

The Dassault Mirage III in South African Air Force service



PART 2

SAAF Mirage III EZ, DZ, D2Z, RZ and R2Z Colours and general marking details

This E-book was compiled by Malcolm Reid
Pretoria May 2022

In the compilation of this document, data has been obtained from various Internet sources and contributors. This data has been cross-referenced where needed to ensure, as much as possible, the consistency and correctness of that data. There have been many contributors to various Internet forums relating to the SAAF Mirage III, and in particular, the Unofficial SAAF Website (saairforce.co.za). Without the efforts by fellow enthusiasts, pilots and crews in providing this written and photographic documentation of the history of the Mirage III in SAAF service, this narrative would not have been possible. Many of the images sourced via Internet searches have been used without the specific permission from the originators as, in many cases, these are unknown. Others have been included with the originators' details retained and unedited as sourced from the Internet. The images have been included in this document on a "fair use" basis for the purposes of historical research and the recording thereof. This document is offered publically as a free e-book and in no way does it provide a source of income for the author or any other party.

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1 Mirage IIIEZ - colours and camouflage

Following on to the acquisition of the Mirage IIICZ, the SAAF took delivery of 16 Mirage IIIEZs from 1965, these being assigned the tail numbers 819 to 834. An additional airframe, assigned tail number 842, was obtained to replace #821 which crashed. As with the other SAAF Mirage IIIs, the suffix “Z” was added to the E designation to denote an aircraft operated by the SAAF.

Having been disbanded in 1957, 3 Squadron was re-activated in 1966 to operate the Mirage IIIEZs, though it nominally remained under 2 Squadron command authority. In February 1970 3 Squadron received full squadron colours and took delivery of Mirage IIIDZ aircraft. 3 Squadron operated the Mirage IIIEZ until April 1975 when the Mirage F1CZs were delivered. From 1974, with the pending arrival of the F1CZs, the Mirage IIIEZs transferred to 85 Air Combat School. The name later changed to 85 Combat Flying School (CFS) and relocated to Air Force Base (AFB) Pietersberg.

Unlike the Mirage IIICZ, the IIIEZ did not see significant combat action, tending to remain in the confines of South Africa as a training asset. The surviving 16 Mirage IIIEZs were converted to Cheetah E under Project Brahman.

The quickest way to identify an EZ from a CZ is that the EZ has a distinct doppler fairing beneath the forward nose, an extended fuselage aft of the cockpit causing the intake leading edges to appear further aft and the EZ has no leading edge fillet on the vertical stabilizer.

1.1 Natural metal delivery colours

Like the Mirage IIICZs (addressed in Part 1 of this document), the EZs were delivered in an unpainted natural metal state with red trim applied to the intake leading edge as well as behind the cockpit. They had the South African national colours of orange/white/blue applied to the entire rudder with the following text superimposed in black : “AVIONS M’DASSAULT” and “MIRAGE IIIEZ N°. 8xx”, the “8xx” being a placeholder for the individual aircraft serial number e.g. “821”. In some cases, the words “SNECMA ATAR 9” were applied to each side of the fuselage just ahead of the fin fillet / fuselage junction.

The standard size Castles (30 inch on wings, 24 inch on fuselage) were applied in six locations with those on the fuselage just ahead of the junction between the wing leading edge and the fuselage. The radome was painted black. Other markings were as follows :

- Red trim / markings were applied to the upper wings as for the CZ.
- The airbrakes were red with yellow edging.
- The aircraft three-digit tail number was painted in 8 inch black numerals on the rear fuselage. It is assumed that, like other Mirage IIIs in SAAF service, the last two digits of the serial number were painted in small black numerals on the front undercarriage door.
- “*Mirage IIIEZ*” was added in black script beneath the windshield on either side of the fuselage.
- “*Cyano II CFS*” was applied in black script on the nose aft of the radome.
- The various dielectric antennae panels on the vertical stabilizer leading edge and fin tip were painted in pale gray or white with black / dark grey leading edges.

EZs in the natural metal scheme displayed a variable arrangement of :

- A large red individual letter code on the vertical stabilizer (refer to Part 1 of this document).
- A black code consisting of two letters and a numeral (e.g. “EZ2”) applied to the mid fuselage
- The red fuselage lightning bolt.
- 2 Squadron badge added on both sides of the vertical stabilizer.
- Or a combination of the above – refer to the images below.

Like the CZs, the natural metal EZs demonstrated a variation of metallic hues to various panels due to the multiple grades of aluminum and other metal alloys used in its manufacture.



Two natural metal EZs (#820 / EZ2 and #833) displaying various combinations of markings as noted above. Both have the red trim behind the cockpit and on the intakes but do not have the red fuselage lightning bolts which were added later. The camouflaged aircraft and the aircraft in the foreground are CZs, which are identified by the fillet extension to the leading edge of the vertical stabilizer. Note that, on EZ #833, the red trim line can be seen ahead of the elevon hinge line.

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EZ #820 / E22 seen without the red fuselage flash. This photo may have been taken in France prior to delivery to the SAAF.



A wonderful period photograph showing a broad array of SAAF aircraft including a number of natural metal CZs and EZs as follows :

- From front to back : CZ #813, tail code "P"
- EZ #824, fuselage code "EZ6"
- EZ #819, fuselage code "EZ1", tail code "V"
- EZ #823, tail code "Z"
- CZ #812, tail code "N"
- CZ #815, tail code "C"
- CZ #800, tail code "A"

All of the Mirage III have the Castles in six locations, red fuselage flash, orange/white/blue rudder flashes and "Flying Cheetah" winged 2 Squadron badge.

1.2 Early buff/green camouflage

The EZs were later painted in the standard SAAF camouflage as initially applied to the CZ : hard edge upper surface (wings, fuselage and vertical stabilizer) disruptive camouflage scheme (original pattern) of olive drab BSC298 and deep buff BSC360. The undersides were in light admiralty grey BSC697 (which was actually closer to a very light blue-grey). The finish was gloss.

These aircraft had the Castles located in six positions (30" on upper and lower wings and 24" on the intakes) but with the fuselage Castle now located further forward just aft of the intake leading edge. The 2 Squadron badge was replaced with the 3 Squadron badge, the location remaining on the vertical stabilizer. The South African national colours of orange, white and blue remained prominently displayed on the rudder with the simplified text "MIRAGE IIIEZ / N°. 8xx" either present or removed. *Mirage IIIEZ* script was retained on the forward fuselage either side of the cockpit. The "SNECMA ATAR 9" text was removed from the fuselage. The 3-digit serial remained in 8" black numerals on the rear fuselage. The last two digits of the serial number were painted in black numerals on the front nose gear door.

Nose cones were seen variably as follows :

- Unpainted natural metal.
- Combination buff upper and light blue/grey lower with a hard demarcation between the two.

