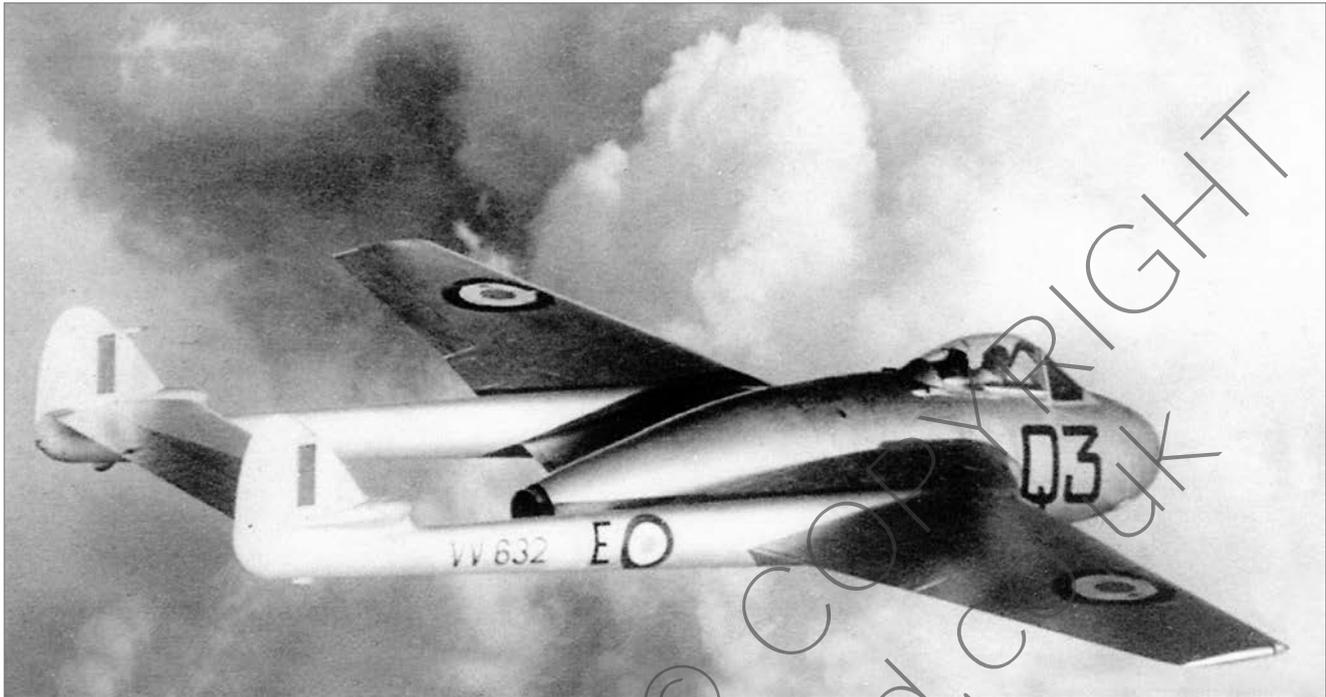


The de Havilland Vampire F.1, F.3, FB.5 & FB.9



Beautifully portrayed in its true element, Vampire FB.5 VV632 remained with 613 (City of Manchester) Sqn, RAuxAF throughout the whole of its active service from 16 February 1951 until the unit disbanded in 1957, and is seen with its first coding Q3-E.
(via Andy Thomas)

Designed to satisfy a 1941 Air Ministry specification for a single seat pressurised day fighter to be powered by the new Halford H.1 turbojet, the resulting DH 100 prototype, LZ548/G, made its maiden flight in the hands of Geoffrey de Havilland Jr. from Hatfield on 20 September 1943. Early in 1944 it became the first Allied aircraft to exceed 500 mph in level flight, giving a portent of its future potential.

Nicknamed 'spider crab' because of its unorthodox twin-boom fuselage, though soon officially designated the Vampire, it proved to be an outstanding design that was economic to operate and successfully developed to effectively fulfil many roles, leading to UK production totalling more than 3,250 plus almost 1,100 manufactured abroad under licence.

The Vampire F.1, powered by a 3,100 lb. thrust DH Goblin 2 (as the Halford was re-named) entered RAF service with 247 Squadron in March 1946 at Chilbolton, moving to Odiham in late June where it was joined by 54 and 130 (soon re-numbered 72) Squadrons. This proved to be the only front line Vampire wing in Fighter Command, which had chosen the Gloster Meteor as the standard day interceptor for UK defence. F.1 Vampires were later handed down for service in Germany with 3 Squadron, and also issued to a few RAuxAF squadrons, having been replaced in the Odiham Wing by the Vampire F.3. This mark had increased internal fuel, the ability to carry under wing drop tanks of up to 200 gallons capacity, and could be distinguished by a new bubble canopy (later retro-fitted to many F.1s), a lowered tailplane, and redesigned fins of more typical de Havilland curved profile. As well as at Odiham the F.3 served with a few Auxiliary squadrons and with 32 and 73 Sqns in the Middle East.

The F.3 was followed by the most prolific variant, the FB.5, almost 900 of which were built, mainly by English Electric. With thicker gauge skinning this mark featured clipped wings that were stressed to carry under wing ordnance of up to 2,000 lb, and was optimised for the fighter/ground attack role. With a maximum speed of 530 mph, and a ceiling of over 40,000 feet, it combined good manoeuvrability with (mostly) docile handling. FB.5s replaced the F.3s with the Odiham Wing, remaining until 1952, and fully equipped 10 Auxiliary squadrons in the UK. However, the FB.5 will mostly be associated with RAF service overseas, notably in the expansion of 2TAF in Germany, where it equipped 19 squadrons in the early 1950s, as well as 8 more in the Middle and Far East. In these theatres it most ably combined the tasks of air defence and ground attack, put to the test in 'policing' duties against insurgents in Aden, Kenya, and Malaya. The Vampire FB.5 was relatively easy, if awkward, to maintain and its Goblin engine was reasonably reliable - factors that made it well suited to the frequent deployments that were such a feature of RAF operational training in these overseas commands at that time.

The Vampire FB.9 was a tropicalised version of the Mark 5, and had a Godfrey cockpit refrigeration unit near the starboard wing root that necessitated the intake fillet being extended 8 inches forward on that side (a considerable number of FB.5s were later modified to incorporate this cooling equipment, although it was not always fitted). The FB.9 also had other minor refinements including slightly revised instrumentation. As well as equipping squadrons in the Middle and Far East, some also supplemented FB.5s in 2TAF and RAuxAF units, and in common with FB.5s, concluded their RAF service as advanced trainers.