



Salvage work on Pete Underdown's Sabre, XB819/Z after his prang near Julich, 29/6/54. The groundcrew's apparel is typical: blue serge battledress, boots, or wellingtons as worn by the Corporal whose pint sized mug of hot tea is emblazoned with 234 Sqn's dragon insignia. (234 Sqn)

In the Vampires and Meteors you still flew with a soft leather helmet and in normal shoes, and a lightweight flying suit over your battledress. In Sabres you were, as it were, dressed to kill!

One wore one's Sabre boots everywhere possible, with the tops of one's trousers tucked nonchalantly into the boots so that everyone could see them. As it happens they were extremely comfortable boots, with soft leather uppers, like the wartime RAF escape boots. In civvies people also sported either the little gold-metal Sabre buttonhole badge, or the 'Mach-buster' badge. These goodies were handed out by the Canadair Rep on the squadron after you had done your first supersonic run, and came with a certificate that stated you had flown faster than the speed of sound.

In those days, at least to start with, there was no regulation saying you shouldn't 'aim' your sonic boom over HQ Rheindahlen so as to wake up the staff chappies! Eventually, of course, this was forbidden as too many windows were being broken.

To fly, the Sabre was a joy, especially after the old Meatbox and the Vamp. You were seated in a wide, roomy cockpit, with the cockpit sides seemingly very low compared to the RAF machines. The colour scheme in the Sabre cockpit appeared to have been designed with an eye to making life easy for the pilot - emergency lights so you could see them immediately and so on. We had a radar gunsight, of course, which was reflected in my



234 Sqn Sabres after the adoption of fuselage bar markings, and plain red nose marking, (although XB794/V still retains chequers). Nearest aircraft are XB836/B, and 792/X with red code letters outlined in white. (Robin Brown)



Fg Off Shrimpton just managed to remain airborne after XB807/Z, his 234 Sqn Sabre, mushed into the ground at the Monschau weapons range in West Germany, on 4 August 1954.

decent scores (for once) at the air firing camp at Sylt. We didn't like the American ejector seat too much and preferred Martin Baker's design, mainly because of the face blind. The Sabre's ejection seat was worked by handles adjacent to the arm rests, which was good when you were trying to eject from an aircraft subjected to high G forces, but we missed the (apparent) protection of the face blind. We had leg-restraining straps for the first time, and once again these were an improvement on the RAF design in that the metal loops were part of the flying suit, and one didn't have to strap on a special strap round each leg as you did in the Hunter.

234 Sqn gained brief notoriety by getting a gun camera shot of the Soviet Tu-104 that was allowed to fly over 2TAF airspace on the occasion of the visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev to the UK. They arrived at Portsmouth in the battle-cruiser Sverdlov but returned to the USSR in the Tupolev. Although the 2TAF aircraft were supposed not to go anywhere near this machine, 234 got behind it and, as it were, shot it down! Rheindahlen got to hear about this and when the Russian VIPs returned over 2TAF every squadron was grounded until they had safely passed. The photo of the Tu-104 was in 234 Sqn's scrap book.

We didn't see much of the RCAF Sabres as they were based rather far away. The USAF by this time was equipped with the F-86D Sabre Dog and later the F-100, which out-maneuvred us. Herewith to illustrate our tangles with the Americans is a quotation from my diary of Wednesday, November 30, 1955: 'My No.2 was Denis Mayous, and my No.3 was Dicky



The final form of 234 Sqn markings is shown with the restoration of the dragon insignia on the nose, and plain white aircraft letters, seen on XB614/J and 766/L early in 1956. (Robin Brown)