



Mirage Enthusiasts Blogs



One Team For Life

Blog 6. Mirage – Exercise Silk Slipper.

28 Nov 23. Clint Rowland

Terry Wilson and I decided we should add to the discussion with a short description of a little known exercise the Mirage was involved in during 1969 - Exercise Silk Slipper. The three pilots involved were Flt Lt Ron Slater (Detachment Commander) and Flg Off's Terry Wilson and Clint Rowland. The aircraft initially deployed on 14 April 1969 were A3 - 10, A3 - 15 and A3 - 48.

The mission was to provide aircraft for Low Level supersonic trials in Woomera in support of further development of the British Rapier Surface to Air missile. Rapier was being developed into an all weather blind fire system. 76 SQN was given the task and 3 Mirages with pilots and a small supporting ground contingent were dispatched from Williamtown to Woomera.

Once all were on the ground, a recce was provided by the Range to familiarise us with the area This was in a DH Otter which was ideal for the purpose. One major concern was the number of large Eagles flying in the area where we were to conduct the flying and at about the wrong height. The Range personnel undertook to keep our area clear of these large birds which could have had disastrous consequences at the high speeds we were going to fly the missions. They were successful.

The majority of the flying planned was for high speed low level (750 knots/M1.2), (250 - 500 ft) along specific tracks past the launchers to prove that the Rapier would detect such targets and launch missiles automatically.

The Mirage easily achieved 750 knots clean, but the Rapier people were having trouble getting the missile system to lock on to the aircraft. Accordingly, they asked us to refit the Supersonic tanks to provide better definition for the radar. This was OK, but we couldn't quite get the speed they wanted. We were entering the run from 10,000 ft and diving down with full AB at zero g to the run height,



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then boring straight in. So the solution we tried was to use 'overspeed' for the dive and initial part of the run which worked well.

Flying the Mirage at these speeds and altitudes was an incredible experience. The sense of speed, coupled with the noise of the airflow on the aircraft (it sounded something like a very loud and eerie "oil-canning" type of noise) was absolutely mind-boggling. The aircraft was very stable, small heading changes (sometimes required to maintain the precise tracking needed) were difficult to achieve once you were pointed down track. Of course the sense of speed was hardly surprising given that the Mirage was covering about twelve and a half miles a minute (or a mile in less than 5 secs). At the end of each run, we were required to do a straight 6'g' pull and at the speed we were doing, any delay had consequences.

Unfortunately, after using the overspeed technique a few times a crack in the afterburner section on A3-10 was detected. We got clearance to do one takeoff to swap the aircraft over at Williamtown.

The replacement Mirage was A3-44 which remained serviceable for the rest of the exercise. When the change-over was being effected, we were advised that the 'Overspeed' function was not designed for this purpose and we were to "Cease and Desist' with this technique.

The following are our recollections of a couple of interesting incidents that occurred during the exercise.

The first incident occurred during deployment. A portable TACAN with a range of approximately 30 - 35 nm was positioned at Woomera for our deployment and use during the Exercise. The first two A/C deployed as planned, but #3 was delayed with an AB problem. When he got airborne, the weather had changed quite a lot. Departure from WLM was uneventful through overcast to transit above 8/8 cloud. This eventually reduced to about 6/8 towards the end of the flight. The deployed A/C had no Radars (not required for the exercise and spares



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short) and were pre Doppler Nav. At TOD, no TACAN was detected. After some discussion with WRA tower and a passing Airlines of South Australia aeroplane,

the pilot was advised that there was some water in a lake near WRA and a thunderstorm approaching the Range from the North. This was a very useful bit of information and it enabled a successful recovery some time later. Inaccurate forecast winds combined with the PHI gave the pilot a few grey hairs.

The second incident occurred during the first of the supersonic runs. At the same time as Silk Slipper was being conducted, a detachment of RAF Canberra aircraft were live firing Live Nord AS 30 Air to Surface missiles on a different part of the range.

Terry Wilson completed a successful run down the range and landed without incident. Unbeknown to him, one of the Canberras had fired an AS30 that was still unexploded on the range. Woomera Range provided armourers to defuse this sort of thing and there was an armourer with his hands inside the UXB at the same time as the supersonic Mirage went over. All flights were notified but this person hadn't bothered to check the daily notices. He woke up some time after the Mirage had departed the area and thought he had died and as it was so hot, he thought the worst. Then he noticed he still had his tools and the Bomb and his truck parked beside him. He then got in his truck and went straight to the bar. The RAF guys passed him off to us later that night saying we had caused it so we had to look after him. His wife found him next day, but I believe that before he went home he left Terry Wilson in no doubt about what he thought of low flying supersonic Mirages!

The consequences of a very short delay in the pull-up at the end of the supersonic run were felt by technicians in an ELDO workshop located off the end of the run. Apparently, the walls moved, lights dropped out of the ceiling and windows were broken. Whilst the French technicians were happy to hear the Mirage pass. the Italians were less so!

A successful short exercise was completed on 1 May 1969 and the four associated Mirages performed magnificently.