

Crash pilot in the air again

BRISBANE. — Being the American who piloted the first Australian F-111 to crash felt "like crashing dad's car", Capt. Bill Baker joked yesterday.

Capt. Baker and his Australian navigator, David Clarkson, catapulted to safety before the \$6.8 million jet plunged into farmland near Armidale, NSW, on Thursday.

The crash was the second for Capt. Baker, 30, from Shreveport, Louisiana. His F-100 bomber was hit by enemy fire over South Vietnam in 1970.

Capt. Baker, in Australia under an exchange arrangement with the U.S. Air Force, was back in the air yesterday.

He flew an F-111 for 2½ hours, 320 km over the Pacific, under a standard procedure to maintain a pilot's flying confidence after a crash.

Capt. Baker said he and Flight-Lt. Clarkson had reported on the explosion and their actions to the RAAF board of inquiry.

The swing-wing jet from the Amberley RAAF base in Queensland was on an exercise over the NSW northern tablelands.

He said they first noticed something wrong when they were at 9000 ft. and flying at 350 to 400 knots.

"We decided to bring it back to Amberley," he said.

"We had considerable time to assess the problem."

Asked if he had time to make sure the plane

id not crash into a populated area, he said: "We had been avoiding populated areas, but it's something you can never tell — you still worry about that."

Capt. Baker said the flames seen by people on the ground would have been from the ejector rockets.



• Capt. Baker

CRASHED AIRCRAFT DETAILS

A8-133

PILOT: SQNLDR John HOLT

☒ Killed

NAVIGATOR: FLTLT Adam NOORDINK

☒ Killed

MODEL-TYPE: D1

TYPE VERSION: F-111C

ROLLOUT DATE:

ACCEPTANCE DATE:

TRANSFER DATE:

DATE CRASHED: 29/09/1977

CRASH LOCATION: Evans Head, NSW

GD S/N: 9

USAF SERIAL NUMBER: A8-133

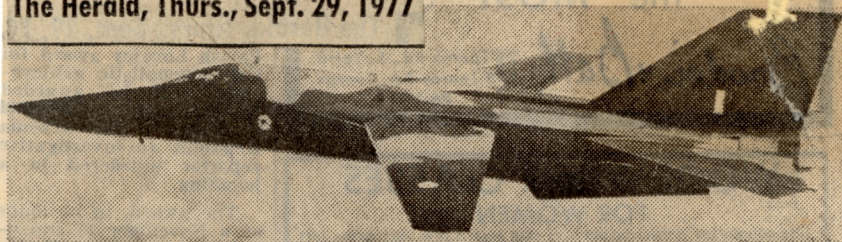
LH Wing Sn:

LH Eng Sn: P65-8901

RH Wing Sn:

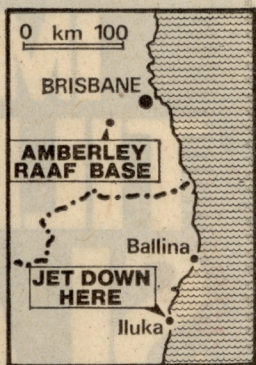
RH Eng Sn: P65-8947

NOTES: *RAAF AIRCRAFT. Aircraft no longer in the RAAF inventory - Crashed at Evans Head, NSW, on 29 September, 1977, impacting the ground 16.1 kms from the range. Crash was due to at least three Bird strikes. Ejection was initiated, however failed to save the crew. Most of the wreckage was buried on site. FLT Noordink was a pilot under training. AFHRS were 994.3*



An F-111 similar to the one that crashed.

TWO DIE IN F-111 CRASH



CANBERRA. — The pilot and navigator of an F-111 fighter-bomber were killed today when their swing-wing jet crashed in dense bushland.

Witnesses said the RAAF jet disintegrated in mid-air during a practice bombing run in NSW.

The crash touched off a bush fire which was raging out of control this afternoon.

Witnesses said the bodies of the pilot and navigator were found about 800 metres from the main wreckage. An area of several square kilometres was showered with wreckage, they said.

The names of the dead were not immediately available.

A vast plume of black smoke spiralled up from the wreckage while another F-111 circled overhead.

