

# Eagle eyed

ST LOUIS

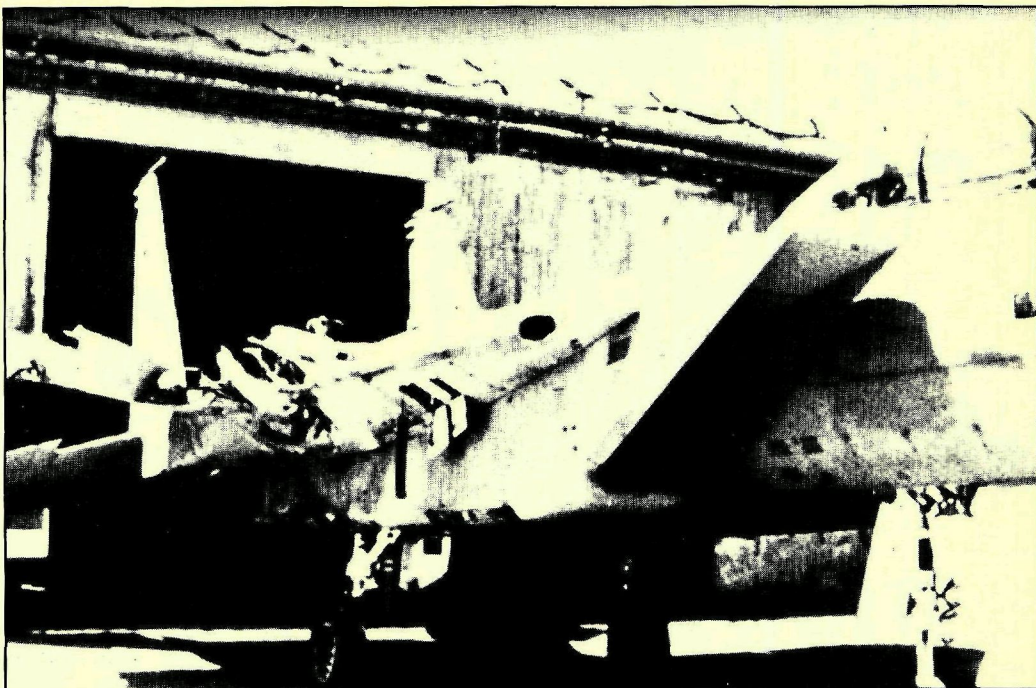
The McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle has now been in service just over ten years, and the worldwide F-15 fleet recently accumulated 1 million flying hours, reports **Mike Gaines**.

On April 1 Eagle deliveries stood at 940 aircraft, including 50 built under licence by Mitsubishi. The US Air Force has 766 aircraft, Israel 50 (with the last three aircraft of Peace Fox 3 delivered last month), Saudi Arabia has 62 F-15s in service, and Japan 62. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia are likely to buy more Eagles in the next couple of years, and Japan has approved a fleet of 155 aircraft and has plans for more.

In the USA the F-15 is replacing the old Convair F-106 Delta Dart in air defence. The first dedicated AD squadron in the continental USA is the 48th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Langley AFB, Virginia, a second squadron, the 318th FIS, is at McChord AFB, Washington, and the 5th FIS is at Minot AFB, North Dakota. By the end of June the Eagle will have joined the Air National Guard, with the 122nd TFS at New Orleans taking its complement of F-15As and two-seat Bs. The 57th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Keflavik AB, Iceland, will trade its F-4E Phantoms for F-15Cs in July.

In operational service with the Israeli Air Force the Eagle has a kill ratio of 58½:0 including three MiG-25 Foxbats. In Saudi service the Eagle shot down two marauding Iranian F-4 Phantoms last year. In USAF service the F-15 has not seen action, but it has the best safety record of any fighter in US service, with an accident rate of 3.9/100,000hr to the end of 1984. The last 12 months' rate is 1.9/100,000hr. The setting up of F-15 air defence squadrons is a direct result of the attrition rate being substantially lower than predicted.

To put meaning behind the statistics, the F-15 has demonstrated its survivability



*This F-15 lost almost half its wing in a mid-air collision but was landed all the same*

on at least three memorable occasions. The first was when a Holloman-based USAF aircraft was involved in a mid-air collision during air combat training. The Eagle's left tailplane was ripped off flush with the fuselage, the left wing trailing edge was badly damaged, and the left rudder disappeared, along with most of the left fin. The aircraft was landed.

A Langley F-15 was skirting a thunderstorm when lightning struck the centre-line fuel tank, which exploded. The explosion put 200 fragments through the fuselage and fire damaged the underside of the aircraft, which was landed safely.

The most outstanding Eagle save was by the pilot of a foreign air force. During air combat training his two-seat F-15 was involved in a mid-air collision with an A-4 Skyhawk. The A-4 crashed and the Eagle lost its right wing from about 2ft outboard. After some confusion between the instructor, who said eject, and the student who outranked his instructor and said no, the F-15 was landed at its desert base. Touching down at 290kt, the hook was dropped for an approach and engagement. This slowed the F-15 to 100kt, when the hook weak link sheared, and the aircraft was then braked conventionally. It is said that

the student was later demoted for disobeying his instructor, then promoted for saving the aircraft.

McDonnell Douglas attributes the saving of this aircraft to the amount of lift generated by the engine intake/body and a "a hell of a good pilot".

For the future, the first F-15 subject to the Eagle multistage improvement programme is scheduled to roll out on June 20. "The MSIP F-15 will maintain a first-shot advantage against the MiG-29 and -31, and the Su-27", says MDC. "It can also attack anything else, from look-down/shoot-down against low-level supersonic cruise missiles to anti-satellite missions if Asat is given the go-ahead."

## Hornets fly in

RAAF WILLIAMTOWN

Two Royal Australian Air Force McDonnell Douglas F-18A Hornets made a 6,637 n.m. delivery flight from the USA to Australia on Friday May 24, in time to mark the official opening of RAAF Williamtown, one of

Australia's two F-18 bases.

Piloted by RAAF crews, the aircraft flew from NAS Lemoore, California, in a record 15hr stretch, one hour less than scheduled owing to favourable winds. The aircraft were supported by US Air Force KC-10 Extender tankers, taking on fuel 13 times during the trip.

Instructors from the RAAF's No 2 Operational Conversion Unit, who have been undergoing F-18 training at NAS Patuxent River, flew the Hornets. Wg Cdr Brian Robinson and Flt Lt Angus Larard flew the first with flight commander Sqn Ldr Laurie Evans and Flt Lt Gerry O'Brien at the controls of the other.

The RAAF has 75 Hornets on order, to be based at RAAF Williamtown and RAAF Tindal. Tanker aircraft (along with airborne early warning) to extend the range of effectiveness of F-18s look set to become priority buys in future budgets.

## TRACER...

Lockheed has delivered the sixth P-3B Orion to the Royal New Zealand Air Force. It will be upgraded before joining 5 Sqn in June next year. Cost of the aircraft is NZ\$19 million (£6.9 million), funds having been allocated in New Zealand's 1983 defence review.