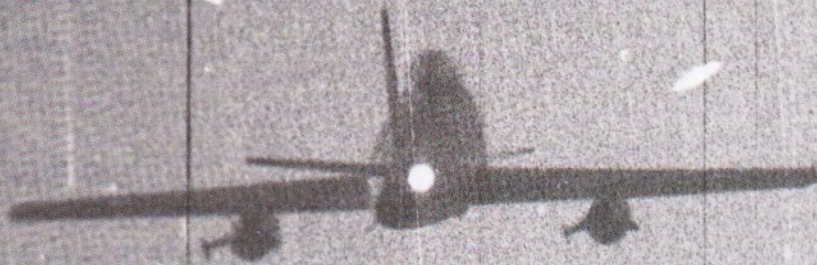


Close-up of Wg Cdr Middleton's Sabre in the Author's gunsight camera. Over-ranged on the gunsight, but at this distance (200 yards/180m) this would probably have been a hit, albeit this was one frame from a rapid fly-through.
All photos Author



ROAD TO PESHAWAR



No.208 Squadron Hunter FGA.9 XF378 in extra long range fit.

ROD DEAN REMEMBERS AN
AIR COMBAT TRAINING
SESSION IN PAKISTAN WITH
RAF HUNTERS 'MIXING IT'
WITH **PAF SABRES AND
MIGs**

A LETTER in the April issue of *FlyPast* (*Background to Pakistan's Treasures*) and the mention of the late Wg Cdr Mervyn L Middleton of the Pakistan Air Force, reminded me of an interesting interlude that took place in early 1971.

At that time I was serving on 208 Squadron ('Naval B' to the knowledgeable) flying Hawker Hunters FGA.9s from RAF Muharraq in Bahrain. That February it was announced that we were to take part in a short detachment to Pakistan with four aircraft, eight pilots and groundcrew. The plan was for us to spend a week at Peshawar, then the Pakistan Air Force's main North American F-86 Sabre operating base. We

would be taking part in various types of combat training activity with F-86s and other PAF combat aircraft.

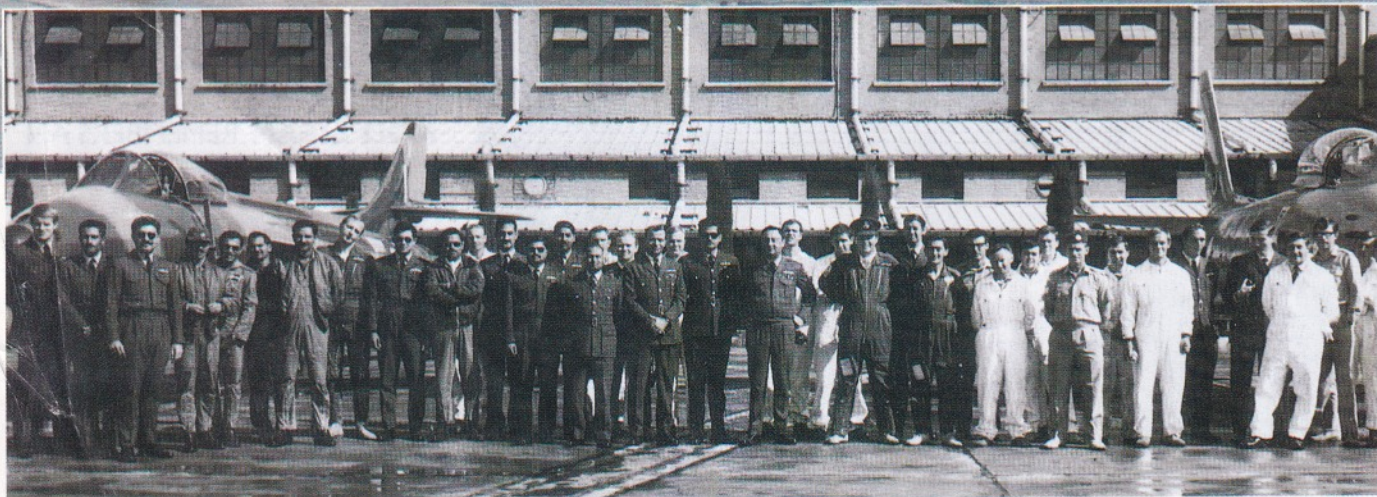
On Monday, March 1, 1971, four Hunters departed Muharraq with Sqn Ldr George Ord (OC 208 Squadron) leading, Fg Off Roger Wholey as No.2, myself as No.3, and Wg Cdr Buck Ryan (OC Operations Wing) as No.4. The first leg of two hours took us to Karachi Masroor for refuelling. The AW Argosy carrying the additional aircrew, the groundcrew, the spares and, most importantly, about 30 cases of