The jet, based at Amberley, Queensland, went down at Woody Head, near Iluka, NSW.

A witness nearby, former Fortitude Valley policeman Jack Starkey, said:

"I heard the plane first, then a mid-air thump, then the crash."

Mr W. Clutterbuck of Iluka said the fire in the wake of the crash was raging out of control.

"No one can reach the crash site except from the beach, and high tide at the moment is preventing that," he said.

"The only possible access is a thin dirt track used by a mineral sands company.

"There are no houses anywhere near the scene."

It was the second F-111 lost from the two squadrons of 24 American-built jets which began arriving in Australia in June, 1973.

The first RAAF F-111 crashed on April 23 this year near Armidale, NSW following engine difficulties.

An American pilot and his Australian navigator ejected safely.

The flyaway cost of an F-111 is \$6.8 million and the total project cost including spares and equipment for the acquisition of 24 models was \$270 million.

Yesterday an F-111 had to make an unscheduled landing at Coolangatta Civil Airport south of Brisbane after developing engine problems.

The F-111s, usually flying in pairs, operate down the Queensland coast from Stradbroke Island to the Evans Head bombing range.

Last August 12, another F-111 made a forced landing at Oakey, west of Brisbane, when cabin instruments indicated an engine malfunction.

Two die as F-111 dives into bush

THURSDAY 29 SEPT 77 From DON BAKER

CANBERRA. — Air Force experts are baffled by the crash yesterday of a \$6.8 million F-111 strike jet — the second in six months.

The two crewmen killed apparently made no attempt to eject from the plane.

There were no Mayday messages or any other suggestions that the jet was in trouble.

An Air Force spokesman said last night: "We are starting right from scratch on this one. The worry is we don't know what happened."

The two men killed were Sq.-Ldr. John Francis Holt, 34, married, with four children, who originally was from Melbourne, and Flight-Lt. Adam Phillip Noordink, 28, married with two children, originally from Caboolture, Queensland.

The jet was on a normal bombing practice run with another F-111 from Amberley South towards Evans Head, a beach resort in northern NSW.

'Thump, then the crash'

It was flying at about 1000 ft. above thick bush about 10.45 a.m. and was 10 km short of the bombing range when it suddenly dived into the ground.

People in the small fishing village of Iluka, about 10 km to the south said there had been a shudder like an earth tremor followed by an explosion and an orange cloud of smoke.

Mr Jack Starkey, a former Brisbane policeman, said: "I heard the plane first, then a mid-air thump, then the crash".

The chief of the local bushfire brigade, Mr Eddie Braz, said he reached the crashsite

about 20 minutes after the accident.

The plane had been "totally annihilated," he said.

"The largest intact section was a 10 ft. by 8 ft. piece of fuselage. The rest was just nuts and bolts."

Mrs Ruth Hammond who lives at Woody Head, just south of the crash site, said that about 11 a.m. her house was "shaken off the ground" by "one hell of an explosion."

The dead crew's commanding officer, Wing-Cdr. Gil Moore, said: "I had known John for about four years and apart from being a close friend he was the chief flying instructor here on the conversion wing."

"We do not know what happened to their aircraft, but pilot error is unlikely."

Searchers were still at the site late last night.

A board of inquiry will be set up.

The first of Australia's 24 F-111s began flying with the Air Force in June, 1973.

The first to be lost crashed near Armidale, NSW, on April 28 this year. The crew ejected safely.



• KILLED in the F-111 crash . . . Flight-Lt. Noordink (above left) and Sq.-Ldr. Holt.

A chat — then pilot dies

By ANDREW WOODLEY

F-111 jet pilot John Holt calmed his anxious mother by phone on Thursday morning.

His mother Gay, 64, had phoned the Squadron Leader in Ipswich from Melbourne after she heard a report of an F-111 making a precautionary landing.

He had just got up, and was preparing for the day's target training as the phone rang at his Bright St. home at 6.50 a.m.

"Don't worry mother. it's just the papers. It's just paper talk — they exaggerate," he assured her.

"There are no worries. Take no notice."

