

Camouflage of the SAAF Mirage III Aircraft:

On 30 May 1969, 2 Squadron sent a report to Tactical Group Headquarters and stated that an investigation had verified that signs of serious corrosion had become evident on a number of Mirage aircraft. The squadron strongly recommended that all Mirage aircraft be painted. This suggestion was supported by the Officer Commanding Maintenance Group in a letter to Air Force Headquarters written on 4 July 1969.

In the letter the following paint scheme was recommended:

- Upper surface; Dark Green (BSC 381C, shade 641) and Dark Earth (BSC 381C, shade 450).
- Lower surface; Sky (BSC 381C, shade 210).

The cost of the material required to paint one Mirage would be in the order of R75.00 and it would involve approximately 40 man-hours.

In a reply dated 10 October 1969 by the Staff Officer (SO) Fighters at Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ), it was firstly mentioned that the AFHQ was only notified of the suggested change after it had already been approved by the maintenance line. He found the colours unacceptable, due to being too dark and commented to the Senior Staff Officer (SSO) Operations and the SSO Technical, that the aircraft would show up as a black area, at short range. The colours would not fit in with the surrounding terrain where the Mirages were expected to operate, namely the Transvaal area under the Air Defence Radar network. He suggested a lighter green (Olive Drab) and a much lighter brown to fit with the background colour of the area. He mentioned that the colours suggested earlier were the same as used by the Royal Air Force and was not acceptable for South African conditions. It was finally stated that, as only enough paint had been sourced for one Mirage, a change at that stage would not have any serious financial impact.

The above reply from SO Fighters was supported by the SSO Technical in a memorandum dated the same day. He replied that he agreed that the colours had to be determined by the Operations Branch, but he stated that the colours had to be specified first. He did however also comment that he thought that the RAF colours were effective at the time they were in use. SO Fighters then sent a signal to the Maintenance Group and the suggested colour scheme was cancelled. The Tactical Group was requested to set up a conference between the Officer Commanding 2 Squadron and the Maintenance group representatives to suggest a more fitting colour scheme. The new suggested scheme had to be sent to SO Fighters as soon as possible.

After a discussion between the various role players, Maintenance group recommended the following colour scheme to AFHQ:

- Upper surfaces; Olive Drab (BSC 381C, shade 298) and Light Stone (BSC 3981C, shade 361). Both colours were recommended to be applied in a matt finish.
- Lower surfaces; Sky (BSC 381C, shade 210) also applied in a matt finish.

It was requested that one Mirage be painted in the recommended colours, after which a final decision would be made around the colour scheme.

As a follow-up to the above recommendation from the Maintenance group, SO Fighters reported to the SSO Operations that there were now two recommendations on the table, namely;

- The Royal Rhodesian Air Force scheme of Dark Earth (BSC 381C, shade 450) and Dark Green (BSC 381C, shade 641), with the lower surfaces also in Dark Earth, all colours matt,
- The scheme as suggested by 2 Squadron of Olive Drab (BSC 381C, shade 298) and Light Stone (BSC 3981C, shade 361) upper surfaces, with Sky (BSC 381C, shade 210) lower surfaces, all colours matt.

He continued with a suggestion that two aircraft be painted, one in each of the schemes. Thereafter flying trials could be conducted to determine the most effective colour scheme. He also recommended that the camouflage pattern as applied to the Mirage IIIRZ's be used.

These recommendations were approved and the Tactical and Maintenance Groups were tasked to complete the two aircraft as recommended. Once completed, 2 Squadron was tasked to carry out flight trials to determine the most effective scheme. A written report had to be sent to AFHQ on completion of the trials, and the Chief of the Air Force would personally approve a final scheme.

In the end four aircraft were painted as follows:

- Mirage IICZ 809 in wrap around Dark Earth with a Dark Green pattern on the upper surfaces, both colours in matt finish,
- Mirage IICZ 803 and 813 in Olive Drab and Light Stone upper surfaces with Sky lower surfaces, but all colours in gloss finish.
- During the trials, the Light Stone and Sky colours were found to be too light and Mirage IICZ 814 was then painted in Olive Drab (BSC 381C, shade 298) and Deep Buff (BSC 381C, shade 360) upper surfaces, with light Admiralty Grey (BSC 381C, shade 697) lower surfaces, all colours in matt finish.

This was the final accepted and approved scheme, although most aircraft were then finished in a gloss finish.



The photograph above show the three different colour schemes next to one another. Mirage IICZ, 809, is leading the line up with the Dark Earth/Dark Green camouflage colours, while the next aircraft, Mirage IICZ, 805, has the final approved colours of Olive Drab/Deep Buff/Light Admiralty Grey applied. The third aircraft is Mirage IICZ, 813, finished in the Olive Drab/Light Stone/Sky colour scheme.

Mirage IIICZ 809:



Mirage IIICZ 803:



Mirage III CZ 813:



Mirage IIICZ 814:

