



## Mirage Enthusiasts Blogs



One Team For Life

### **Blog 1. A Soap Box on Airbrushing Amnesia - the Mirage.**

**6 Oct 23. Pete Taylor**

I'm going to stand on a "**Soap Box**" for a few words.

During the 100-year anniversary of the RAAF, there was very scant mention of the Mirage, if at all and I recall during the flypast that NO mention was made of her at all!

Speaking with a high ranking (Scrambled egg on cap) official at History and Heritage (H&HN Air Force) about the anomaly, he stated that "A lot of aircraft didn't get mentioned, the Mirage didn't because it didn't do anything!"

**DIDN'T DO ANYTHING?** It only presented a huge leap forward in technology from its predecessors and stood ready in lethal defence to any would be aggressor both at home and in South East Asia.

Thankfully we were not required to defend ourselves from aggression. BUT we were ready and fully trained to do so.

What a slap in the face to all the commissioned and non-commissioned ranks that were in their thousands, maybe tens of thousands in those 26 years of operational flying. You obviously didn't "Do anything" either.

**End of Soap Box!**

**7 Oct 23. Pete Taylor**

Greetings again good fellows,

While I have the juices flowing, there is another request I put to you. Quite a number of you achieved very high rank/status when serving and so may have a good idea how to go about this.

77 Fighter Interceptor Squadron was formed at Pearce on 16 Mar 42. Ever since WA has been graced with the fighter of the day returning to WA for a myriad of exercises and other functions.



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None more than the Mirage. Who remembers the 1979 Fly Past and Open Day put on by 25 SQN when CRUMPET entertained.

The Airshows at Pearce from the 60's, 70's and 80's where the crowd was in awe of its performance and handling.

I was in 2FTS in 1982 when the squadron returned for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we met with some of the original SQN members of the day. A very proud day for those blokes.

The Squadron is synonymous with WA and the people of WA deserve to be able to get up close and see this magnificent aircraft, as they can with an imported Tornado and the recent addition of the ARDU Dual Hornet.

Both worthy exhibits but no history with WA. The Tornado and Bullcreek share some 617 SQN history, the Hornet also visited WA during its service life, BUT where's its historical significance?

Bullcreek Aviation Museum has, wait for it. A Mirage perspex canopy. Big deal.

Pt Cook Museum has two aircraft A3-92 on display, as it should, and A3-72 which I am led to believe is being gutted to make a cockpit display.

RAAF Wagga has A3-41 at the front gate and a very nicely painted A3-51 hidden away from public view in a hangar as a training aid, so I am told.

These are two aircraft, one of which could be redirected to WA.

WHAT SAY YOU???

There are hundreds if not thousands of ex Mirage troops in WA that say YES!

### **7 Oct 23 Marty Susans**

Let's not forget that many in Australian industry consider the RAAF Mirage project 'the most successful aircraft project undertaken in Australia', with vital new skills flowing through to the local Aerospace Industry.



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Also, Australia committed the bulk of its Mirage force to a forward base in SE Asia for over 20 years, initially as part of the Far East Air Force, and later as the major component of the five-nation Integrated Air Defence System which promoted cooperation between the host nations in developing their own air defence capabilities - this was an important achievement for Australia's standing in the region.

The Mirage served Australia well, without firing a shot in anger.

Well done Peter!

### **7 Oct 23 Dave Bowden**

In a way Mirage drivers are rather 'special' thanks to the sumpies who worked those engines which propelled all of us into the Mach 2 club. Quite a unique experience and unlikely to be matched by our successors.

Thanks Peter and the whole maintenance team.

### **8 Oct 23 Alf Allen**

Troops

Peter Taylor's 'The RAAF Mirage Family', coming so soon after 'Mirage Compendium', is an extraordinary achievement. Here in Perth I'm peripherally aware that he also has 'irons in other fires'. Dunno how he finds the time and energy!

After some deliberation I have decided to post my recent Mirage 'observations', which a few of you are already fully or partially aware of. I seek neither a boy scout's badge nor a Davy Crockett hat!

