

## **FLTLT Rick 'RickOf' O'Ferrall (USAF Exchange Pilot) 16 March 1976 (F-111F – MO-388)**

### *Inflight fire and successful ejection Mtn Home AFB, Idaho*

The Aircraft was on a routine two-ship conventional ground attack sortie. The Crew was lined up for a 15 NM low precision radar approach when the crew experienced a frozen right throttle at 98%. Touchdown was 600 feet down the runway. The right engine fire push button was depressed the aircraft continued with a nose down attitude so the pilot increased power, the aircraft porpoises, after the third skip at 10 feet above the ground and at 140 knots they ejected. The aircraft impacted 6,585 feet down the runway with the capsule landing 750 short of the main wreckage and fire.

#### **Crew**

**Pilot:** F-111F RAAF Exchange Officer; Instructor Pilot (IP)

**WSO:** CAPT Joseph Dale Freeman, USAF



*Credit: The Mighty VARK - David de Botton & Steve Hyre*

#### **Accident summary from PLT's Perspective**

At the time, there was no existing checklist for this problem at this early stage in the F111F's operational history, so after consulting very briefly (we were at bingo fuel) with the Supervisor of Flying (SOF), I elected to use the same approach that an F111D with the same problem had used only a month or so previously at Cannon AFB. This involved making a normal approach, with full landing flap, and to shut the problem engine down at touchdown using the fire button. I touched down on speed, and unfortunately, the

engine fire button shutdown system had an undetected fault, and failed to shut the engine down.

To summarize the General Dynamics input to the subsequent USAF accident investigation, the combination of circumstances resulting from the stuck throttle, failed fuel valve, and failure of the spoilers to deploy due to both throttles not being at idle resulted in lift on the airframe exceeding weight, and the jet got airborne three times after touching down despite full forward flight control input. The last cycle in this saga resulted in the jet ending up 30ft above the runway, 20 degrees nose down, and clearly unable to survive the coming impact – so we ejected.



Our injuries were spinal compression and neck hyper extension – all from the landing impact compression and the extreme throwing forward on the head as the capsule hit the concrete. After us, they changed the recommended ejection and capsule impact posture to include crossing both arms and grabbing the shoulder straps up high to provide a support for your head/chin so that it wouldn't be able to throw forward (chin down to chest) on impact and to a lesser extent ejection.

Knowing what we learned about the consequences of the one in one million “double failure” that brought these circumstances about and resulted in the loss of the jet, would I have done something different? You bet... I'd have made the exact same approach with the hook down and taken the approach end cable, and 388 would be sitting in the bone yard at Davis-Monthan AFB now instead of being wrecked on the runway that day. We are all wiser in hindsight, and while I'd certainly have done this differently if I had my time over again, I should note that the USAF investigation cleared me of any pilot error or collateral responsibility.

I continued flying the F111F at Mountain Home AFB until the allotted end of my exchange tour with the USAF, returning as scheduled to Australia at the end of 1976. I went on to become one of the most experienced F111 pilots in the RAAF.

*Richard E. O'Ferrall*  
Squadron Leader  
Royal Australian Air Force (Ret'd)



*above photos were taken in hangar 211 - US DoD*

You'll notice that the upper flotation righting bag is deflated, and the glass in the entry/exit canopy section is all shattered. This happened when the capsule landed – it hit in the normal upright attitude, but the impact was so hard (we came down on the concrete runway) that the capsule bounced back up in the air, did a 180 degree roll, landed again (upside down this time, at which point all that glass shattered inwards into the cockpit), bounced once again, and finally landed and stayed right side up in the normal attitude. When it hit the second time and bounced and rolled, all the shattered glass flew everywhere - they were vacuuming glass out of our flight suits and boots and other kit for some time afterwards.

*Richard E. O'Ferrall*