



After the undercarriage refused to lower the pilot of WE375 L-F of 98 Sqn pulled off this successful wheels up landing at Fassberg in early 1954. The Cat.3 damage was soon repaired and '375 continued to fly with 98 and 145 Sqn. (Brian Sharman)

these duties; all the locations were lonely outposts out in the forest and the imagination could play tricks in the small hours, and it was not unknown for a zealous Orderly Officer to mount his own security check!

As noted previously 98 had on its strength a Vampire T.11, WZ514 which was used for instrument ratings, weapons training and so on; this aircraft was finished in the same camouflage scheme as the single seat fighters, and still had the old style canopy, with only the roof opening and fixed sides, and much framing, unlike the later rear hinged clear view canopy, and there were no ejection seats, though a later modification programme rectified both these deficiencies. In the latter part of 1954 the squadron was allotted a Meteor T.7, WA730, which had but 30 hours to its credit when received, and was used for similar purposes to the T.11. A great deal of pride was taken in its appearance and we soon had it embellished in squadron markings, including the red lightning flashes, squadron badges, and the Arms of the then County Borough of Derby, to which 98 was affiliated, and very smart it looked in its silver finish. When supplied, the aircraft was fitted with a ventral fuel tank, and two drop tanks. It was decided to remove the drop tanks and fly with simply the ventral. A Corporal Tech (who shall be nameless) said that he had worked on Meteors and knew the switches; 4 airmen got themselves positioned on each empty drop tank ready to lower them to the floor, the previously mentioned individual climbed into the cockpit, "Ready" he said, pressed the switch and off fell the full ventral tank, rivets popped out and fuel spread across the hangar floor causing a certain amount of aggravation! Sadly, the Meteor was not with us long; returning from a Sylt detachment a day earlier than the main party, the pilot misjudged his approach and put it amongst the approach lights at Fassberg, bending up the port wing, ripping off an undercarriage leg and twisting the whole airframe; when we arrived at the hangar two days later, there it lay, a sad wreck, fortunately there were no injuries. There were a couple of other aircraft on the station strength, a Prentice and a Tiger Moth, and these were used by the squadrons for general continuation training and hack work, and many of us had flights in these aircraft but sadly I missed my trip in the Tiger because it went u/s on the previous flight. When the



Roger Lycett-Smith poses beside 98 Sqn Venom WE438 L-Q (RLS)

Tiger Moths were retired from RAF service, the Fassberg machine, NM120, was collected by a ferry pilot, and having landed in Belgium to refuel, was blown against a hut on the airfield, writing it off. These aircraft had no brakes and a tail skid and could be a handful on the ground in windy weather."

98 lost 3 Venoms in accidents during 1954, the first occurring on 31 May when Fg Off M.J. Dunford's WE372 suffered an engine failure and was able to make a forced landing near Velzen, W.Germany. The second took place while the squadron was on APC at Sylt and involved the CO, Sqn Ldr Smith-Carrington, who was unable to lower the undercarriage on WE374 and was obliged to make a belly landing on 24 June. The third accident, on 27 October, was much more serious and resulted from a fire on WE365 while it was being flown on an aerobatics exercise by 21 year-old Fg Off George Schofield who attempted an emergency landing on the crash strip alongside Fassberg's runway. At a height of barely 10 feet with undercarriage retracted it hit the ground at too great a speed, then climbed steeply before diving back to terra firma where it disintegrated, killing the pilot. The cause of the fire at that stage was unknown, but a few days later, John Severne, flying WE377, was also doing aerobatics when a similar incident occurred, which he describes in 'Silvered Wings':



That's low! A 98 Sqn Venom about to create a breeze for Fg Off Irish (left) and Contact Team colleague during a relatively routine ground attack exercise in 1954. (Brian Sharman)

"Four days later on 1 November, in beautiful weather, I was at the top of a loop at 10,000ft directly over Fassberg when I decided to hold the aircraft inverted for a few moments before rolling level. Whilst still inverted there was a bang, the fire warning light came on and the cockpit filled with smoke. After completing the fire drill, which obviously included shutting down the engine, I prepared myself for a forced landing on the airfield which I could see clearly beneath me. I knew I was under orders to eject, but I was very conscious of George's accident and I was overcome by a conviction that this had happened to me, his Flight Commander, so that the riddle of the fires could be solved. I decided to land wheels up on the grass by the side of the runway so that I would be able to get out of the aircraft quickly if needs be. We all practised forced landings and, with height to spare and perfect weather, I had no difficulty in positioning myself to land alongside the runway in use. I had never landed wheels up before