

Dassault Mirage III

History: In 1981 the Australian Government announced it would acquire 75 McDonnell Douglas F-18s to replace the RAAF's Mirage III fleet. The first RAAF F-18 flight took place in Australia on 26 February 1985, 20CU began its first conversion course for F-18s on 19 August 1985 and No 3 Squadron, the first to fly F-18s, took delivery of its first aircraft in August 1986. In the meantime the RAAF's Mirage IIIOs continued in service.

The first RAAF Mirage III squadron to be withdrawn from service was 76 Squadron which was disbanded in 1973 due to budget cuts. When 20CU converted to F-18s No 77 Squadron became the RAAF's Mirage training unit and conducted its final Mirage III conversion course in February 1986



and began conversion to F-18s in July 1987. When No 3 Squadron at Butterworth in Malaya was withdrawn to convert to F-18s in 1986 No 79 Squadron was reformed to take over the Mirage IIIs there. It remained in existence until April 1988 when its Mirages IIIs returned to Australia and the squadron was disbanded. No 75 Squadron and ARDU were the last RAAF squadrons to fly Mirages. In October 1988 the last 75 Squadron Mirages were flown to Woomera for storage and the final RAAF Mirage III flight was an ARDU Mirage (A3-101) ferry flight to storage at Woomera on 8 February 1989.

In 1990 the Pakistan government bought the 50 remaining RAAF Mirages, 43 Mirage IIIOs and 7 Mirage IIIDs. Pakistan had been acquiring second-hand Mirage IIIs and 5s from various sources and converting them for use in the Pakistan Air Force which was, by this time, the world's largest Mirage III operator. In Pakistan the Australian Mirages were refurbished, originally it was thought that only 20 to 25 could be made operational but eventually more than 40 airframes were refurbished and put back into service. Some of the wings were beyond economical repair so the Pakistan Air Force bought fourteen sets of zero-times wings from South Africa and mated them with the Australian Mirages.

The avionics were upgraded to include a new heads up display, HOTAS controls, defensive chaff and flares and a new and improved radar system having a look-down shoot-down capability. These refitted Mirage IIIs were given new serial designations, 90-5xx for the Mirage IIIOs and 90-6xx for the Mirage IIIDs. The last two digits of the RAAF A-numbers were retained so it remained easy to identify their original RAAF serial numbers through the new Pakistan Air Force numbers. All the RAAF Mirages went to No 7 'Bandits' Squadron, 31 (Fighter Ground Attack) Wing, PAF where they had a joint air defense and attack role.

The models

I'd used up all my Frog Mirage IIIs and a couple of other re-issues I'd picked up on eBay and I was beginning to get worried that I wouldn't have enough kits to complete this set of Mirage IIIOs. Fortunately I happened to see a couple of Eastern Express Mirage IIIEs in a well known Melbourne shop that turned out to be yet another re-issue of the old Frog kit, and at around \$12 each, so I snapped them up. They are exactly the same as when Frog first molded

them but a lot of the crispness has gone out of them and there is a bit more flash. Still, they did the job.

A3-81, 79 Squadron, 1988

I needed to make a 79 Squadron Mirage III to complete the set of Mirages that had flown with Australian units. The only decals available were on a sheet that came with the High Planes Mirage III and that was for an experimental scheme. While I had no objection to that I'd come across some photos of some of the 79 Squadron Mirages taxiing in after their ferry flights to Woomera and I thought it might be appropriate to model one of them instead. They were a mixture of dark grey and green and light grey camouflage schemes and I decided to make this model in the old dark grey and green schemes since the Mirages spent most of their time flying in that scheme. There was a particularly good photo of A3-81 taxiing in so I decided to do it. The big trouble was that there were no decals available for the tail insignia. I bought the Hawkeye decals for the Macchi in the hope that they might be useful but that proved not to be the case. The only solution was to make them for myself.

I've recently bought a colour laser printer so I can now do colour (apart from white) so I set out to make my own decals. This was made much simpler using the 79 Squadron coat of arms on the RAAF web site and a scan of similar tail markings for other squadrons as a basis, but I still had to find the right



colours and get the software to do the kinds of things the programmers had apparently never thought anyone would want to do. I spent an afternoon battling away on the project and got part of the way before I gave up in frustration. Several months later I came back to the project and finished it off in about fifteen minutes. The rest of the decals came from the various bits and pieces I'd accumulated during the course of the project, and the end result looked rather nice.

90.513, 7 Squadron, Pakistan Air Force, c. mid 1990s.

You might not be surprised to learn that there is not much information around about what the Mirage IIIOs looked like in Pakistani service. From the pictures that are available it is clear that some went into service more or less as they had been in RAAF service, particularly the light grey ones. A challenging project would have been of a weathered RAAF fuselage mated with bright shiny new South African wings but there was a very nice photo of 90.513 that appeared to be refurbished in Pakistani colours so I went in that direction.

The colours I used were a bit of a guess, based on a kind of visual average of the colours as they appeared in various internet photos. The national decals came from an old Microscale decal sheet of Mirages of various nationalities but between the time that sheet was printed and the mid 1990s some of the details had been changed so I had to modify them as well. The numbers are not quite the right font but they were the closest to the real thing I could find on my computer. The only thing I was not able to find was the 7 Squadron badge that should appear on the tail. The views I found in photos were not quite good enough to use and my search across the internet failed to turn up anything, as did a couple of enquiries I shot off to Pakistan. Still, there is a blank space on the tail if I ever manage to find something suitable. This is the last Mirage III model I intend to make and it looks right at home among all the RAAF ones.