Other details :

- The wing upper surface leading edge camouflage wrapped around to the lower surface up to the first panel line.
- The upper and lower wing airbrakes were painted red with yellow trim.
- The various avionics antennae on the vertical stabilizer leading edge and fin tip remained in the original pale gray / white with black / dark grey leading edges. However, these were later painted over on some aircraft.
- The Doppler antenna beneath the nose was painted in a cream colour.



EZ #826 in gloss hard edge camouflage with natural metal nosecone. 826 has the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer The two seater behind the EZ is a BZ as can be identified by the forward fillet to the vertical stabilizer.



A line up of nine EZs resplendent in their new gloss hard edge buff/green camouflage. Note that six of the EZs appear to have the unpainted natural metal nose cone. The remaining aircraft are likely to be DZ or D2Zs based on the slimmer nose profiles. Note the 2 Squadron "Wasp" badge on the vertical stabilizers of the EZs. The EZ in the foreground has 500 liter RP18R wing tanks installed.



Another view of the same line-up off Mirages as presented in the previous image. The 2 Squadron "Wasp" badges are clearer in this image. Note how consistently the camouflage has been applied to the nine EZs. It appears as if the "MIRAGE III EZ / No. 8xx text on the rudder is not present.



EZ painted in hard edge buff/green camouflage. The radome was a dark grey with a gloss black backing ring. Note 3 Squadron “wasp” badge on vertical stabilizer instead of the winged “Flying Cheetah” badge of 2 Squadron. The red/yellow air brakes are clearly visible. Wing tanks are 1,300 liter RP62.



EZ finished in hard edge buff/green camouflage with full markings. It has the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. The nose cone has been painted buff / light blue.



Two images of EZ #829 at an airshow at Waterkloof Air Base. #829 is resplendent in full colours and markings and has been polished to airshow display standards. *Cyrano II CSF* is visible on the unpainted nose cone.





EZ #826 in gloss hard edge camouflage with natural metal nosecone and full markings. #826 has the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. Note the finned 110G 500 liter wing tanks and the red missile launch rail on the outboard wing pylon.



Another image of an EZ in hard edge buff/green camouflage with natural metal nose cone and full markings including the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. The wing fuel tanks are 500 liter RP18R.

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EZ #823 in hard edge buff/green camouflage with natural metal nose cone and full markings including the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. The wing fuel tanks are 1,300 liter RP62. Note the weathered protective orange coating on the tanks. The aircraft behind #823 is a two seat D2Z. The D2Z does not have the doppler antenna under the forward fuselage, as was the case for the DZ.



EZ in typical airshow condition.



Another EZ at an airshow. Possibly the same aircraft as on the previous page.



EZ painted in hard edge buff/green camouflage with buff/light grey painted nose cone and full markings but excluding the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer.



Two images of EZs showing the camouflage pattern on the starboard wing. They have full markings applied. However, the EZ in the image above has the 85CFS (Combat Flight School) badge on the vertical stabilizer whereas the EZ in the image below has no squadron badge. Note that both aircraft have had the white/light grey conformal antennae on the vertical stabilizer painted over. Both carry the JL-100 combined fuel tank/rocket pod as would be seen on a typical training sortie.



1.3 Revised buff/green camouflage

Some of the EZs were repainted in the later matt soft edge buff/green camouflage. It would appear from images available to the author that these were painted in the revised pattern only (refer to section on CZ camouflage in Part 1 of this document). Castles were retained as per the previous colour scheme. The orange/white/blue rudder flash was deleted as was the 3 Squadron insignia. All conformal antennae / dielectric panels were painted over. The *Mirage III* EZ was removed from the forward fuselage.

Aircraft equipped with radar noses were variably seen as follows :

- Matt black/dark grey radome with thin gloss black ring and all-buff aft section as in the image below.



EZ (either #819 or #829) in soft edge camouflage (revised pattern). Nose cone is solid buff. It carries the 85CFS badge on the vertical stabilizer. The rudder orange/white/blue flash has been removed. Note the red and yellow airbrakes.

- Matt black/dark grey radome with thin gloss black ring and unpainted natural metal aft section as in the image below.



EZ #822 appears to be in the soft edge buff/green camouflage. *Mirage III* EZ no longer appears on the forward fuselage. Note the weathered orange protective coating on the 110G finned wing tanks.

- Entire nose painted buff (upper surface) and grey (lower surface) with the hard demarcation between the two being a continuation of that for the forward fuselage. See image below. As addressed in Part 1 of this series, this would most likely denote an aircraft with the ballast nose i.e. the Cyrano radar has been removed.



EZ #827 seen at Pietersberg AFB in 1987 painted in the soft edge buff/green camouflage. It carries two JL-100 pods.



Another view of EZ #827 seen at Pietersberg AFB in 1987 painted in the soft edge buff/green camouflage with the 85CFS badge on the vertical stabilizer. *Mirage III*EZ no longer appears on the forward fuselage.

1.4 Low visibility / air superiority camouflage

It does not appear that any of the EZs were painted in any form of low visibility blue / grey camouflage.

1.5 Commemorative colour schemes

It does not appear that any of the EZs were painted in commemorative colour schemes. It's likely that this distinction was left to the BZ and CZ as described in Part 1.

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EZ #832 depicted in the original natural metal delivery scheme. Markings were restricted to the rudder flash and red trim behind cockpit and on intakes. "SNECMA ATAR 9" appears on the fuselage.



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EZ #820 "EZ2" depicted in the original natural metal delivery scheme. Not all aircraft were allocated the "EZx" marking on the fuselage.



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EZ #819 "EZ1" has the red lightning bolt added to the fuselage and a red code "V" on the vertical stabilizer. Again, it would appear that not all natural metal EZs had a red code allocated. 2 Squadron badge has been added.



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EZ #824 "EZ6" depicted in its final markings before receiving buff/green camouflage.

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EZ #828 depicted in hard edge buff/green camouflage with full markings. 2 Squadron badge has been replaced by 3 Squadron Badge (Wasp) and the text on the rudder simplified to dispense with the "AVIONS M'DASSAULT" text, with only "MIRAGE III EZ No. 8xx" remaining. #828 is depicted with 1,300 liter RP62 wing tanks and air-to-air missile launch rails painted in red.



EZ #833 depicted in hard edge buff/green camouflage with full markings and the 3 Squadron Badge. It is depicted with 500 liter RP18R wing tanks and a Matra R530 air-to-air missile on the centerline station.

2 Mirage IIIDZ - colors and camouflage

The Mirage IIIDZ was a two-seat trainer based on the Mirage IIIE airframe. Three DZs were delivered to the SAAF in 1969 and were allocated the tail numbers 839, 840 and 841.

The main differences from the EZ were the tandem cockpit, the slimmer chisel shaped nose and the distinctive cable trunking or ducts running along both sides of the forward lower fuselage. As for the EZ, the DZ was equipped with the Atar 9C engine. These were later converted to Cheetah D. Similar to the EZ, the DZ was equipped with the doppler antenna and fairing beneath the cockpit forward of the nose landing gear. The DZ was not equipped with a radar.

