



THE CANBERRA BOMB SCANDAL

When the Canberra entered service as the RAF's first jet bomber in 1951, its unparalleled high-altitude and high-speed performance made it a world-class air power asset. A bomber is only as good as its bombs, however, and **DAVE FORSTER** reveals how early issues with its warload compromised the type's operational effectiveness

DESIGN OF THE UK's first jet bomber, eventually named Canberra, began in 1945. The aircraft was intended to bomb at roughly twice the altitude of existing bombers — 50,000ft (15,000m) as against 25,000ft (7,500m) — and at high speed. By the mid-1940s it had been agreed that the primary warload of the new bomber would be six 1,000lb (453kg) Medium Capacity (MC) High Explosive (HE) bombs. The RAF still had large stocks of 1,000lb MC bombs left over from the recent war, but these had been designed for release from medium altitude (up to 25,000ft) at modest speeds, and were considered aerodynamically unsuitable for delivery from high altitude and at high speed. The wartime bombs would be similarly unsuitable for release from the new generation of medium jet bombers, then under design. Plans were thus made for the development of a new range of high-speed high-altitude (HS/HA) bombs, suitable for use by both the Canberra and the later medium jet bombers. Priority was given to the development of the 1,000lb MC bomb.

NEW BOMBS FOR NEW AIRCRAFT

Development of the HA/HS 1,000lb MC bomb (later designated the 1,000lb MC Mk 6) began in 1947. The Canberra had a relatively small bomb bay and accommodating six of the new bombs, which, for aerodynamic reasons, required large tailfins, was a tight fit. The solution was the development of a flip-out tail unit (Tail

LEFT English Electric Canberra B.16 WT303 of No 6 Sqn is bombed up at Tengah, Singapore, in 1965. The bombs have been towed out on a modified Type F trolley (foreground) while the first clutch of three bombs attached to an Avro Triple Carrier has been transferred to the hydraulic loader for loading into the Canberra's bomb bay. TERRY PANOPALIS COLLECTION