The Author trying out a Sabre cockpit. Definitely a good view — now can I try it, please?





RAF and PAF pilots and groundcrew at the end of their detachment to Peshawar.



PAF pilots try out the Hunter at Peshawar. A bit cramped when compared to the Sabre. Note the 100 gallon drop tanks fitted inboard.

whisky, arrived about an hour after us. The whisky caused us some concern. Pakistan, at that time, was not 'dry', but the price of booze was astronomical, so we brought our own.

When the Argosy arrived, George Ord got hold of the local customs man and explained that the transport was carrying these supplies because "we would be expected to throw a party at Peshawar". For some obscure reason, the customs man accepted this and we were allowed to bring the lot in.

PESHAWAR TIME WARP

The next leg took us to Peshawar in 100 minutes, where we were met by the senior station

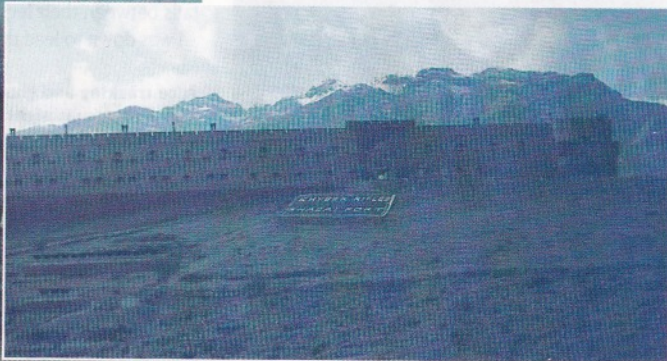
personnel, including the Wing Commander Flying, Mervyn L Middleton. The PAF had made first-class arrangements for our visit: officers were billeted in the Officers Mess, SNCOs in the Sergeants Mess, and the airmen in a hotel downtown. Transport, with drivers on permanent call, was also allocated: a car going to the 'Boss' and the OC Ops, a minibus for the pilots, and a coach for the lads – "go anywhere, any time, just ring up MT and book it". Try telling that to an RAF MT Officer!

After two long flights, our first requirement was a shower followed, in short order, by a beer. So off we went to the mess.

The Officers Mess – a beautiful one-storey

building set among well-tended plants and trees, with large, well-ventilated rooms – looked as though it had changed little since the 1930s. Right – drop the kit, into the shower, swift change and into the bar for the welcoming party.

I stepped out of the shower ten minutes later to find I had been robbed. Everything – clothes, bags, flying suit, the lot – had gone. While I was musing on this and wondering how I was going to raise the alarm with only a towel wrapped around me, there was a gentle knock at the door and an aged retainer stepped in with a cup of tea. He announced that he had unpacked my things and taken my flying suit to be 'dhobied'



The Khyber Rifles Headquarters – *real* cucumber sandwiches and tea!

(washed by hand), all in the few minutes it had taken me to shower.

He asked me if I knew a Flt Lt Dermot Boyle, as this had been his room in the 1930s when he was on (I think) 6 Squadron and when he, as a young lad, had been Boyle's bearer. Ye gods, I was right – nothing had changed. The old man seemed pleased to know that Flt Lt Dermot Boyle had done quite well in his RAF career (Marshal of the Royal Air Force and a knight of the realm), even though I was not acquainted with him personally.

It later became apparent that it was quite possible to live in that mess with only one set of clothes – the instant that garments came off, they disappeared, to be returned some 30 minutes later washed, immaculately pressed, and ready to wear again. This was to be the first of many indications that the 'British Raj' was then still alive and well in Pakistan.