Colour scheme and markings were as follows :

Delivery scheme :

- Overall natural metal finish.
- Red trim on the intake leading edges only.
- The black anti glare panel extended from the nose panel forward of the windscreen to the tip of the nose.
- Castles in 6 positions (30" on upper and lower wings, 24" on fuselage). The fuselage Castles were located at the wing leading edge junction with the fuselage.
- Orange/white/blue colour rudder with what appears to be "AVIONS M'DASSAULT" and "MIRAGE IIIDZ 8xx" for the aircraft number on upper portion of the rudder.
- "*Mirage IIIDZ*" was applied in script on forward fuselage
- The 8" black 3-digit tail number was applied to the rear fuselage.
- It is assumed that, as for other Mirage IIIs, the last two numerals of the aircraft number were applied in small black digits on the nose gear door.
- Airbrakes were red with yellow edging.
- Dielectric antenna panels on the vertical stabilizer were in light grey with black/dark grey leading edges.
- The doppler antenna panel on the underside of the nose was a cream colour.
- The tail cone and nose appeared to be a darker metallic hue than the rest of the airframe.
- No squadron badge appeared on the vertical stabilizer.



DZ #839 looking very clean in unpainted natural metal colour scheme. The various grades of metal used in the construction of the Mirage is apparent. Very clearly demonstrated is the darker exhaust section and the extreme nose as well as the dark wing attachment frames on the fuselage. It appears that the red trim is restricted to the intake leading edges only. No squadron badge has been applied to the vertical stabilizer. The doppler antenna beneath the nose is clearly visible. As with other two-seater Mirages, the upper frames on the forward section of the canopy were white as was the lower portion of the rear canopy section. Note the location of the ejection seat warning triangles and the *Mirage IIIDZ* script on the nose.



Unidentified DZ in unpainted natural metal sporting two 500 liter RP18R supersonic wing tanks. The Castle on the starboard wing is barely visible between the two elevon actuator aerodynamic fairings. The cable trunking on the lower forward nose is visible in this image. Note how, with the landing gear extended, the main gear doors and the nose gear doors revert to the closed position.

The DZs were later painted in the hard edge buff/green upper surface camouflage with light blue / grey undersurfaces. The finish was gloss :

- The black anti glare panel extended from the nose panel forward of the windscreen to the tip of the nose.
- The DZs were operated (as with the EZ) by 3 Squadron and, later, 85CFS. As such, DZs were seen sporting variably the badges of 3 Squadron and 85CFS.
- Castles were applied in six positions (wings 30", fuselage 24"). The fuselage castles were relocated to just aft of the intake leading edge.
- The South African orange, white and blue rudder was standard with the simplified text "Mirage IIIDZ No. 8xx" applied in black halfway up the rudder.
- "*Mirage IIIDZ*" was retained in script on forward fuselage
- The 8" black 3-digit tail number was applied to the rear fuselage.
- The last two numerals of the aircraft number were applied in small black digits on the nose gear door.
- Airbrakes were red with yellow edging.
- As for the D2Z, it is likely that the thin red line was applied to the wing forward of the elevon hinge line.
- Dielectric antenna panels on the vertical stabilizer were in light grey/white with black/dark grey leading edges.
- The doppler antenna panel on the underside of nose was a cream colour as can be seen in the image below.



DZ #840 in hard edge gloss camouflage with full complement of markings and black anti-glare panel on the nose. Note the 3 Squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. RP18R 500 liter fuel tanks are installed. Note the chisel shaped nose with an intake for avionics cooling at the tip. The aircraft in the background is an EZ.



Another image of DZ #840 in a different setting.



Profile artwork of DZ #840, but now with 85CFS badge on the vertical stabilizer and RP62 1,300 liter wing tanks.



DZ #841. The doppler antenna is clearly visible beneath the nose. Note the reinforcing strips on the forward canopy section as well as the mirrors. The round air intake for avionics cooling is visible on the extreme nose beneath the pitot probe.

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A lineup of seven Mirage IIIs. From right to left these are : D2Z, DZ, D2Z and four EZs. The D2Zs do not have the doppler antenna present. The DZ and the first EZ appear to be carrying RP18R fuel tanks. All of the aircraft are in the hard edge buff/green camouflage with full markings. Note that the entire opening section of the canopy frame of the third aircraft (D2Z) is painted buff and does not match the surrounding camouflage. Three of the EZ have unpainted nose cones and one has a buff/light blue nose cone. 3 Squadron badges are present on the vertical stabilizers.

Photo was taken at AFB Pietersberg.

3 Mirage IID2Z - colours and camouflage

The Mirage IIDZ fleet was supplemented with eleven D2Zs which were assigned tail numbers 843 to 853. These aircraft were equipped with improved avionics but retained the Atar 9C engine. Various publications and online websites have erroneously reported that the D2Z was equipped with the Atar 09K50 engine. This is not true.

The D2Z is very similar to the DZ, the only obvious difference being the lack of doppler antenna beneath the nose on the D2Z imparting a much sleeker nose profile. The D2Z also had the distinctive cable trunking or ducts running along both sides of the forward lower fuselage. The D2Z had a prominent horizontal blade antenna either side of the upper section of the vertical stabilizer.

The delivery colour scheme for the D2Z was basically the same as for the camouflaged DZ, this being the buff/green gloss hard-edged camouflage scheme with light blue undersides :

- Castles in six locations and sizes as per DZ.
- The text “Mirage IID2Z No. 8xx” was applied in black at the top of the orange/white/blue rudder, unlike on the DZ where the text was located further down the rudder.
- Other marking details as per camouflaged DZ.
- It would appear that no 2 or 3 Squadron badges were applied to the D2Z. However, some aircraft had the 85CFS badge applied to the upper vertical stabilizer - check references.
- Aircraft appear to have been delivered with the entire frame of the opening section of the canopy painted in buff. This was later repainted to match the base fuselage camouflage pattern.

It should be noted that the D2Zs were painted in the buff/green camouflage in France prior to delivery. As such, the buff appeared to have a slightly different hue to it (more orange) than the buff on the earlier SAAF Mirages which were painted in South Africa.

Some D2Zs in the hard edge camouflage later had the Castles and fin flash removed. This may have coincided with the application of the 85CFS badge on the vertical stabilizer.