A hardcopy of the 48-page centenary edition of Air force News topically came into my hands. The word 'mirage' is not in its lexicon. There is a pix of the Sabre, and three mentions, and even the 'here today, gone tomorrow' F-4 gets a pix and a mention. In the 100 year timeline threaded through the mag, even the 1988 withdrawal from BUT after a 30 year presence fails to mention *that* word. The very fact that two of our four full-strength MIR squadrons spent nearly all of their lives based on a foreign shore is itself extraordinary - an achievement not even matched by the RAF in its four decade deployments to RAFGermany.

Shortly thereafter along came the definitive 100 year history of the RAAF: 'Then. Now. Always'. At page 231 of 460, in a section dealing with the maritime squadrons, there is, by default, a long distance airborne shot of a P-3 tarmac with a row of Mirages along the fence.



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For once, the Mirage is mentioned! There are, of course, so many 'firsts' or 'mosts' that one could go on for pages and pages, notwithstanding that I reckon there would, to this day, be a

six figure number of former RAAF personnel who were either directly or indirectly associated with the aircraft during its 25 year service.

Twelve months ago I wrote (email) jointly to History and Heritage, and Air Force News, suggesting they may care to address their 'oversight' of the centenary publications with an article reflecting the 60th anniversary of the first flight of A3-1, in February this year. Specifically, I suggested they may like to consider organising a photoshoot of Fighterworld's A3-3 flanked by Marty Susans and Steve Bihary: the former representing the aircrafts early service and the latter its later years. The added significance of these gentlemen is Marty's father Ron, with his France involvement and early base commander WLM, and he joined up in 1940 FFS!; AND, Steve, still a fast jet instructor (79Sqn) a full third of a century after the Mirage's demise!

After 'due consideration', fully two hours and 20 minutes, I received a supercilious and almost rude NO, from Air Force News!

Sure, we are all based, but there are so many storylines here that would be of interest to many. The EE Lightning was, of course, the RAF's equivalent fighter. Could you image that Service totally snubbing that aircraft? Not in a million years!

I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but I believe we have one here. I believe the Mirage's service was sufficiently recent that those with editorial clout determined quite early on that the aircraft, with its hull loss record, (which was par for the course for its generation) did not 'suit' the RAAF's current narrative of a near exemplary flight safety record in the 21st century.

If this is indeed the case, it is 'wokery': history being massaged to fit current 'norms', for which the RAAF should be thoroughly ashamed.

Rant over. Wokery will not extinguish our memories!

### **8 Oct 23. Alan Hurditch**

Alf, I'm with you on wokeness in the RAAF/Defence these days. I visited Fighterworld a few months ago and was shocked to see their FA-18 adorned in Aboriginal artwork. I doubt that this was an operational requirement.



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**13 Oct 23. Vinny Iervasi**

I'm reluctant to add to the debate about today's RAAF, but feel compelled to respond to a couple of comments below.

Having just completed a lifetime of service I've seen the RAAF transform first hand over the past four decades, almost always for the better. The women and men I joined with, like the women and men that remained when I left, were/are just as willing and capable of giving their lives for this nation as all who have served before. How they look, dress, talk shouldn't matter when put under that microscope of analysis.

It's too easy and simplistic to indict an entire institution to wokeness – whatever that is and if it really matters anyway. I do know that my primary concern has always been the preparedness of our RAAF – and ADF – to meet the challenges that are assigned to it. That has been extremely difficult over the past five years, and it has got nothing to do with being 'woke'. The mission has always been the defence of our nation.

Right now, they face a challenge like most of us have not seen in our lifetime. They draw strength from the support they receive from the community and their family, none more important than from veterans. But when they don't get that support, I know they draw strength from each other.

I joined the RAAF in an era when you would get abused and spat on if you walked down the street in your uniform. That didn't dissuade us from the task at hand. In fact it steeled us to the cause.

