One Team For Life Mirage Enthusiasts Blogs Blog 3. Mirages Sitting on their Bums.

24 Oct 23. Pete Scully: Butterworth a CO 3 found himself nose wheel off the ground.

Thoroughly enjoying all these Mirage stories: they've encouraged this old dinosaur out of the cave. I have little to add but I do have a request. I first flew the pointy machine in May 65 (blimey, that's nearly 60 years ago?) I still remember that flight; I had Fred Barnes as chase pilot. I don't remember the first night flight – I had my eyes closed. It was such an honour to be the 1st Opso of the 1st Sqn (75) and then, later, to have my own (3). However, the request. I've heard that on the tarmac at Butterworth a CO 3 found himself nose wheel off the ground & resting comfortably on the tail. (No names; no pack drill). Does anyone have a photo of this embarrassing event. I'd be most grateful if someone could send me a copy & I'll pass it on to the chap involved. All good wishes to all. What wonderful memories we share.

Oct 23. Peter Condon.

I recall a similar incident at Willy when I was on Sabre OCU mid-1965. A Mirage sat on its bottom after/during engine start when the two main wheels moved forward when hydraulic pressure built up. I'm not sure of the cause.

25 Oct 23. Barry Schulz

Our mate Nobby did it in TVL on redeployment DAR -WLM with 76 Sqn. I think it was something to do with exercising speedbrakes after shut-down. The troops used to pull the 'handles' (hydraulic valves - I think there were T shaped ones in main gear well and a lever one in nosegear well. Not sure of actual purpose but acutely aware of consequences of getting things out of sequence.

Further to TVL undercarriage incident. The aircraft settled back onto a Clarktor vehicle (probably drag chute replacement). Possibly saving injuries to troops scrambling around under the aircraft.

25 Oct 23. Mike Nixon

Hello all, My memory (for anyone interested)!!

The 3 handles were for opening each of the flipper doors after shutdown (for ground servicing). Recall that the pre-flight walkaround put 2 handles up but left the 3rd down. During pre-start cockpit checks, you had to check the utility hyd pressure was zero before getting the ground troop to put the 3rd handle up. The reason for this (so I was told) was to avoid any hydraulic surge in the UC system that could unlock the main wheel locks that locked the fore-aft movement. In the normal lowering sequence, the main UC would first lower fully laterally before jacks moved the UC to the rear - fully locked down and steady green light. If the fore-aft locks unlocked on the ground, the UC legs could roll forward of the C of G, resulting in a graceless "sitting on tail". The mechanical UC locks were internal and integral to the jacks - locked and unlocked by the combination of jack position and hyd pressure. This arrangement caused a series of aircraft losses due to failure of a main lateral lock and collapse of that main wheel after touchdown.

First time was Bruce Wood and Geoff Shepherd at Willy around 1976 - a short exciting ride for them after they dodged the SAR chopper hovering in front of the tower, got airborne again and ejected over the married patch. It took a number of accidents before the cause was identified. I don't recall what the fix was (if any) - perhaps just a revision of the jack bay servicing procedure. I recall a crewroom debate at the time about whether we should do a normal UC recycle before pulling the emergency down handle. Immediate emergency down was the checklist procedure, but that had been demonstrated to not fix the problem.

26 Oct 23. Brendan O’Loghlin

All this talk of third handles and wheel problems reminds me that once returning to the Willy circuit, I got two greens and a starboard main wheel red. (I think it was 3SQN 1968? or maybe 77SQN, 1971; can’t check the log book since we are at present visiting children living in EU.) That malevolent little red light completely ignored an EMG down command accompanied by suitably colourful vocal encouragement.

On tower flyby, predictably I guess, friendly trafficker said not sure but it looks halfcocked. Helpful voices on red set common told me to do all the things I'd done (less the swearing bit). Well meaning advisers, rather unnecessarily I thought, reminded me of the flight manual warning not to try landing. (Moi?) Time to get serious with the rapid rocking, rolling and pitching. But as you know, at 250-ish knots the dear old girl only knew how to produce drag, not g.

When the low fuel warning cheerfully joined the other party lights, it was out east past the initial point sandhills for a little seascape (uninviting, cold, but no whitecaps and softer than rooves and runways) and a little more altitude while the SAR chopper cranked up. Up to 8 grand in full dry for a last try to pull some rough and cranky g. I can't remember the max u/c door speed - but anyway at that stage it was them or me. So I dived to about 350 kts and honked hard. No joy. The second time and a tad faster I was lucky. Clunk, three greens! followed post haste by a very straight in approach, cool as a cucumber of course. There was even enough gas to get back to the lines, complete with u/c doors still on board. The guys pulled it all apart later and found fine shavings of metal somehow got through the hyd system filters and jammed an actuator until harried into place by my antics.

Nobody raised an eyebrow at the deliberate gear overspeed.

2 Feb 24. Geoff Nutt

I have read a couple of accounts from people that have experienced in one way or another a jet collapsing on its rear; always a good story. Well, I can tell a story (that I have dined out on many times) about just such an occasion.

