

Venom Day Fighter 2nd Line Units

Central Gunnery School/Fighter Weapons School Leconfield; to Driffield 2 October 1957

As already described, the CGS/FWS trained above-average fighter pilots to become Pilot Attack Instructors (PAIs) and throughout the 3-month course at Leconfield students were assessed on flying ability, instructional ability in the air and on the ground, and on their all-round personal ability to assume the key post of PAI upon return to their squadron. Venom FB.1s were used on the third phase of the course, ground attack. AVM Leslie Phipps, then a Flight Lieutenant instructor at the FWS summarises that phase:

“Whether you were a night fighter pilot learning new tricks, or a Middle East Venom pilot finding it not quite as easy as you thought, the ground attack part of the course was usually seen to be the most exciting. For someone learning to be an instructor it was certainly demanding. Dual instruction for students during this phase was in the Vampire T.11. The aircraft was also used later in the phase to assess students’ airborne instructional ability. The Venom was used for all solo flying. The aircraft used were FB.1s, the first mark of Venom to enter service; some of the very early ones at FWS in 1955 even had no ejection seats and were modified later. The aircraft flew with internal fuel only - no tip tanks. No need for lots of fuel, for the ground attack range at Cowden, just south of Hornsea, was less than 5 minutes from Leconfield.

This ground attack phase covered rocketing – the 3 inch rocket with a concrete head; air-to-ground firing, with 20 mm cannon; and low-level bombing, with the 25 lb. practice bomb. Venoms were armed in one of two ways: for rockets and 50 rounds of 20 mm, or 4 practice bombs. This matched the alternative delivery styles current at the time: 30° dive for rockets and gunnery and low level/level flight delivery for bombs. The flying programme tried to run only one of these attack profiles on the range at a time and sometimes the weather suggested which. Weather with a good cloud base was fine for rocketing and gunnery and when there was a lowered cloud base bombing was possible.

Weapons delivery in the days of the Venom depended solely on aircraft handling skills and visual observation. As



*Venom FB.1 WR321 of the FWS at Acklington’s Battle of Britain open day 17 September 1955. The aircraft letter ‘M’ was orange, repeated in black on the orange nose wheel door.
(Eric Taylor)*

you entered the dive for rockets or guns the gunsight was used to assess how much to aim off for wind effect at ground level. Slightly out of range - poor results. Too close - a different sort of problem! For low-level bombing straight and level flight on the run-in was essential, so too, obviously was correct assessment of bomb release point. But the Venom was such a delight to handle and such a good weapons platform that very high degrees of accuracy were regularly achieved with all three armaments.”



*The comparatively large wing area of the Venom FB.1, WE289/X, is seen to advantage in this photo depicting the four main types in use with the FWS in 1956, the others being Hunter F.4 WW610/C (lead), Meteor F.8 WK678/P (top), and Vampire T.11 XD483/A (in the box).
(via Tim Theotlis)*



*AVM Leslie Phipps, then a Flt Lt staff weapons instructor at the Fighter Weapons School, briefs three students prior to a ground attack training sortie in the unit’s Venoms.
(AVM Leslie Phipps)*



The FWS unit badge, only on the port side of the nose, and black aircraft letter ‘E’ on the boom and nose door identify ownership of this Venom FB.1, WE314, at Church Fenton 19 August 1956.