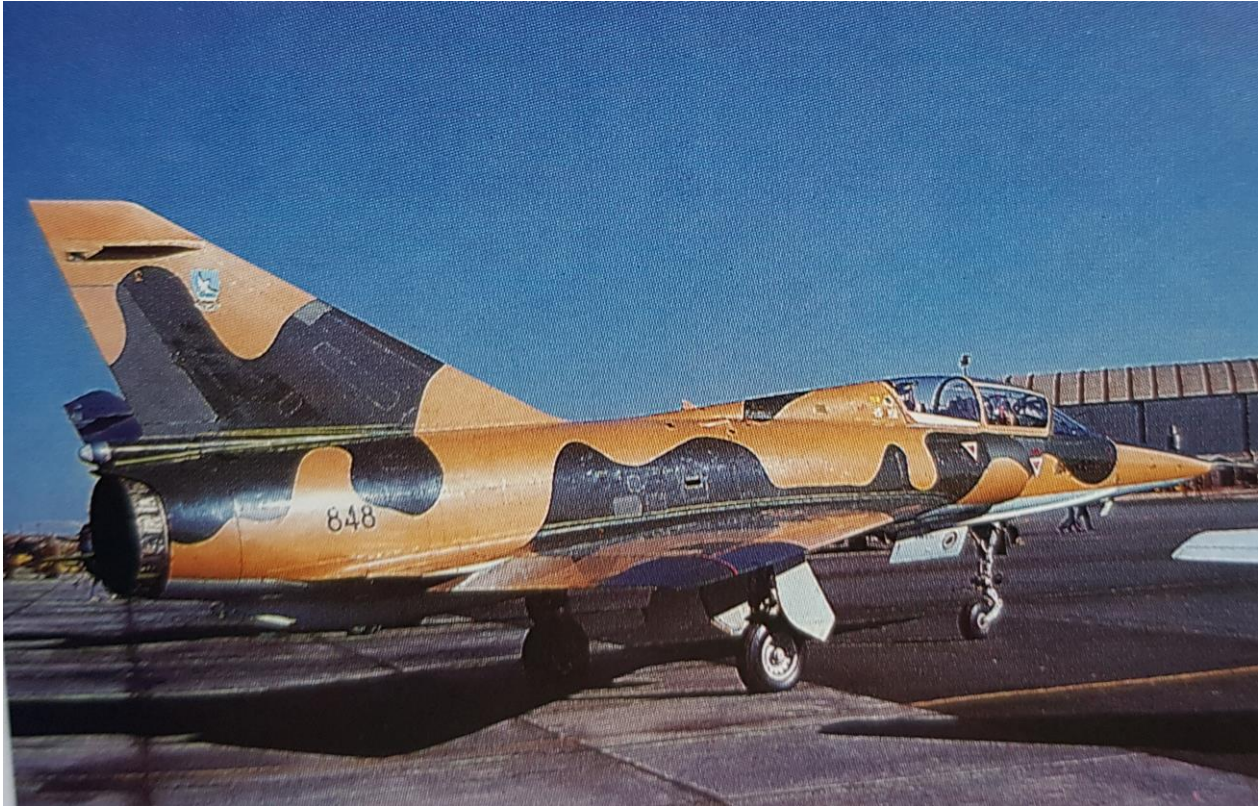
Some D2Zs were later repainted in the soft edge matt buff/green camouflage. The orange/white/blue rudder flash and text was deleted on these aircraft. Some had the Castles removed. The vertical stabilizer antennae were also painted over in the base camouflage. All other details were as per the original gloss scheme.



Two images of D2Z #845 in the gloss hard edge camouflage (original pattern) with full markings except for the squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. The entire opening section of the canopy frame is painted buff. Note that the text "Mirage IIID2Z No. 8xx" is applied on the top portion of the rudder.



D2Z #849 painted in the hard edge camouflage. The entire opening section of the canopy frame is painted buff.



D2Z #848 painted in the hard edge buff/green camouflage without Castles. 85CFS badge is on the vertical stabilizer. All conformal antenna have been painted over. The red line ahead of the elevons is visible.



D2Z #846 in company with an EZ #819 in 1984 operating out of Pietersberg Air Base. Both aircraft have the 85 CFS squadron badge on the vertical stabilizer. They are devoid of Castles but all other markings appear to be standard. Note that the conformal antenna on the leading edge of the vertical stabilizer has been painted over but the one on the top remains in original white / light grey. Note the darker hue of the green on the intakes and the exhaust area in comparison to the adjacent fuselage areas.



D2Z #846 showing off the beautiful lines of the classic delta. Points to note from this image :

- a) Variable hue of green on fuselage, tail cone and wing areas – the darker areas appear to be more glossy than the rest;
- b) The red airbrakes with yellow surrounds;
- c) The red line ahead of the elevon hinge line;
- d) Tail hook – the D2Z was the only SAAF Mirage III to be equipped with a tail hook;
- e) The aluminium drag chute cone with metallic blue front section;
- f) The horizontal blade antenna near the top of the vertical stabilizer;
- g) The antenna on the leading edge of the vertical stabilizer has been painted over;
- h) No Castles on fuselage or wings;
- i) 85CFS badge is on the vertical stabilizer;
- j) “NO STEP” or “BLY AF” markings on the elevons and the pitch damper.
- k) #486 carries no Castles.



R2Z #846 with EZ #819, Pietersberg 1984. Note the “NO STEP” or “BLY AF” markings on the airbrake of #846.



D2Z #843 landing at Pietersberg AFB, 1984. The three digits "843" appear on the nose door whereas this would usually be limited to the last two digits of the aircraft number. #843 is carrying JL-100 pods.



Another D2Z, this time #848, landing at Pietersberg Air Base, 1984. Both aircraft in the images above are devoid of Castles.



Two images of D2Z #847 in soft edge matt camouflage (original pattern) seen at Pietersburg in 1984. Note that opening section of canopy frame has been painted to match the fuselage camouflage. The antennae on the vertical stabilizer have been painted over. #847 carries the fuselage Castles and it is therefore possible that these were also applied to the wings. The 85CFS badge has been applied to the vertical stabilizer.





The aircraft on the left is a D2Z (note antennae on upper vertical stabilizer which distinguishes this from the DZ) with an EZ to its right. Both aircraft are in soft edge matt camouflage with what appears to be a total lack of markings.



D2Z at Pietersberg Air Base. Behind are two EZs. They all appear to be in the hard edge buff/green camouflage. Note that the "Mirage IIID2Z No. 8xx" is applied at the top of the rudder on the D2Z but the text is applied in the center of the rudder on the EZs.



Underside photo of D2Z carrying two RP18R fuel tanks and a single AIM-9B captive round. Note the position of the Castle on the underside of the wing. It is located between the two aerodynamic fairings which cover the elevon actuators and just forward of the elevon. This location would be similar for all SAAF Mirage IIIs when carrying the Castles.

4 Mirage IIRZ - colours and camouflage

The SAAF took delivery of four reconnaissance Mirage IIRZs, tail numbers 835, 836, 837 and 838.

4.1 Original NATO colour scheme

The RZs were constructed as part of a batch for the French Air Force before being diverted to the SAAF. As such, they were painted and delivered in the standard NATO scheme of grey / green upper hard edge semi-gloss camouflage. The undersides were painted silver. The intake leading edges, the vertical stabilizer leading edges and the extreme nose were painted in a darker grey. The canopy frames were painted entirely in the camouflage grey and did not match the surrounding green.