Shortly afterwards his wife, Valda, who had just celebrated her 33rd birthday, waved to him as he drove to the Amberley Air Force base.

'Nuts and bolts'

Just after 10.45 a.m., Sq.-Ldr Holt died in a high-speed, low-altitude crash, which left his \$6.8 million supersonic jet in pieces.

A witness who saw the wreckage in thick bush near Iluka, in northern NSW, said, "The largest intact section was a 10 ft. by eight ft. piece of fuselage. The rest was just nuts and bolts."

Air Force crash experts are trying to reconstruct the last moments of the flight to discover exactly how Sq.-Ldr. Holt and Flt.-Lt. Adam Noordink, 28, were killed.

About 1½ hours after the crash Gay and her husband, Vernon, 70, heard at their Caulfield home that he was missing.

Three hours later they knew he was dead. "It was just like a bad dream," said Mrs Holt yesterday. "It was something I always thought about but never believed could happen."

Sq.-Ldr. Holt delighted thousands of Melbourne in March this year when he led an arrowhead city flypast of F-111 jets trailing afterburners during Moomba.

According to his brother David, 31, Sq.-Ldr. Holt was expected shortly to have been promoted to wing commander.

Sq.-Ldr. Holt, who married in 1964, leaves four children, Adrian, 11; Darren, 8; Graeme, 6; and Janelle, 4.

Their four youngsters ran behind the family car waving and shouting goodbye.

He had wanted to fly ever since he heard the exploits of an uncle who was a World War 2 pilot — but when he left Nhill High School he had none of the right qualifications to start training as a pilot.

He was determined, and managed to join the Air Force as a "rookie."

While based at Wagga he saw an advertisement for aircrew, applied and was accepted.

He trained on Macchis and later flew Canberras before switching to F-111s.

● **Escape bid theory —**
Page 22.



● **ABOVE:** The crater made by the F-111 when it crashed in northern NSW. Kerosene from the plane's tanks is still in the crater.



● **RIGHT:** The F-111's pilot Sq.-Ldr. Holt.

● **BELOW:** Vernon and Gay Holt at home in East Caulfield yesterday.



F-111 escape bid theory

From RICHARD MACEY

BRISBANE. — The crew of an F-111 killed when their plane crashed on Thursday night might have made a last-minute bid to eject, a RAAF spokesman said last night.

The two crewmen, the pilot, Sq.-Ldr. John Holt, 34, a senior flying instructor, and Flight-Lt. Adam Noordink, 28, were killed instantly in northern NSW.

Investigators were looking into the theory that the crew made an unsuccessful attempt to eject, the RAAF spokesman said.

"There is also the possibility that the escape capsule might have ejected on impact," he said.

People in a town about 10 km from the crash scene said they heard a loud explosion, followed by a large orange mushroom cloud of smoke when the plane hit the ground.

The RAAF spokesman said yesterday the ejection of the escape capsule from an F111 was accompanied by a spectacular fireball as rockets blasted the capsule away from the plane.

The Defence Minister, Mr Killen, said last night reports of the F111 blowing up in mid-air had been discounted.

"It would now appear there was no explosion in the air as some accounts indicated, but it was a ground impact," he said.

● In Canberra, a RAAF spokelman said the air force might have problems keeping a set number of F-111 strike jets flying.

Sixteen of the RAAF's 24 F-111C jets were planned to be operational at any one time.

But now that two have crashed, maintenance staff might have trouble keeping 16 operational, the spokesman said.

MINUTE PAPER

(Write on this side only)

Stock No 7530-66-034-7471

Subject:

A8-133

DPE 9506

F-111 crash blamed on bird

The RAAF today blamed Thursday's F-111 crash, which claimed the lives of two pilots, on a bird striking the wind-screen.

A RAAF spokesman said the court of inquiry investigating the crash at Evans Head bombing range found evidence that "strongly indicated" this.

He said the bird strike probably disabled the pilot causing the aircraft to go out of control and enter a steep dive at high speed.

The spokesman said the crew escape capsule "functioned before the aircraft hit the ground."

But he said the plane was too low and in such a fast dive that the ejection could not be successful.

