

St. George's Lightnings

by R. Levy

SINCE THE END of June 1962 the sight of Lightning T.4s has been a familiar one at R.A.F. Middleton St. George, for on the 27th of that month XM970 arrived from English Electric's airfield at Warton, destined for the Lightning Conversion Squadron.

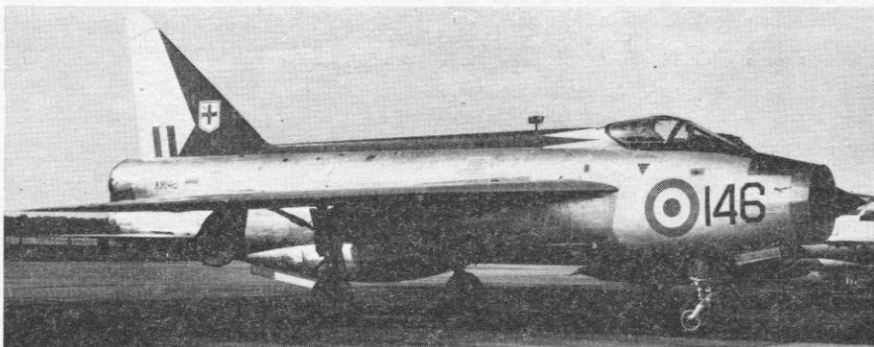
Before that, until the unit received its own aircraft, experience was gained with single-seat Lightnings loaned from the first three squadrons in Fighter Command so equipped, Nos. 56, 74 and 111. In most instances a single fighter would be loaned for one day only, the pilot landing at Middleton early in the morning and departing for his home base late in the afternoon; in the intervening period the L.C.S. instructors would "keep their hands in" with local training flights. Sometimes, however, a squadron would detach an aircraft to Middleton for several weeks, as happened in February 1962 with XM179 "F" of No. 56 Squadron.

In March 1963 the squadron was fully involved in its comprehensive training task. Most of the instructional staff of the L.C.S. had previously served with a Lightning squadron, or with the Air Fighting Development Squadron, part of the Central Fighter Establishment, which maintained a close liaison with the L.C.S.

On 1st June 1963 the Lightning Conversion Squadron was renamed No. 226 Operational Conversion Unit, and by the end of the month had received the first of its long-awaited Lightning F.1s. These aircraft had previously seen service with No. 74 Squadron, and after a major overhaul at Leconfield were delivered to Middleton, where it was not long before the black fins and tiger's head insignia of 74 Squadron had been replaced by the new red and white scheme of the O.C.U.



Lightning T.4 XM972, "J", the second aircraft to be delivered to the L.C.S., photographed in September 1962, showing the original type of coding



Lightning F.1 XM146 newly acquired by 226 O.C.U. was formerly "L" of 74 Sqn.

Both the T.4s (used for conversion training) and the F.1s (used for weapons training) now sport these distinctive markings which are derived from those of No. 145 Squadron, which is the identity of the O.C.U. for the purposes of defence exercises. The practice of allocating a squadron number to an O.C.U. is not new to Fighter Command, and in fact until 1st June No. 145 was one of the two Hunter squadrons which comprised 229 O.C.U., Chivenor.

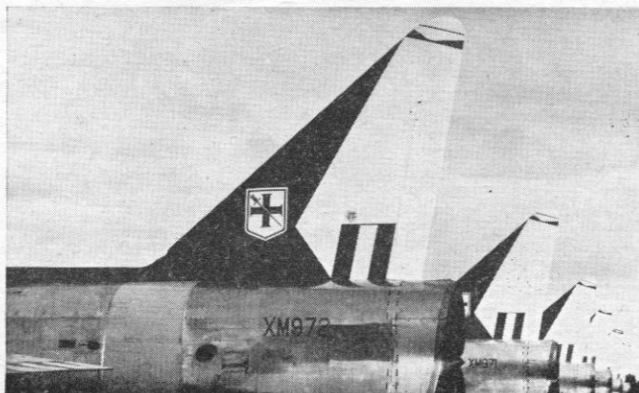
At this juncture it is perhaps pertinent to give a brief résumé on the unit's markings since its inception at Middleton St. George. The first four T.4s were coded "G" to "K" (letters "A" to "F" being

reserved for the F.1s), while succeeding aircraft remained without embellishment until February of this year, when a new coding system made its appearance.

Comprising the three numerals of the serial number repeated in much enlarged form forward of the nose roundel, the new system resembles the style used by the Royal Navy, and must surely be unique among current R.A.F. formations. The old code letters on the fin were eventually discarded, though not before XM971 "K" had been recoded "T" early in May, only to become "971" before the month was out!

Construction of the airfield at Middleton St. George began some months before the

LEFT: Taken in 1963, this photo shows XM972 with present-style coding. RIGHT: Close-up of 226 O.C.U. markings



St. George . .

outbreak of World War II, but it was not completed until 15th January 1941, when it became a bomber station housing Nos. 76 and 78 Squadrons flying Whitleys and, later, Halifaxes.

In September 1942 these squadrons left Middleton and were replaced by three squadrons of the R.C.A.F. For his heroism, self-sacrifice, and conspicuous bravery in trying to aid the trapped rear gunner in his burning Lancaster during a raid on Cambrai on 12th June 1944, Pilot Officer Mynarski, a pilot with No. 419 Squadron at Middleton, was subsequently posthumously awarded the V.C.

The last bombing raid from the station was on 15th April 1945, when the target was the Frisian Islands. After the war Fighter Command arrived in the form of 13 O.T.U. which disbanded on 1st May 1947. Subsequently the station became part of Flying Training Command, housing first No. 2 Air Navigation School, and later 205 Advanced Flying School (renamed No. 4 Flying Training School).

In June 1956, however, Middleton once more came under the jurisdiction of



Recently incorporated into 226 O.C.U. are the Javelin T.35 (XM336 illustrated) of the former Fighter Command Instrument Rating Squadron

Fighter Command, Nos. 92 and 264 Squadrons taking up residence the following February. From 15th October 1957 until 1st October 1958, the airfield was out of use while the main runway was extended in length from 6,000 to 7,500 ft. in order to accommodate the Lightnings in later years. During this period No. 264 was renumbered 33 Squadron and, equipped with Javelin FAW.7s and later with FAW.9s, it remained at the station until 16th November 1962, when it was renumbered No. 5 Squadron and de-

ployed to Germany. No. 92 Squadron had moved to Leconfield earlier in the year, and it still operates from there today, flying Lightning F.2s.

Equipment June '62-Sept. '63

Lightning T.4s: XM969 (ex-"H"), XM970 (ex-"G"), XM971 (ex-"K", ex-"T"), XM972 (ex-"J"), XM987, XM990, XM991, XM993, XM994, XM996, XM997.

Lightning F.1s: XM140, 141, 143, 146, 165, 166 and 167.

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