

266 Squadron

Wünstorf,

to Fassberg 15 October 1955,

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Barely 9 months after the squadron was reformed with Vampires at Wünstorf 266 began to re-equip with Venom FB.1s, becoming the third front line unit to do so after 11 and 5 Sqn with which it formed the resident wing. The first arrivals were WE294 and 312 on 2 April 1953 from 22 MU, Silloth, to which were added 3 unmodified (pre-mod.51) Venoms on loan from 5 Sqn to enable the first pilots to make familiarisation flights, beginning with the CO, Sqn Ldr Colin Coulthard and his Flt Cdrs. By 12 April most pilots had flown several sorties in the Venoms including formation



Venom FB.1 WE326 A-A of 266 Sqn. (John Rawlings)

flying up to 40,000ft, helped by the delivery of 3 more new aircraft, and the CO had introduced a shift system so that his pilots would gain maximum experience before *Long Trek*, the planned visit to Southern Rhodesia scheduled for the end of May.

In the intervening few weeks further new aircraft arrived, flying intensified, covering height climbs, battle formation, aerobatics, and distant cross-country sorties with *Long Trek*



The same Venom, WE326 at Tabora, Tanganyika on 5/6/53 during 266 Sqn's 'Long Trek' mission. (via Andy Thomas)

in mind. This activity was not without incident, however, with Plt Off Peter McLeland experiencing a flame-out at 8,000ft on 20 April, and being unable to relight the engine, was obliged to bring WE320 in for a wheels-up landing on the airfield crash strip, resulting in Cat.4 damage. Worse was to come, when, on 2 May Fg Off Gregory's Venom,



The first Venom FB.4 WR464/A for 266 Sqn.

WE271, suffered an in-flight fire thought to have started in the starboard wing. At that time Venoms were not yet fitted with ejection seats and so the pilot tried to make a belly landing on the crash strip alongside Wünstorf's runway, but while on final approach at about 100ft the Venom entered a shallow dive and crashed with fatal consequences. Fg Off Edgeworth Frank Winter Gregory was 23, and the Venom was one of the unmodified aircraft on loan from 5 Sqn.

By 10 May 6 new Venoms had been delivered from the UK to bring the UE to 16, and on 16 May the squadron's aerobatic team flew its first 4-man practice, with amendment to the conclusion of their display changed next day from line astern loop and break, to a 4-box landing. Between 25 and 29 May flying was restricted to air tests to attain full serviceability for the 12 Venoms, led by the CO, that departed on the afternoon of the 29th on the first leg of the *Long Trek* mission, arriving 1 hour 20 minutes later at Istres, where a 40 knot Mistral was blowing. During the next 3 days they continued over similar length stages routing via Luqa, El Adem, and Fayid, where on 3 June the detachment, which was supported by Valetta and Hastings transport aircraft carrying ground crew and servicing equipment, split into 'A' and 'B' Forces, with the latter flying one day behind the former. Here they also met their navigational escort in the form of a Canberra for A Force and Meteor NF.13 for B Force. Subsequent stages were Wadi Halfa, Khartoum, Juba, Entebbe, then the longest leg of 1 hour 55 minutes from Tabora to Lusaka (N.Rhodesia) where A Force arrived on 5 June. Next day it put on a show comprising three formation runs by 4 aircraft over the airfield, then aerobatics by the CO and Flt Lt Taylor which impressed the large and appreciative crowd. B Force arrived on 7 June after some technical problems and the whole force of 12 Venoms, 2 Hastings, 2 Valettas, the NF.13 and Canberra departed next day on the final stage to Salisbury (S.Rhodesia) where 266 flew in formation over the city before landing at New Salisbury airport, where they were met by the acting Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Mr. Davenport.

12 June was devoted to aerobatics and formation practices



Venom FB.4 WR464/A 266 Sqn. (MAP)