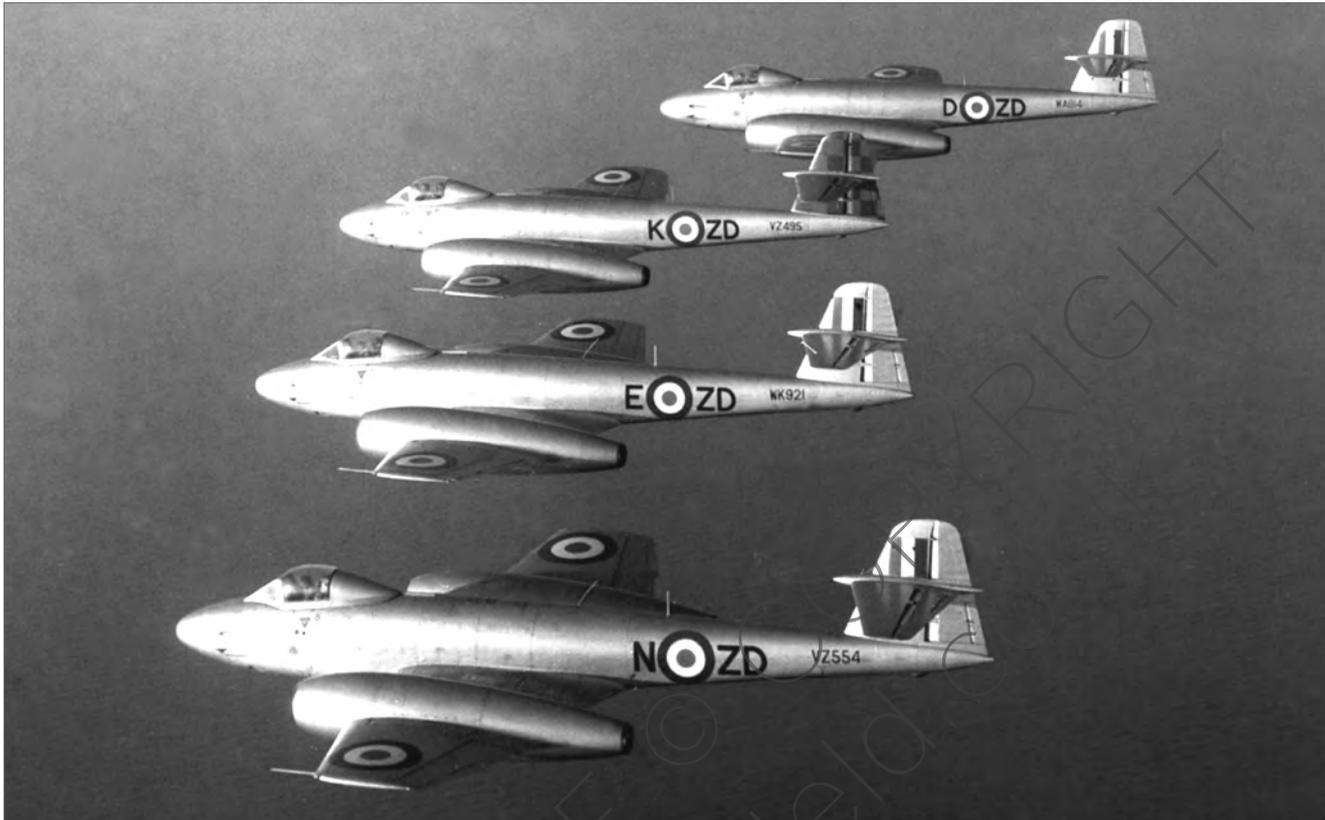


## Tactics and Training

---



*Beautiful finger four of 222 Sqn Meteor F.8s led by ZD-K, VZ495 the personal aircraft of CO Sqn Ldr Ron Wilson, AFC with red and blue chequered fin. 222 was the last F.8 squadron to retain unit code letters and only relinquished them early in 1954. (Kenneth Foster)*

### RAF Fighter Command

High flying Soviet Tu-4 'Bull' bombers were assessed as being the principal airborne threat to the UK in the early 1950s, and to counter this the Command made it a priority to get its Meteor fighters into position to intercept the bombers as far out to sea as possible. To help achieve this and minimise response time the GCI radars were improved, and during 1950-52 Operational Readiness Platforms (ORPs) were constructed at each end of the main runway at fighter airfields on which to park interceptors 'at readiness' awaiting the order to scramble. (See also Appendix Three 'Airfield Infrastructure Development')

A little later the 'Telebrief' was introduced whereby instructions to scramble to meet incoming raids were passed directly from the GCI station in 'real' time (i.e. directly from the radar screen information) to the fighters at readiness on the ORP via a land-line plugged into each aircraft. This reduced response time compared with the previous procedure which involved the GCI station telephoning the Group HQ, thence the Sector Operations Centre (SOC), and Air Traffic Control (ATC) at the fighter airfield(s) nearest the inbound threat.

Interception tactics varied and were continually evolved and refined, mostly by the Central Fighter Establishment (CFE) and its constituent units, notably the Day Fighter Leaders' School (DFLS), the prime objective being to place fighters into a position from which they could maintain a sustained attack on the enemy bombers. In the early 1950s

the favoured technique was generally the stern pursuit wherever the interceptors enjoyed a height and speed advantage, while taking care to approach from outside the line of fire from the bomber's defensive armament, and in this respect Russian bombers tended to have heavy calibre cannon tail guns.

However, head-on intercepts were also regularly practiced because it was recognised that on many occasions there wouldn't be time to position fighters in the ideal situation above and behind the bomber target. At this stage tactics were based on the expectation that the bombers would not be accompanied by escorting fighters, since none had the necessary range to reach the UK although this assumption was less valid towards the end of the decade by which time tactics had also been modified to respond to significantly higher performance offensive aircraft as well as the RAF's newer interceptors.

Defensive techniques after dark using AI-equipped night fighters had the same objectives but imposed greater difficulties. In 1950 the standard RAF night fighter was the AI.10-equipped Mosquito NF.36 which had only a marginal performance gain over the Tu-4. From 1951 the Mosquito was replaced by the Meteor NF.11 and Vampire NF.10 jets, which were 100 mph faster, although fitted with the same AI.10 radar. It was found that the optimum interception procedure with these types, and later versions of the Meteor and Venom night fighters, involved GCI radar positioning