I see that same grit and determination in our current RAAF. If there's now an environment where they can express themselves differently, then why don't we celebrate that? Just because it wasn't available to us doesn't mean it's wrong, or weak. Oh, and by the way, they've been on operations almost non-stop since 1999.

Finally, those of the Mirage era were critical in the transition to the F/A-18, the aircraft I spent my entire career associated with. Like many on this network, I'm now a 'dinosaur' as the Classic has been retired and we've moved onto the F35 (albeit with Supers and Growlers as well). That doesn't mean I'm irrelevant, just that my time has ended. I have confidence and trust that our aviators today will adapt and cope because, like you all, I did my job to the best of my ability to ensure they can do theirs. If you want to verify that, have a listen to the podcasts that Ringo has been so adept in pulling together [AIRFORCE ASSOCIATION PODCASTS \(raafansw.org.au\)](https://www.airforceassociation.org.au/podcasts).

As for aircraft paint jobs, there's nothing operational about any of the squadron-painted aircraft that were in the fleet. They were a visible representation of the pride of those who served. And if they drew attention to a new generation of aspiring aviators, that's no bad thing either.



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Everyone is free to express their views – that's why I'm expressing mine here. I guess that's part of the attitude and ethos I inherited from all who served before me.

Take care everyone.

### **13 Oct 23 -Pete Taylor**

Hi Joe, I agree with most of your sentiments, however, there is a group, maybe a very small group within the modern RAAF who have taken it upon themselves to make the Mirage and it's people totally irrelevant in RAAF history.

That is what we are all "Pissed Off" about. There has been NO RECOGNITION of the service the Mirage and it's people contributed to the defence of Australia and its northern neighbours for at least 26 years, both at home and abroad.

OK, the modern RAAF has changed as it always has over the different eras. It was always better back when!!!!. The current generations will most probably think the same in the future. That is not the point that we are all trying to make.

It would be very acceptable if someone in higher authority had the will to apologise for overlooking the Mirage during the 100 year celebrations, or at the very least make a statement of recognition about the role the Mirage and its people had for over a quarter of a century.

I hope you can take this as constructive criticism of what has transpired and not a reflection, on my part anyway, of the boys and girls (I hate the term Aviator) of the Modern RAAF.

### **16 Oct 23. Bob Richardson**

Thanks for the interesting debate guys.



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As one of the even older generation who flew the Sabre for nearly as long as I flew the Mirage - but the latter never operationally - I was struck by Joe's comment:

'... I joined the RAAF in an era when you would get abused and spat on if you walked down the street in your uniform.'

I remember being commander of an honour guard at Essendon airport for the then newly appointed GG and great historian .... on his first visit to Victoria. My briefing from those responsible for such matters was along the lines that Vietnam War protesters were expected, and there was a small possibility of fruit being thrown! Fortunately that wasn't the case.

But I also remember during my fourth deployment to Ubon in 1965 being in awe of the USAF F4C's combined air and ground combat capability - that starkly revealed what we were then: 'the poor country cousins'.

And we also have to admit that in comparison to subsequent contemporary USAF capabilities, our Mirages had no real prospect of being useful in conflicts away from our shores, despite all our work in increasing its combat capability to the max practicable. (I'm bemused about Pakistan converting them to air refuelling; I'd always been told that wasn't possible without a pressure refuelling design.)

But the fundamental step we had to take was the technological jump from the Sabre to the Mirage, with eg its state-of-the-art throttleable A/B and its then admirable high speed performance and handling. It and the F111 were vital steps toward our inaugural world-class transition to the Hornet, whose full envelope I was lucky enough to evaluate 53/54 years ago.

So we should all be very grateful for our French Lady. who of us will ever forget strapping into the world's best ejection seat for the first time and looking way back at that wing? And on the conversion night accel to



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Mach 2, pulling up to find very soon that you're rocketing above 55000ft - with little result when you roll inverted and try to pull the nose down because the elevons are still nearly fully up - or that's how I remember it anyway!