Markings were applied as follows :

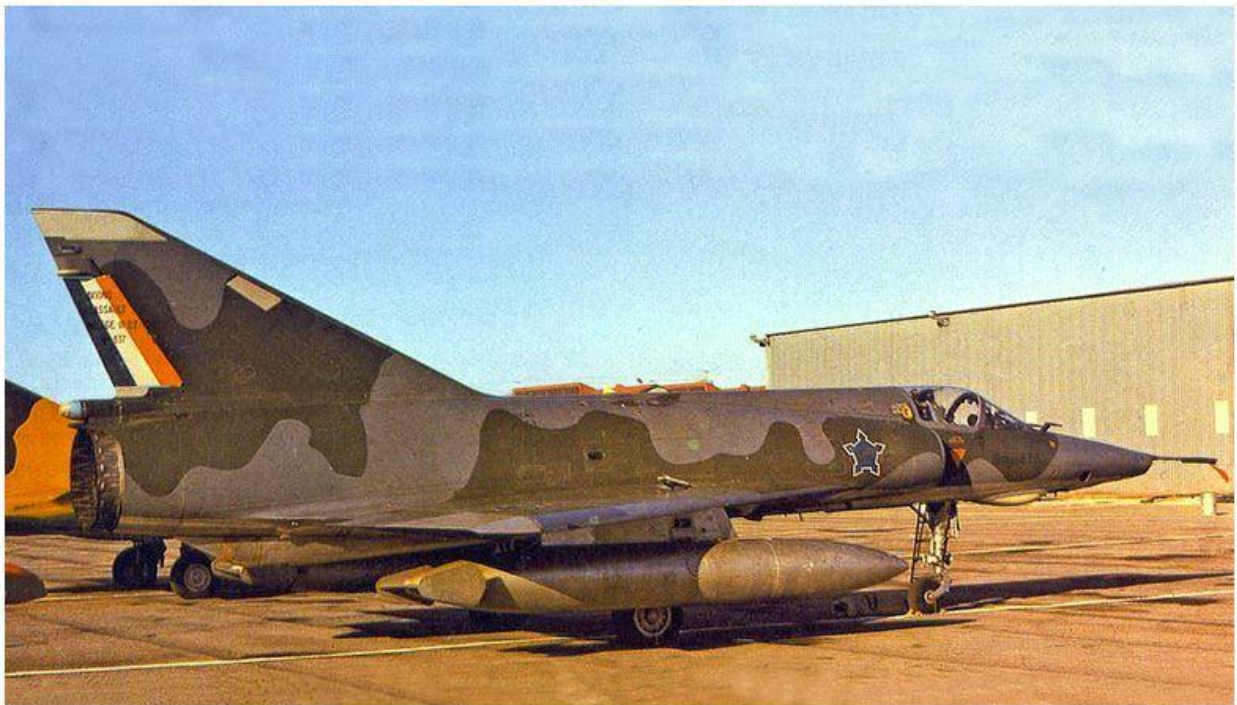
- Orange/white/blue colour rudder with text “AVIONS M'DASSAULT” and “MIRAGE IIRZ 8xx” on upper portion of the rudder, the “8xx” being a placeholder for the aircraft number.
- Castles were applied in the 6 positions – 30” on upper and lower wings and 24” on intakes in rearward location above the junction of the wing leading edge and fuselage.
- “*Mirage IIRZ*” was scripted in black beneath the windscreen on both sides.
- “SNECMA 9C” text applied in black on the rear fuselage just ahead of and below the fin fillet.
- Antennae on the vertical stabilizer were in light grey with black leading edges.
- Air brakes were red with yellow trim.
- Red stripes were present on the trailing edge of the upper wing just forward of the elevon hinge line.
- No squadron insignia were applied to the vertical stabilizer.
- Ejection seat warning triangles beneath the canopy were of a different colour and configuration to the rest of the SAAF Mirage IIIs.
- The RZs in this colour scheme did not appear to carry the 3-digit aircraft number on the rear fuselage.

The chisel nose and the faceted windows for the cameras distinguish the RZ from an EZ. The RZ was also equipped with the Doppler antenna on the lower forward fuselage just ahead of the nose undercarriage. The engine was the Atar 09C.

Each of the four Mirage IIRZs then had individual colour schemes applied later during their service with the SAAF. These are discussed further on in this document.



This RZ is in pristine new NATO grey/green/silver camouflage. This image was possibly taken in France prior to delivery. The black patch over the fuselage SAAF Castle is the auxiliary intake blow-in door in the open position. The doppler antenna is visible ahead of the nose landing gear. Note the darker grey leading edges of the intakes and the vertical stabilizer and the front of the nose. The canopy is painted entirely in the camouflage grey. The chisel nose houses a forward looking camera as well as several sideways and downward angled cameras.



RZ in weathered NATO grey/green/silver camouflage. There is no 8th 3-digit aircraft serial number present on the rear fuselage, but looking at the rudder, this would appear to be RZ #837. The fuel tanks are 1,300 liter RP62s.



A reconnaissance Mirage III RZ, serial 837, of 2 Squadron at Port Elizabeth in 1975. The aircraft still wears the NATO scheme of Olive Drab and Medium Sea Grey with Light Admiralty Grey undersides. By the mid-1980s the upper surfaces were Olive Drab and Deep Buff.

Although the text above notes “light admiralty grey undersides”, this is incorrect. RZs were retained in a painted silver lower surfaces for this scheme.



RZ painted in the NATO grey/green/silver camouflage with the nose bay door open and the camera palette in the lowered position.

4.2 Mirage IIIRZ 835

It has been noted in various forums that #835 was used operationally (combat ops) in the original NATO camouflage. It was then repainted in an experimental two-tone matt light grey / blue camouflage in the form of a blue diamond on a light grey background. This was applied soon after Operation Protea (around 1983/84). The grey goes all the way into the intakes. In this scheme, #835 had no other insignia / markings except for the numbers “835” inside the main undercarriage doors. All antennae were painted over in the base camouflage colour with the exception of a white panel directly beneath the rudder. #835 appeared to have no maintenance stencils or markings applied for this scheme. #835 was used operationally in this colour scheme.



RZ #835 in grey/blue camouflage in the operational area in company with an unidentified R2Z. The distinction between the two greys is almost imperceptible in this and other images. Both aircraft are equipped with centerline RP825 and two wing mounted RP62 fuel tanks – all are unpainted natural metal.



Most likely RZ #835 with two wing mounted RP62 fuel tanks. These look like they have been camouflaged.

Prior to retirement, #835 had shark teeth and eyes applied to the nose below the windscreen. The shark teeth wrapped around the lower fuselage / doppler antenna. #835 was delivered to the SAAF Museum at Swartkop in this colour scheme. See images below :



RZ #835 doing a fly-past at Swartkop Air Base



Two images of RZ #835 with rapidly fading grey camouflage and other markings. The remaining outlines of the teeth and eyes are visible.



