

Mirage A3-18 Ejection 01 April 1974

FLTLT Lindsay Boyd

The First of April is not a good date to eject; many calls around the base, “Did you hear that Boydy has ejected?” Followed by, “Come off it, I know what day it is!”

At that time I was posted to 75Sqn and we were in the middle of a bombing and gunnery program at Song Song Range. This sortie was a 40° bombing and 30° gunnery exercise and it was my second flight of the day in A3-18. I was flying as No 4 in a four ship. We pitched out on the range at 9000ft and flew one ‘sighter’ pass. As I levelled out on downwind and increased the power to maintain speed, the engine compressor stalled. I tried a couple of times to set the power that I needed but the engine stalled each time so I set it as high as I could and after declaring an emergency, started heading back towards Butterworth. The lead aircraft initially shadowed me but when I was about halfway back and my descent profile looked good for the runway, he headed back to the range.

My descent profile however deteriorated and I could see that I was not going to make the runway so approaching 1000ft I called ejecting. I pulled the seat pan handle with my left hand. I had heard that it seemed a long time before the canopy and seat went but nothing was happening. I soon realized that I was about to die so I swapped hands and pulled the seat pan handle with my right hand.



The Aircraft Accident Report says that I left the aircraft at 180ft, 160kts and a ROD 12-1500fpm. The ATC staff in the tower, who were watching the aircraft, did not



see me leave the aircraft and they were only about 3nm away. I was aware of the seat separating and one catch by the chute then I hit the ground hard in a corner of a dry paddy field close to the aircraft fireball. The SAR chopper was very quickly on the scene and took me to 4 RAAF Hospital.

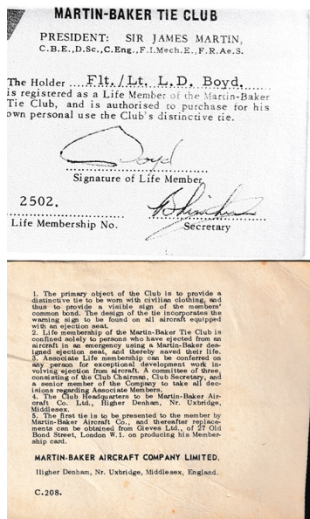


Initial X-Rays and examination did not show any reason for the pain in my back. A few days later however, a visiting RAF Orthopaedic Specialist, GPCAPT R W Povey, happened to be visiting 4 RAAF and his examination suggested that I had damaged five vertebrae. His guidance to staff on the best technique for the X-Rays confirmed that they had compression damage. Two of these have substantially recovered but three have not, causing continual issues. At the time of the accident GPCAPT Povey had apparently seen more ejection injuries that anyone else in the world.

The Aircraft Accident Report stated that the compressor stall was caused by fatigue failure of a 1st stage compressor blade, possibly a manufacturing defect. After I lived to report that I had not been able to get the seat pan handle to work with my left hand checks on other aircraft revealed that a high percentage of aircraft had the same problem. The seat pan handle could not be pulled with any slant to the left. As I was in a hurry to get out, I was not aware of any requirement to make sure that I pulled it straight or with a slant to the right.

The seat pan handle had two half moon shaped cut-outs in the shaft of the handle. The cut-out on the right-hand side was engaged by the seat safety pin for the seat pan handle. The cut-out on the left-hand side of the shaft had no useful purpose. I am not sure about the truth of this but I heard that the Macchi seat (similar to the MB Mk4 in the Mirage) had been modified to eliminate this problem.





The problem with the seat pan handle jamming could possibly have been implicated in other Mirage accident report(s) of pilots calling that they were ejecting but then did not (I came close). Maybe others who you wonder about; why did they not eject? As a positive on the Mirage servicing side, apparently the Mirage ejection seats had been recently modified to increase the speed of the sequencing of the ejection system. Certainly this was put to the test in my case.

Regards,

Lindsay Boyd

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