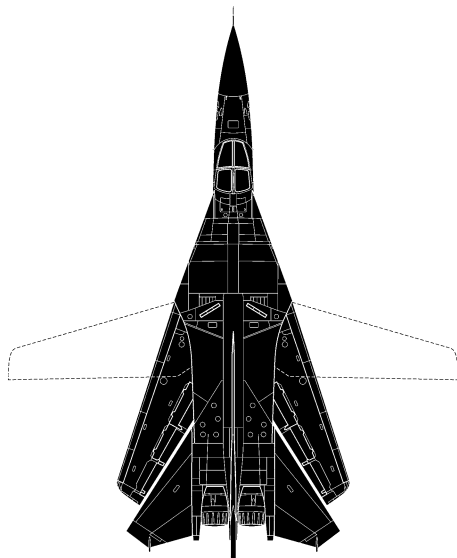


F-111 Aardvark



The F-111 Aardvark, born in controversy and initially plagued by accidents, became the best all-weather interdiction aircraft in history and also served well in a variety of other roles. It was the first variable-geometry aircraft to enter active US military service, and its wings could sweep back from 16 to 72.5 degrees.

In the beginning, the aircraft was known as the TFX (Tactical Fighter Experimental). In the early 1960s, the Air Force declared a need for a new supersonic strike aircraft, and the Navy issued a similar requirement for a fleet defense interceptor. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, ignoring advice of military leaders, ruled that the two services would have to get along with a single, common aircraft for both missions. The F-111 used large quantities of special high-strength D6AC steel. It featured side-by-side

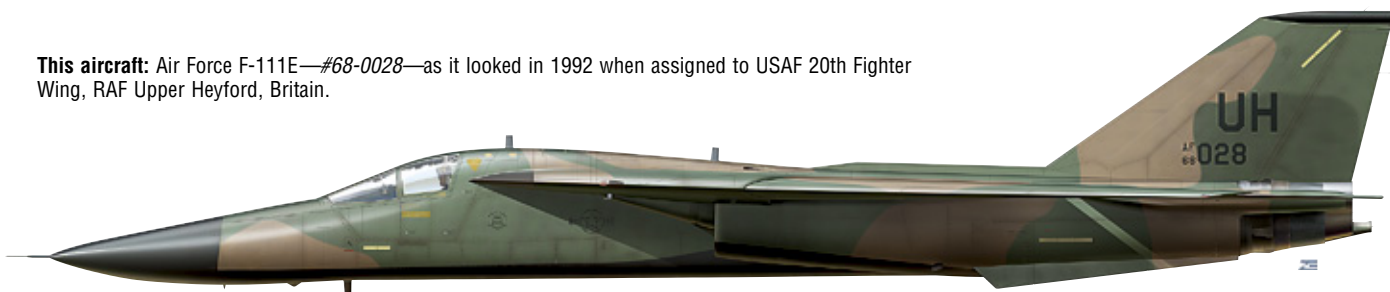
seating for the two-man crew. The F-111 also had an advanced AN/AVQ-26 Pave Tack electronic system for flight at extremely low level, at night, and in poor weather.

Everything about the proposed aircraft bred contention. It was planned as a Mach 2 multi-role, multiservice tactical fighter-bomber aircraft capable of low-altitude penetration. Achieving these goals required massive engineering work, which caused long delays and huge cost overruns.

The Navy, when it got the chance, dropped its F-111B version. Still, the Air Force variant proved itself many times over—in Vietnam, Libya, and the 1991 Gulf War. The EF-111 “SparkVark” variant was a smashing success. Even Strategic Air Command had a nuclear variant, the FB-111, which served well despite initial SAC reservations.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Air Force F-111E—#68-0028—as it looked in 1992 when assigned to USAF 20th Fighter Wing, RAF Upper Heyford, Britain.



An F-111A with wings forward for lower-speed flight.

In Brief

Designed, built by General Dynamics ★ first flight Dec. 21, 1964 ★ number built 563 ★ crew of two (pilot, weapon systems officer) ★ two Pratt & Whitney TF30 turbofan engines. **Specific to F-111F:** armament one 20 mm M61A1 cannon ★ load up to 32,500 lb of nuclear or conventional ordnance ★ max speed 1,452 mph ★ cruise speed 470 mph ★ max range 2,971 mi ★ weight (loaded) 82,800 lb ★ span 63 ft spread and 32 ft swept ★ length 73 ft 6 in ★ height 17 ft.

Famous Fliers

Notables: Fernando Ribas-Dominicci (KIA), Paul Lorence (KIA), Richard Brown, Michael Cool, Ivan Dethman, Charles Foster, Arthur Huhn, Brad Insley, Thomas Lennon, Ron Levy, Carl Poole, Christopher Russo, Robert Venkus, Sam Westbrook III. **Test pilots:** Dick Johnson, Val Prahl.

Interesting Facts

Called “Aardvark” many years before USAF adopted nickname at aircraft’s retirement ceremony ★ needed no drag chute or reverse thrust to slow down after a landing ★ achieved one of the best operational safety records of any aircraft in USAF history ★ sported a two-man cockpit module, which served as an emergency escape and survival shelter on land or water ★ played key role in 1972 Operations Linebacker and Linebacker II in Vietnam ★ carried the brunt of Operation El Dorado Canyon raid against Libya in April 1986 ★ F-111F flew 46 percent of US laser guided bomb strikes in 1991 Gulf War ★ in the Gulf War, scored an unofficial kill of an Iraqi Mirage, which flew into the ground trying to engage.