Upon delivery to the SAAF Museum, #835 was repainted by the Museum in the original NATO grey / green upper and silver undersurfaces with all markings added as were originally applied when first delivered to the SAAF. The only exception being that the “835” on the rudder is in larger text. This is the status of 835 as she currently resides at AFB Swartkop (2018).

It is interesting to note that, on close examination of a damaged section of paint on #835, one can see the matt light grey beneath the NATO green as seen in the image below.



Detail images of RZ #835 photographed at Swartkop in 2018. It had been repainted to represent its original NATO grey/green camouflage :
Above left image – shows “835” in stencil font on the inside of the main undercarriage doors.
Above right image – scratch on forward fuselage showing what appears to be traces of the blue/grey camouflage beneath the NATO green.



RZ #835 photographed in 2018 at Swartkop.
Thankfully 835 has been moved beneath a shelter with the other Mirage III outdoor static display aircraft.

For combat operations, #835 was fitted with the standard “cats balls” RWR antennae and the chaff/flare dispensers attached either side of the outboard wing pylons – this is addressed in more detail in Part 5. A typical combat configuration was two V3B Kukris air-to-air missiles for self defence on the outboard wing pylons and 1,300 liter wing tanks on the inboard wing pylons.

4.3 Mirage IIIRZ 836

#836 was repainted in the soft-edged buff / green / grey matt colour scheme (original pattern) but did not have a black anti-glare panel applied to the nose.

#836 was modified by installing an Atar 9K50 engine as a lead-in to the Cheetah R programme. The aircraft was then unofficially referred to as a Mirage IIIRZ-50. The distinct scalloped / curved engine intake splitter plate configuration associated with the 09K50 engine can be seen on images of #836 after its conversion. The airframe of #836 was later used to repair Cheetah #844, after an incident at Upington, during which the rear section of the Cheetah was damaged.

As a result of the more powerful 09K50 engine, #836 was cleared in SAAF service to carry the larger 1,700 liter (374 Imp gal) RP30 external wing tanks. This large tank was generally only used by SAAF Mirage IIIs which were powered by the 09K50 (R2Z and RZ #836).

During operational service on the border, #836 did not carry any SAAF castles or squadron insignia.

4.4 Mirage IIIRZ 837

#837 was repainted in the soft-edged buff / green / grey matt colour scheme (original pattern). #837 did not have an anti-glare panel applied to the nose.

#837 was then repainted in an experimental three tone light grey / blue / dark grey scheme similar to that applied to some of the Mirage F1CZs. No squadron insignia were applied. Unlike #835, standard SAAF Castles were applied at all six positions on #837. The intake Castle was located very far forward, just aft of the intake leading edge. "837" was applied to the rear fuselage in black. Pilot's name "Capt. Barries Barnard" was painted in black beneath the windshield. All insignia and markings were oversprayed with the base colours to tone them down (see image below). #837 was delivered to the SAAF Museum at Swartkop in this colour scheme.



RZ #837 in the three-tone blue/grey low visibility camouflage. Image is dated 1990.



Photo © D Wingrin

RZ #837 at Swartkop Air Base after delivery to the SAAF Museum. The light grey and light blue camouflage on the forward fuselage appears to wrap around to cover the entire doppler fairing including the usual cream based antenna.

#837 was then transferred to the Military Museum in Bloemfontein and was repainted in the feathered buff / green matt colour scheme. The entire nose was incorrectly painted black for some reason.



RZ #837 at Bloemfontein in an unfortunately bogus colour scheme.

4.5 .Mirage IIRZ 838

#838 was repainted in the soft-edged buff/green camouflage (original pattern) and had the anti-glare panel applied to the nose.



Dassault-Breguet Mirage III RZ - SAAF-838

RZ #838 in soft edge buff/green camouflage. The Castles have been retained on the intakes and are visible on the port upper wing leading one to deduce that Castles were present in all six locations. 2 Squadron badge appears on the vertical stabilizer.

According to Piet van Schalkwyk (as posted on the unofficial SAAF website forum) : *“At the original re-paint into the buff and green colours, 838 had the orange/white/blue fin flash applied to both sides of the rudder as well as Springbok castles to the upper wing surfaces. The fuselage Castles were a few inches further back, compared to when she was delivered to the Museum, but all Castles were soon removed from the aircraft and only the fin flashes and unit insignia remained. By the time of the Pietersburg show (late 1980's or early 90's), she had the fuselage Castles re-applied in the very far forward position, with the upper wing Castles still applied and the fin flash removed. The anti-glare panel was also already applied. This black anti-glare strip was only applied at a later date and not on the original re-paint. At the time of delivery to the Museum she had new Springbok Castles applied to the fuselage only, in a very far forward position, with the 2 Squadron badge on both sides of the fin.*

838 was delivered by Dudley Trollip to the SAAF Museum in this colour scheme. Had the shark mouth and eyes applied for delivery to the Museum. What is important is that the aircraft had the standard pattern as applied in the hard edge and gloss finish era, and not the modified pattern as applied to the CZ's with the additional green sections across the top of the fuselage.

After delivery to the Museum, 838 was repainted off base and the finish incorrectly resembles that of the Mirage IIR2Z 854 which was in gloss finish with a hard edge (colour scheme as at 1990 when aircraft were withdrawn from service).” The shark's teeth were retained.”



RZ #838 with teeth and eyes applied. Camouflage is the soft edge matt scheme.
#838 has the centerline RP825 and two wing mounted 110G tanks installed - note the fins on the wing tanks and the heavily weathered orange protective coating the fuel tanks.

838 currently resides at the SAAF Museum AFB Swartkop.



Two images above of RZ #838 photographed at the SAAF Museum at Swartkop Air Base in 2018. As noted a few pages above, #838 never flew in the hard edge buff/green camouflage.



5 Mirage IIIR2Z - colours and camouflage

The SAAF ordered four reconnaissance Mirage IIIR2Zs. These were fitted with the higher thrust Atar 09K50 engine. They were given tail numbers 854, 855, 856 and 857.

The “2” in the “R2Z” and “D2Z” has been ascribed in several publications and internet sources to identify SAAF Mirages fitted with the Atar 09K50 engine. This is true only for the R2Z and not for the D2Z, which used the 09C engine.

A scalloped boundary layer splitter plate on the air intakes identifies that the 09K50 engine is installed in the R2Z. The intake leading edge was cut back to provide a larger intake area for higher air mass flow rate required for the 09K50 engine. This resulted in the distinctive scalloped intake boundary layer splitter plate. The R2Z is further different from the RZ in that the R2Z does not have the Doppler fairing on the lower forward fuselage.

5.1 Early camouflage scheme

The R2Zs were delivered in the factory applied standard SAAF hard-edge gloss buff/green/grey camouflage using the French colour mixes as noted elsewhere in this document for the D2Z. They had a black anti-glare panel ahead of the windshield which ran all the way to the pitot probe. The frames of the opening section of the canopies were painted entirely in buff when delivered. These were later repainted to match the adjacent fuselage camouflage. They had the six Castles applied, 30” on the upper and lower wings, and 24” fuselage Castles just aft of the intake leading edge.

