

The Mirage

Peter (Pygmy) McAndrew, now living in the UK, saw the story on the crashed Mirage in our last issue, he writes:-



"Sorry - Can't help you with the names of any of these guys (75 Sqn blokes perhaps?) but I spent a couple of lovely nights baby-sitting it in the swamp. I was in a team called Ground SAR. It was a secondary duty, purely voluntary. Our job was to secure a crash site to prevent people tampering with the 'evidence'. My particular job was to set-up communications back to the RAAF base or to other supporting units. The team on this occasion was headed up by an ADG officer (can't remember his name), Jock Boyle (FSGT ADG), 2 drivers (can't remember their names either) and myself.

We got a call early in the night a Mirage had gone in and we had to report to the ADG's office with our kits. As is generally the case with Knuckle Heads, they don't park their aircraft in the most pleasant of places. This one was parked in Howard Swamp, a couple of miles south of Darwin. We travelled down to the site in a couple of Toyota Landcruisers. We spent most of the hours before midnight helping all and sundry out of bogs. (Give an officer a 4x4 and he thinks he can drive anywhere.)

It took a bit of doing but we were able to shepherd the majority of the sightseers, from the Base, away from the plane until the next day. After all the on-lookers had left, we tried to get some sleep in the swamp. What a night it was! Bloody mosquitoes. I had forgotten to pack my mossie net so tried to get some sleep in 1 of the Tojos. Had no luck here, so ended up sharing a net with one of the drivers. The next day a group of people were brought out from the base to scour through the swamp to find bits of the plane scattered during the ejection. Can't remember what we found but we were looking for the canopy and a couple of ejections seats.

The next night was a bit better as I had been back to base to get my 3-man tent and some mossie coils. After all and sundry had left for the day, a couple of us drove to a pub/shop near Howard Springs to buy some liquid refreshments. We played cards for a while to allow the liquid to take effect, as this helped to reduce the effect of the mossie bites.



The following day, a Chinook was flown in to pull the Mirage free from the mud. I think the Mirage was flown back to base under the Chinook."

Ian Johnson, who lives in Perth, also saw the article - he writes I note with interest your photo of A3-105 south of Darwin. I attended the site with Cpl Rick Kies (Mother) at the time to help recover the (at the time) top secret ARC159 radios and to keep us off the turps for a couple of days!

The main recovery items were the offending undercarriage leg (that wouldn't come down) and a matra 550 launcher that was fairly contemporary at the time. I cannot recall the names of the black handers, but the bloke with glasses might be "Smurf". The bare back on the right is Rick Kies. (top photo).



A Chinook was used to lift the wreckage to drier ground to allow access to the undercarriage. An Iroquois was used for the launcher recovery. I was one of the crew that dispatched the aircraft for the night flight. There were phantoms, F111s and Mirages on a big push so they had little choice but to get out.

Jim Barden was a safety manager at Virgin Blue the last I heard. Unfortunately JP Conlan was taken out by a hang glider in the NT after a great time flying Skyhawks, Mirages and F18's. I managed to souvenir a set of seat-pins off the aircraft which I keep close at hand.





Mick Rickers, Geoff Marchment and brother, Doug Cross, Col Sivier and John Scott far right.
This was taken in 1984.

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