HIMALAYAN BACKDROP

The next day saw the start of flying, the Himalayas providing a splendid backdrop. The first event was a '4 v 2': four PAF Sabres versus two RAF Hunters. Now I know we were playing away, but the odds seemed slightly in favour of the home team – particularly when we heard that we would be running a Combat Air Patrol

(CAP) at 20,000ft (6,100m) over a given line and that we would be 'bounced' from a radar-directed intercept with the four-ship, almost certainly with a height and speed advantage – interesting!

My No.2 was one of our JPs (Junior Pilots) by the name of Dave Stanley and I briefed him that we would not, under any conceivable circumstances, play the Sabre's game, but rather use the Hunter's relative advantages, namely high Mach number performance. The Sabre could undoubtedly out-turn a Hunter, but above Mach 0.9 it would be at considerable disadvantage in terms of climb ability and turn performance. So although we were briefed to CAP at Mach 0.8 (another advantage to the home side!) as soon as we had them visual, the game was on and we would accelerate to Mo.9 and maintain *at least that speed* and not below. Off to the CAP.

We had been on CAP over a very good line feature – a range of low hills about 20 nautical miles (37km) to the south of Peshawar – for 45 minutes with absolutely nothing happening. Where were they? They had been right behind us on take-off. Eventually we found out that the PAF ground radar was not very sharp and the four Sabres had spent 45 minutes rushing around on various radar headings without get-

ting within 10 miles (18.5km) of us.

Eventually the PAF leader, Wg Cdr Middleton, gave up and just headed for the line of hills. Like myself and Dave, he was not only getting very frustrated but was also getting a bit tight on fuel for anything like a meaningful combat. Dave eventually saw the Sabres about the same time they saw us: in our 'six o'clock high' range, about three to four miles (5.5 to 7km) and closing. Great!

I knew our planned tactics would work, but also that they would have resulted in a long, delicate dancing act before we ended up in any advantageous position, and neither we nor, I suspected, the Sabres had the fuel for that kind of game after spending 45 minutes swanning about. What the heck – we intended to have a scrap before we had to call it off because of fuel problems, even if we ended up losing. "Hard inwards turnabout – go!"

Within seconds we were mixing it with four Sabres. A turning fight was on – something which had definitely not been planned.

The Hunter turns quite well, particularly with a notch or two of flap out, but these late model Canadair-built Sabres could, as predicted, more than match it – they went round on the proverbial sixpence. Fairly soon, I ended up with one particular Sabre latched onto my tail and there was no way I could either shake him off or out-turn him. What next – sit here and watch myself die, even if it was only on film? Not likely.

Sydney Camm endowed the Hunter with superb handling, particularly after extended leading edges were fitted to the wings, and magic flaps like barn doors which could (ignoring the speed limits) be chucked out at any speed. This, plus the carefree handling of the 200 series Rolls-Royce Avon, meant there was a further trick to be tried – stopping. Although not in the same league as the HS Harrier, the Hunter could generate fairly high rates of deceleration by slam closing the throttle, applying full airbrake and full flap, and pulling the hard turn right into deep and very heavy airframe



Pakistan Air Force Canadair Sabre 6.

buffet. The aircraft remained fully controllable, but lost speed at an incredible rate.

My opponent could not see any of this as I was top-side up to him. The Sabre suddenly and unexpectedly found himself closing at a high rate, with insufficient time to get a tracking solution and too much speed to hold the turn, and he flew through my flightpath, astern, at fairly close range. At this stage we hoped that Rolls-Royce had put this Avon together well, and slammed the throttle full open, airbrake in, half flap, a boot full of top rudder and aileron and nose high reverse the turn, hopefully into a barrel roll to drop behind the opponent – well, not quite!

As I reversed, there was the Sabre about 30 yards (46m) away, on a parallel heading,



canopy-to-canopy and pulling hard towards me – damn, these things don't half turn! Now I was not about to chicken out and lose this hard-won equality, but neither was the Sabre prepared to ease off because I would certainly have got him. Fortunately, he was going a bit faster than I was, and he flew across my nose at very, very close range top-side up and with his fin appearing about to slice through my nose (I had an outstanding view into his cockpit). He missed, but not by much.