Other details :

- Orange, white and blue flash was applied to the rudder.
- “MIRAGE R2Z / N°. 8xx” was added in black text over the rudder flash, the “8xx” being a placeholder for the actual aircraft serial number allocated.
- Aircraft tail number in 8” black numerals on the rear fuselage.
- Last two digits of tail number in small black numerals on nose gear door.
- “*Mirage R2Z*” in black script beneath windshield on forward fuselage
- Red airbrakes with yellow edging.
- All antennae on vertical stabilizer in light grey with black leading edges.
- Red trim line on upper wings just ahead of elevons.
- Some aircraft had a large 2 Squadron badge on top vertical stabilizer ahead of rudder.

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R2Z #856 in early delivery gloss hard edge camouflage scheme. 2 Squadron badge has not been applied to the vertical stabilizer. The entire canopy frame is painted in buff. Note the original French factory mounted RWR antennae on the leading and trailing edges of the vertical stabilizer. This was unique to the R2Z as the only SAAF Mirage III variant so equipped.



R2Z in standard hard edge, gloss buff/green/light blue camouflage. SAAF Castles in six locations. Canopy frame is painted buff. Red stripe is visible in front of the elevons. The airbrakes are in the fully open position. RP18R 500 liter fuel tanks are carried.



R2Z #855 in gloss hard edge camouflage scheme. The 2 Squadron badge is present on the vertical stabilizer as is the orange/white/blue rudder and *Mirage III R2Z* script on forward fuselage. The canopy frame has been painted to match the surrounding camouflage. Note the original French RWR antennae on the leading and trailing edge of the vertical stabilizer.



R2Z #854 trailing its drag chute. Two RP18R 500 liter tanks are on the wings. The canopy frame is painted in buff.

5.2 Later camouflage scheme

The R2Zs retained the standard SAAF hard-edge gloss buff/green/grey camouflage as well as the black anti-glare panel ahead of the windshield. However, the following adjustments were variably made to this colour scheme and markings:

- It would appear that the frame of the opening section of the canopy was repainted in the corresponding fuselage camouflage colour i.e. green
- The six Castles were removed on some aircraft.
- The squadron badge was removed from the vertical stabilizer.
- The orange, white and blue flash removed from the vertical stabilizer, as was the “MIRAGE R2Z / N°. 8xx” text.
- “*Mirage R2Z*” was removed from the forward fuselage.
- All conformal antennae panels were over painted in the base camouflage colours.
- This overall “toning down” of the aircraft likely coincided with the R2Z’s use in the operational area / southern Angola.

The following remained unchanged :

- Aircraft tail number remained in black on the rear fuselage.
- Last two digits of tail number remained in small back numerals on nose gear door.
- Airbrakes remained in red with yellow edging.
- Red trim line remained on upper wings just ahead of elevons.



Photo © Ivan Spring / Spring Air Archives

Unidentified R2Z with centerline RP825 fuel tank covered in the orange protective coating. Aircraft is devoid of any Castles or squadron badges. The ejection seat warning triangle is conspicuous beneath the canopy.

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R2Z #857 in standard hard edge buff/green camouflage with Castles and squadron badges removed and antennae painted over. The factory fitted French RWR antennae have been removed and replaced with "cats balls" spherical RWR antenna, just distinguishable behind the rearmost camera window on the nose and on the trailing edge of the vertical stabilizer above the rudder. #857 carries a load of centerline RP825 and wing mounted RP62 fuel tanks.



R2Z #857 in hard edge gloss buff/green camouflage with rudder markings, squadron badge and Castles removed and antennae painted over. The standard aircraft stenciling and ejection seat warning triangles are retained as are the red / yellow airbrakes and red line ahead of the elevons.



R2Z #854 showing off its upper surface camouflage pattern. Its carries the full original markings including painted rudder and Castels in six locations. The squadron badge has not been applied to the vertical stabilizer.



R2Z #857 at Ysterplaat AFB in plain hard edge buff/green camouflage and devoid of Castles and squadron badge.

Radar warning receiver variations from early to late R2Z

- The R2Zs were delivered with the standard forward and rear facing Dassault installed fin mounted RWR antennae. These were located near the top of the vertical stabilizer facing forward and aft.
- The change to the later colour scheme appeared to coincide with the installation of the locally developed Compact Radar Warning System (CRWS) consisting of two half spherical Radar Warning Receiver (RWR) antennae either side on the top of the vertical stabilizer and two more on the lower forward fuselage just aft of the camera bay.

R2Z #857 now resides as a static exhibit at the SAAF Museum at AFB Ysterplaat. See image below. Note the scalloped intake splitter plate which identifies this as being fitted with the Atar 09K50 engine.



6 SAAF Mirage III marking details

This section addresses some of the specific aircraft markings and symbology found on the SAAF Mirage III fuselage and wings. Some of the images represent aircraft which have undergone refurbishment and repainting by the various Museums. As always, and notwithstanding the good work done by these entities, there may be some errors in accuracy. It is best to check references.

6.1 SAAF Castles

As noted in Part 1, the SAAF Springbok insignia (“Castles”) were applied as standard as follows :

- Wings, upper and lower, 30 inch¹ diameter – the Springbok faces towards the fuselage with legs towards the wing trailing edge.
- Fuselage, 24 inch diameter – the springbok faces forward.
- The Springbok was a gold colour with the blue Castle outlined in white.



Unidentified BZ in delivery natural metal scheme with Castle far back on the intake. Springbok faces forward. Note details of red trim on the intakes and the wing leading edge. The small red panel behind the canopy is the canopy emergency release handle. The stylized canopy marking is present above the forward ejection seat warning triangle, but appears to not have been applied above the rear triangle. Other details to note are : a) the forward canopy upper reinforcing frames in white, b) what appears to be a light grey hood / curtain in the rear cockpit for blind flying training.

¹ This dimension is the diameter of a circle drawn around the five points of the Castle



Castle on port intake of CZ #813 taken at the National Museum of Military History in Johannesburg. Springbok faces forward.



Castle on starboard wing of CZ #813. Springbok faces inwards.



Castle on BZ #816 at the SAAF Museum Swartkop. Springbok faces forward.



CZ #800 "Black Widow" was given a Castle with Eagle insignia as part of its final colour scheme. However, the eagle's head should be looking forward !

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Castle on starboard wing of RZ #835. Note the three "KEEP OFF" stencils on the two elevon control surfaces and the inboard pitch control damper. Note also the red leading edge to the control surfaces. This aircraft has been repainted to present the aircraft in the delivery colour scheme so it is assumed that adequate research was conducted prior to repainting and that the details are correct. The round object is the blue formation light.



D2Z #851 showing the typical markings on the front end of a Mirage as would be expected to be seen concurrent with the hard edge buff/green camouflage scheme. Note how the camouflage wraps onto the inside leading edge of the intake splitter plate.