The Herald, Tues., Oct. 4, 1977

Crash jet hit

From DON BAKER

CANBERRA. — A bird caused a \$6.8 million F-111 strike jet to crash last week, according to a preliminary inquiry by RAAF experts.

Two crewmen were killed when the jet hit the ground during a bombing practice run in northern NSW last Thursday.

A RAAF spokesman said last night experts believed after checking the wreckage that a bird hit the jet.

"Probably it came through the plane's windscreen and disabled the pilot," he said.

"Then, the experts believe, the plane went out of control and into a pretty steep dive.

"They have evidence that the second crewman hit the ejection button before the plane hit the ground.

"But it was too low, going too fast and the angle of the plane was wrong for the capsule to be ejected."

The two men were "unlucky" to hit the bird, the spokesman said.

"Birds are always a problem for jets," he said.

"It's a matter of the speed of the aircraft and the weight of the bird."

Ironically, only days earlier the RAAF had rejected tougher windcreens and capsules for its F-111 fleet.

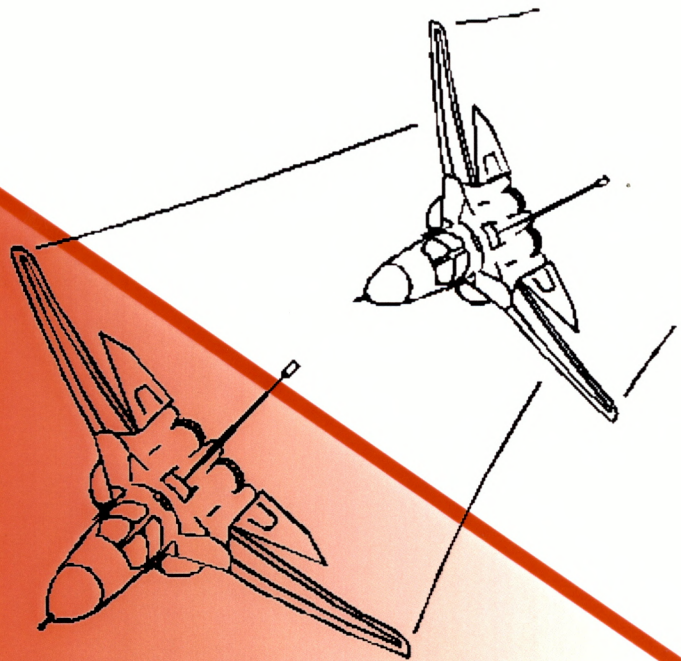
The new screens and capsules would have cost \$25,000 each, but were rejected because they were not tough enough, the spokesman said.

Last week's incident was the 560th recorded by the RAAF since 1969 of a RAAF plane hitting birds.

Only one crashed — a Mirage in 1972 — and the pilot ejected safely.

The only previous record of a pilot being killed in an accident involving a bird was in 1962, when a Sabre jet crashed.

bird: RAAF



1978

NEWS PAPER CUTTINGS AND
ARTICLES OF INTEREST for
the year 1978

AN SRLMSQN PERSPECTIVE

CRASHED AIRCRAFT DETAILS

A8-141

PILOT: WGCDR D.N. ROGERS

☐ Killed

NAVIGATOR: FLTLT Peter GROWDER

☐ Killed

MODEL-TYPE: D1

TYPE VERSION: F-111C

ROLLOUT DATE:

ACCEPTANCE DATE:

TRANSFER DATE:

DATE CRASHED: 25/10/1978

CRASH LOCATION: Ohakea, NZ

GD S/N: 17

USAF SERIAL NUMBER: A8-141

LH Wing Sn:

LH Eng Sn:

RH Wing Sn:

RH Eng Sn:

NOTES: *RAAF AIRCRAFT. Aircraft no longer in the RAAF inventory - Crashed into the sea 26.5 nm from Whenuapai Island and near the peninsular town of Coromandel. A/C took off from RNZAF Base, Ohakea on 25 October, 1978. Crash was due to bleed air leak and fire in the Main Wheel Well. Crew ejected and survived the crash. The module landed in the water in the Hauraki Gulf.*