18 Oct 2023. Doug Riding

Reference Air Force's apparent airbrushing amnesia over the Mirage, its history and contribution to Australia's defence as the longest serving fleet of combat aircraft, I offer the following in support of Peter Taylor's concerns.

The 31 March 2021 RAAF Centenary edition of Air Force News has a timeline of milestone events commencing on page 9 across several pages, beginning with 1921 through to 2021.

Many milestones are highlights of the RAAF's history, and some are lowlights, e.g. 1960 - Department of Air moves into new offices in Canberra.

However, to support Peter's contention that deliberately or otherwise the Mirage has to some degree been airbrushed out of the RAAF's history, please note that the only milestone event in the timeline I could find that implicitly suggests that there had been an all-weather, supersonic, multi-role fighter in the RAAF combat force structure for 27 years was:

Quote:

### **BUTTERWORTH ERA ENDS April 16 1988**

*The 30 year permanent presence of RAAF fighter units based at Butterworth, Malaysia, ends with a special ceremony.*

*In future the Australian presence will comprise a detachment of P-3 Orions, an Army Rifle Company and regular rotations of F/A-18A/B Hornets.*

Unquote.

Ironically, a Mirage is mentioned once in the Centenary edition in an article headed **'BEHIND THE BRUSH - "I went with my family to the Edinburgh Airshow in the mid-80s and saw this amazing bright orange Mirage fighter," Mr Harrison said.'**

It is also instructive that, at page 33, the **ICONIC AIRCRAFT** (of the Centennial era) features Hornet, F-35 and F-111. Not much sign of recognising the Mirage era and its contribution to the corpus of knowledge developed for the introduction of subsequent fighter forces. And in 2021, it's worth noting that the F-35 had done nothing apart from air show demos and the standing up of the first squadron. (Not quite iconic, yet?)

Thanks to some, and particularly Peter Taylor and Marty Susans, the Mirage and its air and ground crew history will not be forgotten.

For Bob Richardson, you are right to reflect on the 'poor country cousin' status of the 79 Squadron presence at Ubon, but I would note that this was an applicable observation on the overwhelming quantity of USAF airpower represented by the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing and the USAF. Qualitatively, it's worth remembering that while the 555th and the 497th were long term tactical fighter squadrons, the 433rd TFS arrived at Ubon in 1966, and six months before its arrival it had been a C-130 squadron. A TFS in name only. You may not have had the opportunity to fly dissimilar (MiG) air combat training missions in our Sabres against the F-4s from the 433rd that were programmed regularly by the Wing and 79 SQN to occur when the strikers returned from their combat





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missions over the North without loss or battle damage. Many 79 SQN pilots will remember well the value these training engagements brought to and acknowledged by the 8th TFW and the 433rd.

Bob, I would also dispute your dismissal of the Mirage as having "no real prospect of being useful in conflicts away from our shores." Its air combat and interception performance against dissimilar fighters and strikers (including RAF Vulcans) in and around IADS exercises and HIGHs was exceptional, and range was the only constraint on strikes for CAIRS and interdiction, for any regional conflicts I could imagine. Twenty-seven years, FCS!

20 October 23. Brendan Ologhlin.

Team,

Re-reading Doug's thoughtful remarks, I noted again the entry regarding the 'special ceremony' at the end of the permanent presence in Butterworth in 1988. I guess they meant my final parade as the last OC BUT, with much FIFO brass, before we flew the last beautiful French ladies home.

Nah.

The special ceremonies for me were:

1. Having five former OCs back to the Big House for a farewell dinner after the formalities. Many tales shared. The oldest if not boldest to attend was K R J Parsons. He walked in to meet Helen and said: 'Delighted etc. You have moved the fridge.'
2. Flying one of the very last 79SQN Mirages back to Oz In May '88. We went via Changi - and if the RAAF did not think it a historic occasion, the RSAF did. They invited us to a celebration at Tengah - which was normally closed to foreigners in later years. (Also significant since it was just short of 20 years earlier in Feb '69 I had flown A3-86 to BUT on 3SQN deployment under the late Ted Radford RIP.)

Thanks for all contributions.