Unidentified EZ. Note that the stylized canopy above the triangle appears to be “facing” backwards. White text on the triangle is “EJECTION SEAT”. Note also “Cyrano II CSF” on unpainted natural metal nose cone. Note how far forward the Castle is on the intake. The doppler antenna is a cream colour. If trying to replicate a Springbok, this one would be useful as an accurate representation on an operational aircraft in original paint scheme.



Unidentified EZ showing marking details on forward fuselage including “Cyrano II CSF” on unpainted natural metal nose cone. The red surrounded black circle above the doppler antennae is the tube used to locate the ground recovery tow bar.



Detail of Springbok on intake Castle on CZ #813.
The style and dimensions of the Springbok appeared to vary through the life of its use by the SAAF.

6.2 Ejection seat warning symbols



Starboard fuselage warning triangle on BZ #816, made up of stylized canopy and red white triangle. Note dual language. This would be more or less typical of ejection warning signs on all SAAF Mirage IIIs with the exception of the grey/green RZs. This would be mirrored on the port side. The straight edge of the stylized canopy would face forward (to the right in this image).



CZ #813. Note the subtle differences to that of BZ #816 above - the white text is now in Afrikaans and the red English and Afrikaans text has been swapped. The stylized canopy is in orange instead of red.



Starboard side of BZ #818, front seat warning triangle. Once again some subtle variations – the red text below the warning triangle is now in Afrikaans and the text on the red triangle has all but disappeared.



Port side of BZ #818, front seat warning triangle.



Starboard side of BZ #818. The transparent object is the blast shield which would prevent injury to the rear occupant in the case of ejection or damage to the front canopy in flight. Note how the camouflage colours wrap into the leading edges of the intakes and boundary layer splitter plate. Cockpit interior is all black as is the case for all SAAF Mirage IIIs.



Port side of BZ #818 showing front and rear ejection warning triangles. The stylized canopy appears in red above both warning triangles. There is a yellow surround to the canopy emergency release handle window aft of the canopy.



Starboard side of BZ #818. Note that the stylized canopy marking appears above both the front and rear ejection seat warning triangles. It appears that this may have not been the case for DZ and D2Z aircraft where the rear canopy marking was deleted as is shown in images elsewhere in this document.



Unidentified CZ showing forward fuselage markings including the standard NATO symbols on the avionics bay panel aft of the cockpit. The canopy emergency release handle window aft of the canopy is surrounded in solid yellow edging.



CZ #809. The typical forward fuselage markings and standard maintenance and warning stenciling are present. This time the canopy emergency release handle has a yellow surround with black stripes. All of these markings would have been oversprayed in the base blue / grey camouflage but it would appear that the camouflage has weathered exposing the brighter coloured symbology beneath.



III CZ #800 "Black Widow" showing standard ejection seat warning details.



CZ #800 with the late Glen Warden in the cockpit. Note the non-standard detail around the canopy emergency release handle window.



Unidentified DZ. Details to note is the white text on the front seat warning triangle is "EJECTION SEAT" whilst on the rear seat triangle it is "UITSKIET STOEL". Note also that the stylized canopy does not appear above the rear seat warning triangle. Note also the standard warning and maintenance markings on the fuselage aft of the cockpit.



RZ #835. Note that the warning triangle is not red and white as is typically the case for all other SAAF Mirage IIIs variants. Although this aircraft has been repainted by the SAAF Museum to represent the delivery green/grey camouflage, it would appear that the markings have been applied correctly when comparing to period photographs of the grey/green RZs. The slender objects either side of the forward canopy are the camera aiming mechanisms installed on the RZs. The two small holes beneath these are the attachment points for the access ladder.

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R2Z #857 showing port forward fuselage marking details. Note absence of Castles. Typical warning and maintenance symbols and text are present aft of the cockpit as is the yellow surround to the canopy emergency release handle window.



R2Z #857 showing starboard forward fuselage marking details.

6.3 Canopy emergency release handle windows



R2Z #857 showing details of markings and text associated with the canopy emergency release handles.



RZ #835 showing details of canopy emergency release handle markings. The window has been broken and the red handle lies in a horizontal position. It would normally be stowed in the vertical using the square black clip to retain it in position as shown in the following image.



CZ #813 showing details of canopy emergency release handle markings. Note mismatched camouflage between canopy frame and fuselage.

6.4 Air brakes

The wing airbrakes on all SAAF Mirage IIIs were generally painted red with yellow edging. This was applied to both the top and bottom airbrakes. However, the “no-step” markings on the upper airbrakes varied. Some had no markings whilst others had text stenciling “NO STEP” or “BLY AF” or a boot print with a cross symbolizing no step.



BZ #816 showing plain red / yellow airbrake. Note also the red stripe ahead of the elevon hinge line. This was painted on some aircraft on the wing surface ahead of the elevons whilst on other aircraft on the leading edge of the elevon.



BZ #818 showing red / yellow airbrake with “BLY AF” (Keep off) stenciling.



CZ #813 showing red/yellow airbrake with boot and cross marking.
The coat hanger shaped symbol is to designate the aircraft wing hoisting hard point which is located behind the semi-spherical access hatch.



R2Z #857 showing plain red/yellow airbrakes with no "no step" markings.



Port wing of RZ #838 showing plain red/yellow airbrakes with no "no step" markings.



RZ #857 showing red/yellow airbrake on underside of starboard wing.

6.5 Wing control surfaces



CZ #805 showing single boot and cross in black on inboard elevon only. There appears to be a similar marking on the air brake. The air brake is painted red with yellow trim. The round object near the wing tip is a blue formation light.



CZ #813 showing single boot and cross in black and red on inboard elevon only.



RZ #857 showing no “no step” markings on the elevons or pitch control surfaces.



RZ #835 showing “KEEP OFF” markings on all three control surfaces on starboard wing. Note that the red stripe is painted on the elevon leading edge and not the wing surface.

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RZ #835 showing "KEEP OFF" markings on all three control surfaces on port wing.



D2Z #849 showing what looks like "keep off" markings on the two inboard control surfaces on the starboard wing : the markings on the inboard pitch control surface appear to be "KEEP OFF" with the words one above the other, whilst the markings on the inboard elevon may be "BLY AF".

6.6 2 Squadron badge



BZ #818 showing the 8" standard aircraft number as well as the 2 Squadron "Flying Cheetahs" badge.



2 Squadron badge on CZ #813. The detail of the actual badge as applied to various aircraft would vary. "Sursum Prorsusque" is Latin for "Upward and onward".

7 References

The Unofficial SAAF Website – www.saairforce.co.za - both reference section and discussion forums including the following contributors – Dean Wingrin, Piet van Schalkwyk (SAAFColours), Greg Swart (GregAir), Alan Taylor (FlyingSpringbok), Vernon Vice (Spice), Joker, Brent Best (Kremlin), Sean Thackray (Madmax).

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