I was an LAC on duty at 3SQN sometime in 1979. A3-82 had been doing duty in Tengah and had returned for a 'C' servicing. Around 1500h, she'd been in the hangar all day, my FSGT (Jim Smith) told me to go and do a flight controls check on it. By the time I had chased up the hydraulic rig and the flight controls test box (the BDC3 which was on wheels and needed towing by a clarktor), stand down time was approaching. So I completed all the required checks before hyds were put onto the aircraft;

hyd tanks were full, no hyd lines were disconnected, undercarriage lever in the down position. I checked the EE508 for hydraulic unservicabilities (there were none) and finally walked into Framie section and asked generally if there was any problems with putting hyds on 82 (nil). Time was around 1600h - knock off time. But before I left I ensured power and hydraulics had been disconnected. As I left the hangar for a well earned stubby in the block (I was a singlie), I noticed some RadTechs taking the nose off the aircraft for a radar servicing.

Next day: I walked out to the aircraft, and knowing I had done all the appropriate checks the afternoon before, I plugged in AC and DC and connected the hydraulic lines. The radome was back on the aircraft, but a light-weight jack was still under the rear of the aircraft. I started the hydraulic rig and commenced to dial up pressure. I recall the gauge going past about 400psi when I heard a loud ‘CRACK’. At which point the main landing gear started to rock forward. The wing beside me started to drop, and I instinctively smacked the stop button on the hyd rig. 82 had settled down in the hangar, but incredibly not gone all the way on its bum. Fortuitously the RadTechs, working the night before had left their ‘lightweight’ jack (made of angle iron, and placed at the back of the aircraft to stop it teetering when the radar was removed) at the rear jacking point. This had prevented the aircraft from completely collapsing onto the rear of the engine. The right main wheel had fully rocked forward, but the left had gone only about halfway forward. Nonetheless, that aircraft wasn’t going anywhere in a hurry.

I stood there stunned, imagining my career flying out of the hangar doors. As I ‘watched’ it, one of my SGTs walked into the hangar past the back of the aircraft. As it happened he was only a matter of a couple of weeks away from discharge with an associated level of care. I looked at him, and with a trembling in my voice I said, “Sarge, I think I’m in trouble.” His response was not in the least supportive. He looked at the aircraft, he looked back at me, then said, “yep,” and walked off. I find it comical now, but not so then!

I looked around, still ’stuck’ to the one spot next to this aircraft laying there like a lame duck, and inexorably as word spread, people came out

of every nock and cranny in the hangar. I started getting pumped with questions about how it had happened and what I had done. But I had no explanation. I only knew that the afternoon before all was ready and safe to apply hydraulics. As the mingling became a throng my FSGT appeared from Instrument Section and whisked me away from everyone, back into the section. It was an action that I never forgot, and used it as an example of excellent leadership in the years to follow in my career.

He sat me down in Instrument Section, removed the servicing manual from the rack, and started pumping me with questions about what I had done. I remember clearly being asked, in sequence, the process for preparing the aircraft for this particular servicing. My experience with this servicing stood me in good stead as I went through the checks without fault. FGST Smith's response was to return the folder to the rack and say, "well, let's find out what happened." It was at this point the WOEng burst through the door of the section (having someone's guts for garters was quite possibly on his mind). He was met with, "get out of my section, I've got this covered." Very forthright from my FSGT.

When I returned to the scene of the action, the FSGT Framie and a couple of his SGTs were examining the damage. The starboard main undercarriage had rocked all the way forward. There had been a removed panel from inside the wheel well that had been leaning against the tyre - it had been crushed. The port u/c had only gone about half way - this was the extent of its movement because of my 'killing' the hydraulic power so quickly. The nose undercarriage had not yet moved. Some of my colleagues were starting to (comically) pat me on the back for such an effort. Someone informed me that it was my shout at the Airmen's Mess that night!

Now came the operation to get A3-82 upright again. Unfortunately, the lifting point at the rear/starboard side was about 20mm too low to slide a jack under, and of course the, now, bent and buckled light weight jack had to be removed. The question of lifting this poor aircraft had been creatively answered by a Framie by the name of Doug Abrahall (RIP). He was sitting on an MJ-1, the motorised lifting apparatus for bombs and gun packs for the Mirage (and many other aircraft). Doug drove the

‘Jammer’ up to the starboard side of the aircraft (the lowest), positioned the lifting cradle under the ’supersonic’ fuel tank under the wing and attempted to lift the aircraft - after all, it only needed to go up 20mm. When Doug hit the handle to lift, the cradle, tank and aircraft stayed where they were and Doug, along with the body of the ‘Jammer’ sailed into the air. This sight brought great merriment among those watching - the WOEng was not amused. Doug’s suggestion had been put to the test and failed, but he was not done yet. Encouraging support was provided by 8-9 other techos in the form of weight distribution - they all sat/hung off the ‘jammer’ next to Doug as he hit the up lever again. That little hydraulic pump in the MJ-1 groaned and hissed as the full weight of the wing came on, but it worked. The aircraft lifted just enough to get the jack under the back. Of course this action had to be repeated on the other side to remove the light jack and replace it with the correct one. The operation worked with the only damage to the panel and the tyre.

An investigation ensured into how the undercarriage handle had been moved into the up position sometime between 1600h the day before and 0800h on this fateful day. An answer was never established; I always wondered how it could have happened because, as I had been told, moving the undercarriage lever when the aircraft is on the ground (without the engine running) is a two handed operation. It could not have been an accident!

The end result for me was ’no action required’. I had been ably supported by my section head, FSGT Smith, and life continued somewhat unevenfully for me at 3SQN for the next year or so until repatriation.