As he dived out of it, I followed him down and managed to get a few fleeting shots but nothing to write home about. As we got down to tree-top level – so much for the 7,000ft (2,133m) above ground-level minimum height! – we had reached our fuel limit and had to knock it off.

The Sabres were on the ground first and their pilots were standing around waiting for us to taxi in. As I stopped, I noticed Wg Cdr Middleton walking over towards me. What now – not a rocket on the first sortie? It just so happened that the PAF had very similar flying rules to the RAF and the minimum range for combat, for obvious safety reasons, was set at 600ft (180m) in a 'bubble' around the aircraft which must not be infringed.

He waited as I climbed down the ladder and started to walk back with me. All he said was: "600 feet?" "Yes," I replied, "give or take a foot or two". "Good, I'm glad we agree." So I had been fighting the Wing Commander. He was certainly good, but I like to think he learned something new about the Hunter.

Then the next pair were off, and it became apparent that they had also been taken to the cleaners by the Sabres by playing their game and not the Hunter game. Things were not going well.

RAIN STOPPED PLAY

We lost the next day-and-a-half to heavy rain, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of a test match. This gave us the opportunity to visit the Khyber Pass, and have tea and cucumber sandwiches (with the crusts cut off, I'm not joking) in the Khyber Rifles Officers Mess. An armed escort was provided to prevent the locals from holding us hostage. It was a memorable day out, if only for the cucumber sandwiches and the opportunity to sign a visitors book signed by the Queen, President Kennedy and other world-famous names.

Although the weather ruled out flying, we made a couple of important decisions. Firstly, we had flown the aircraft to Peshawar with the Extra Long Range fit, two 230 gallon (1,045 litre)

24 hours to raise the money," he said. "Only hard currency, sterling or dollars, not rupees," we reminded him. I do not know how you raise £1,440 in Peshawar at 24 hours notice, but he did it. The cash injection to the squadron fund ensured that we had an excellent disbandment party when 208 folded in August 1971.

The rain stopped and we were raring to go, but the runway was flooded. Wg Cdr Middleton asked Air Traffic Control how long it would take to clear the runway, and on being told that the sweeper vehicles were having no effect, he detailed 60 PAF airmen to grab brooms, and double out to the runway and sweep it dry! (I told you the British Raj was alive and well!). Mind you, the look on the faces of our ground-crew was worth a fortune when we jokingly told them they were on next!

BRING ON THE MIGS

Things remained still very much in favour of the PAF as we came to the last day. We still did not have anything resembling a kill and only two opportunities left to redeem ourselves. The high power section, the 'Boss' and 'Buck' Ryan, set forth to do battle with a pair of Chinese-built MiG-19 *Farmers* – the Shenyang F-6 – which operated out of Sarghoda, some 130 nautical miles (240km) south south east of Peshawar. They came back with their tails between their legs.

I was down to lead the last pair, again with young

Nice tracking and good ranging – definite kill. The Author's gunsight film of the Hunter versus MiG-19 combat.



Rain stopped play. PAF Sabres and a RAF Hunter in the deluge at Peshawar, March 1971.

tanks inboard and two 100 gallon (454 litre) tanks outboard. On arrival, the 100s had been removed and we flew with the 230s. We obviously needed to consider performance ability, and as most sorties were of a fairly short duration the 230s were a bit of an overkill and imposed a performance penalty. Off they came, to be replaced by the 100s inboard. We thought this would help.

The second decision revolved around the whisky. A visit to a local Chinese restaurant (yes, they have them in Peshawar, too) had brought the not-entirely-unexpected enquiry from the head man: "Psst – got any whisky for sale?" "Yes. What are you prepared to pay?" Negotiations continued for some while and we eventually agreed on £10 a bottle. Bear in mind that this was 1971 and the stuff only cost 10 shillings (50p) a bottle in the NAAFI.

