



## At The Sharp End: Pilots' Recollections

### 'Bugs' Bendell (67 & 4 Sqns.)

After I had been on 67 Squadron for about four months, Flt. Lt. Lee Jones, one of the Flight Commanders on 112 Squadron who had recently graduated from the Fighter Leaders School at West Raynham, was authorised to lead a sweep, commonly known as a 'wing Ding', against the USAFE fighter squadrons in 4ATAF. It was quite usual for the Brüggen squadrons to operate as a wing; we conformed to the same standard operating procedures or SOPs, as they were called, and we were often tasked as a wing during major exercises. But this time it was different; Lee had telephoned the USAFE base at Bitburg and had thrown down the gauntlet, so to speak, telling them that the Brüggen wing would be overhead at 1500 hrs, and that they - the USAFE - could do nothing about it. Needless to say, the Yanks had other ideas 'Who is this crazy Limey anyway?' and they made plans.

The Brüggen squadrons eventually produced twenty-four aircraft. I was programmed to fly as Blue Four - the last aircraft in the formation - but at least I had been selected for the home team, which I took as a compliment.

The weather was perfect, eight eighths blue - not a cloud in the sky. The start-up and radio checks went without a hitch:

'Gold, check in.' 'Two. Three. Four' and so on, until the twenty-four Hunters were lined up on the runway. It was hot and turbulent at the back end during the

engine checks. At last we were ready for take-off, in pairs at five-second intervals: the first pair pulled high, the next stayed low, the next high, and so on. In that way successive pairs avoided the turbulent wake of the aircraft ahead. Lee Jones climbed in a wide spiral to allow Brüggen Combine to join up.

Contrails started at 25,000 ft; from the briefing we knew that they would be persistent above this altitude. The Americans could see us coming almost from the top of the climb, but for fuel conservation we had to stay high, as the Hunter F.4's radius of action was limited. Brüggen Combine made a brave sight, though, as it headed south.

About twenty miles from Brüggen, a lone Meteor F.8 crossed our path and in clipped R/T, Lee directed Blue Three and Four to take care of the bogey at eleven o'clock low. My adrenaline started pumping; this was going to be exciting. The Meteor was certainly no threat to Brüggen Combine, but one never

*Straight at the photographer... this Hunter 6XJ632 'H' of 26 Sqn with everything down gives a good idea of the wide track main undercarriage which was helpful in crosswind landings. The large flaps and the absence of fins on the 100 gal drop tanks are also evident in this view. (D.Schmidt)*

questioned the leader. Our bogey was probably a Belgian Air Force Meteor; at least, he was heading in that direction, but the pilot had seen what was going on and had wisely decided to run for cover. We chased him but he had too much of a head start and he disappeared in the industrial haze at low level, north of the Ardennes.

We climbed back up to high level, hoping to rejoin Brüggen Combine, but they were long gone. Instead we found a geriatric USAF B-45 bomber, cruising sedately by at 15,000 ft. It would have been churlish to ignore him, so we each made a quarter attack and took gun

*67 Sqn Hunter F.4 WV367 setting out on a sortie from Brüggen early in 1956 prior to it being coded 'X' (via Peter Caygill).*

