockpit floor was a useful means of protecting pilots, particularly during low level operations.

Most of these features of the FR.10 were shared with the FGA.9 version of the Hunter which was never based in RAF Germany. Also the FR.10 and FGA.9 shared their common descent from the Hunter F.6 in that both were conversions of this aircraft and neither of them newly built. When the first of 32 Hunter FR.10s was delivered to RAF Gütersloh on 5th January 1961, it went to 4 Sqn which had flown Hunter F.4s and F.6s from Jever until their disbandment on 30 December 1960 on

which date 79 Sqn, with Swift FR.5s at Gütersloh, had been re-numbered 4 Sqn.

As could be expected, the Hunter was now a mature aircraft and its serviceability far superior to its predecessor, while in terms of range, with the ability to carry 230 gal. drop tanks in addition to the 100 gal. drop tanks, it also scored over the Swift.

In contrast to the day fighter Hunters the primary task of the Hunter FR.10 was photo-reconnaissance. As the powerful 30 mm Aden cannon had been retained, a secondary ground-attack capability, mainly to be used on opportunity targets and the ability to defend itself, came in handy. The camera nose of the FR.10 housed three Vinten F.95 oblique cameras with lenses of 4 or 12 inch focal length for 70mm film in interchangeable film magazines for 500 exposures. To allow photography at very high speeds and low level, exposure times of up to 1/2000 second could be used at a cycle rate of 4 to 8 frames per second.

The cameras were protected by hydraulically operated shutters which opened automatically when the cameras were triggered. A thermostatically controlled heating element ensured that the system could operate between - 20 and + 50 degrees C. There was no "viewfinder" in the cockpit but pilots

*The business end of Hunter FR.10s 'C' and 'G' of 4 Sqn at Gütersloh in September 1961, when the aircraft still have silver under surfaces and lack the yellow 'Rescue' arrow left of the canopy emergency release of later years. The significance of the 'square' left of the cannon port is unknown. (A.Saal)*