At this stage, we had not revealed how much we had to sell and the restaurant owner was taken aback, to say the least, when we suggested we could let him have 12 crates! "It'll take me

Stanley as my No.2. This had to go well and, regretfully, I told Dave I was taking a much more experienced pilot with me – Roger Wholey, one of the best combat pilots I have ever known. Dave was disappointed, but fully understood my reasoning. Roger and I blasted off absolutely determined either to get these two MiGs or not bother coming back.

We were at 40,000ft (12,200m) on the north-bound leg of a north-south race track about 40 miles (74km) north of Sarghoda when we saw them, in contrails coming in from 3 o'clock. We split vertically, Rog going low for speed and turning into them fairly hard, and me going high and turning gently.

It worked – they both followed Rog, but could not turn with him. After less than one turn, I was in a position to drop on the back man and Rog was working into a good position on the leader. It obviously seemed to the No.2 MiG that this was going to be a good 'sandwich', with him getting Rog before Rog got the MiG leader.

He was wrong. I came down right into his '6'

and closed to about 400 yards (360m) before the MiG pilot saw me and broke hard right. Too late, I was in and staying – that'll teach him to clear his '6 o'clock' before committing! Rog latched onto the leader and stayed behind him for the rest of the fight. We were now two independent one-to-one combats, being split beyond visual range and doing very much our own thing, while still keeping track of events in the other fight by radio. All seemed to be going very well.

Over the next five minutes or so, both fights worked their way down from 40 thousand to deck level with little change. The MiG could roll very rapidly, well in excess of the Hunter roll rate, though this is no great advantage with someone camped right behind you. Despite

pearing at 200lb (25 gallons/114 litres) a minute, and the MiG-19, with two engines and reheat, was probably worse off. After a couple of minutes at very low level, my man started running flat out on the deck on a southerly heading. Rog reported that his man was doing the same. They were obviously heading home, and we followed.

Fuel was getting a bit tight, but we were going to follow them back to Sarghoda, even if it meant landing there because of fuel shortage. I saw the airfield when we had about three miles (5km) to run and at about the same time, the other MiG – with Rog firmly glued to his tail – appeared line abreast of us. There we were, a big box of two MiG-19s and two Hunters doing the best part of 600 knots, on the deck, heading right for Sarghoda.

As the MiGs broke downwind over Sarghoda, Rog

on? The line Chief gave us an explanation: "We didn't want you worrying about over-stressing – you just had to get them and we would have straightened the aircraft out afterwards." As it happened, neither of us had over-stressed.

The aircraft were handed back to be made ready for departure the following day, and we went downtown for some shopping before the farewell party with the remainder of the whisky. Now what was it that She-Who-Must-Be-Obedyed had said she wanted? A brass inlaid sandalwood coffee table, very good quality and extremely cheap.

How I ended up with an ancient mountain flintlock gun over 6ft long instead, how we shipped/smuggled it back to Bahrain in a Hunter pitot head box (the pitot head was subsequently recovered by the Air Attaché), and the ear-bashing

Year 1971		AIRCRAFT		Captain or 1st Pilot	Co-pilot 2nd Pilot Pupil or Crew	DUTY (Including number of day or night landings as 1st Pilot or Dual)	Day Flying			Night Flying			Flt Totals (7)
Month	Date	Type and Mark	No.				1st Pilot	2nd Pilot	Dual	1st Pilot	2nd Pilot	Dual	
— Totals brought forward							1533.50		178.35	64.15		12.20	1789.1
FEBRUARY	16	HUNTER T.7	XL 585	SELF	FL OFF THOMPSON	I.F.	1.05					1.05	
	17	HUNTER F.9	XJ 636	SELF		SIM. STRIKE 'C' L.L.C.W.	1.15					1.15	
	18		XJ 636	SELF		SIM. STRIKE 'C' 2.V.2	1.20					1.20	
	19		XJ 636	SELF		HI. BATTLE I.V.I. L.L.C.W.	1.15					1.15	
	22		XF 376	SELF		SIM. STRIKE 'C' I.V.I.	1.40					1.40	
	22		XF 431	SELF		RECCE HIWA'S. I.V.I.	1.45					1.45	
	24		XF 445	SELF		SIM. STRIKE 'C'	1.30					1.30	
	25		XF 687	SELF		8 HI-BATT. 4V4 COMBAT (CPB)	1.40					1.40	
<i>Paul Ray FLORES</i> SUMMARY FOR FEBRUARY 'A' FLT. UNIT 208 SQN HUNTER F.(G.A.) 9 SQN. LDR. DATE 1.3.71 HUNTER T.7. OR 208 SQN. SIGNATURE <i>Rodney Chen.</i> TOTAL							21.30			1.15			22.45
							1.05						1.05
							22.35			1.15			23.50
							TOTAL HUNTER.						
MARCH	1	HUNTER F.9	XJ 636	SELF		MUHARRAQ - KARACHI (MASROOR)	2.00					2.00	
	1		XJ 636	SELF		KARACHI (MASROOR) - PESHAWAR	1.40					1.40	
	2		XF 519	SELF		2.V.4 (F.86 F)	1.00					1.00	
	4		XJ 636	SELF		2.V.2. (M ₁₄ 19)	0.45					0.45	
	5		XJ 636	SELF		PESHAWAR - KARACHI (MASROOR)	1.40					1.40	
	6		XJ 636	SELF		KARACHI (MASROOR) - MUHARRAQ	2.30					2.30	
	9		XF 519	SELF		I.V.I. COMBAT E.S.E.'s	1.20					1.20	
	9		XJ 688	SELF		4.V.2 COMBAT	1.00					1.00	
	10		XF 519	SELF		4.V.2., 2.V.2, L.L.C.W.	1.00					1.00	
	11		XL 585	BYRNE	SELF	C.F.S. CHECK	1.00					1.00	
Totals carried forward							1559.15		178.35	64.15		12.20	1814.25

The Author's logbook showing the Peshawar detachment.

having a theoretical speed advantage, this was not all that apparent.

It probably would have been if the fight had stayed at high level for any time where the MiG-19's supersonic capability would have told, but most of the time we were below 20 thousand and the aircraft seemed fairly evenly matched on speed between there and low level. Despite everything my man threw at me – hard breaks, attempted forced fly-throughs into the previously-described barrel roll, slowing down into a 'scissors' (very low speed cross-overs trying to make the opponent fly ahead) – he could not shake me.

Rog was having the same result with his fight. It was very clear that at medium and low level the Hunter had the match on the MiG-19 for turning ability, was much superior at low speed handling, and that the maximum speed difference was nil.

This could not be allowed to go on for much longer. At low level and full power, fuel was disap-

and I both got the 'bingo' lights – 1,300lb (590kg) of fuel remaining and something like 130 nautical miles to go in the opposite direction. The 600 knots was converted into a rapid climb via the first 60% or so of a loop and a half roll, and within a very short time we were back at 40,000ft (12,200m) and at range speed for the return to Peshawar, where we landed with about 400 pounds of fuel remaining in each aircraft – a good sortie that had lasted all of 45 minutes.

HONOUR RESTORED

Honour was restored. We had given the final pair of MiGs a right pasting because they allowed us to play our game and they let the fight get quickly down to a height where they had no advantage. It was the same lesson as our fights with the Sabres – play the fight to your advantage, not your opponent's.

It was only after landing that I noticed that the 'g' meter in my aircraft was covered in black bodge tape – why? Roger's was the same. What was going

I got for this back home are all incidents best glossed over. Suffice to say that 'Er Indoors is still here and that the gun is a right swine to balance your coffee on!

We left Peshawar on Friday, March 5, with a good beat-up and night-stopped Karachi Masroor with the Sabre squadron based there. The journey into Karachi for a Chinese meal (how come everybody likes Chinese food?) in three cars driven by PAF fighter pilots and the three minor shunts we had on the way there and back (including one which involved two of our cars), should be consigned to history. After a relaxed start on Saturday, we departed for home. The final leg had its moments, but only Roger and I talk about that.

Until I read Andrew Thomas's letter, I was unaware that Wg Cdr Middleton had died in the Pakistan/Indian conflict which followed a few months after our visit. A great shame – he was certainly a gentleman and an excellent fighter pilot, but how, as a Pakistani, did he end up with the name of Mervyn L Middleton?