
F-111 Memorials – Erskine & Angell (A8-139)

On 28 January 1986, an F-111C from No 1 Squadron crashed into the ocean 50 nm east of Moruya, NSW during a night maritime strike mission killing the pilot, FLTLT Steve 'Esky' Erskine, aged 24, and navigator, CAPT Greg Angell (USAF exchange WSO) aged 34. Despite only 3% of wreckage being recovered there was no evidence an ejection was attempted.

Memorial plaques to both aircrew can be viewed at RAAF Amberley Memorial Garden. Their names with 113 others have also been etched on the granite memorial wall at the [F-111 "Vark" Memorial Park](#) in Clovis New Mexico, USA.

Crash Site Coords: [35.56S 151.08E](#)



FLTLT STEPHEN MATTHEW ERSKINE

CAPT GREGORY SPENCE ANGELL

28 TH JANUARY 1986 (AIRCRAFT A8-139)



ESKY

GREG



etched on the 'Vark' memorial wall - right hand column



THE escape module of an F-111 aircraft on display at the RAAF Amberley Base. The module of the crashed F-111 has not been found.



FLIGHT-LT Erskine — feared dead.



CAPT. Angell — feared dead.

Fireball enveloped F-111 as it crashed into sea, says witness

A FIREBALL enveloped an RAAF F-111 which crashed off the southern New South Wales coast on Tuesday night, a witness said yesterday.

The pilot, Flight-Lt Stephen Matthew Erskine, 28, single, of the Brisbane suburb of Mansfield and the navigator, Capt. Gregory Spence Angell, 34, married, a US Air Force exchange officer, of California, are feared dead.

The plane was in what one RAAF spokesman described as a "relatively simple descent" from 5000 m to 1000 m as part of a simulated attack on shipping shortly after 8.25 p.m. when it crashed in the sea 80 km east of Bateman's Bay.

A witness in a plane about 30 km south-west said the F-111, codenamed Buckshot Colt One, appeared to have burst into a fireball at sea level.

An RAAF spokesman said this was consistent with an aircraft hitting the water.

The officer commanding RAAF Amberley, Air Commodore Ian Westmore, who also took part in the manoeuvres, said yesterday no reason for the crash could be given.

He said Flight-Lt Erskine and Capt. Angell had planned the entire mission.

"It was going according to plan," he said. "It was a particularly straightforward and simple mission."

Air Commodore Westmore said he had flown over the area where the aircraft disappeared, but medium level cloud had hindered visibility.



AN F-111 aircraft similar to the one which crashed off the New South Wales coast.

He said searchers yesterday recovered pieces from the plane's cockpit and clothing from the two crewmen who were feared dead.

He said there was no proof the ejectable module the two crewmen could have used had disintegrated, but said a witness "did not see what was consistent with the module being fired".

A preliminary examination of the wreckage recovered by late yesterday indicated the crash would not have been survivable.

The RAAF continued its search for the men yesterday evening.

Fifth plane to go down

THE crashed F-111 was the fifth to go down.

In 1973, Australia's two squadrons of 24 F-111 strike aircraft cost more than \$300 million.

By 1985, four had been involved in crashes with two men dead.

The first crash was near Armidale in April, 1977. The crew ejected.

In September, 1977, a crash killed two crewmen when their plane hit a flock of birds over Evans Head, New South Wales.

An engine malfunction may have caused the third crash off Auckland, New Zealand, in October, 1978.

The fourth crash occurred on take-off from Ohakea in New Zealand in August, 1979.

Air Commodore Westmore, said yesterday the latest crash would not halt F-111 flights.

Crew error unlikely - Westmore

A FLOCK of birds may have caused last week's F-111 crash off the southern NSW coast, Amberley Officer-in-Charge Air-Commodore Ian Westmore said yesterday.

He said something distracted the crew before they could eject safely.

He said one theory was the aircraft had a "cataclysmic malfunction" after flying into a flock of birds.

"It is incredible to our minds that a crew of that experience could have made a mistake to cause loss of the aircraft," Air-Commodore Westmore said at a press conference.

"We have nothing to judge whether it (the crash) was crew error.

"I would be extremely doubtful the crew made any error."

Air-Commodore Westmore said pilot Flight Lt Stephen Matthew Erskine, 24, of Mansfield in Brisbane, had about 600 hours flying hours in the aircraft.

He said the navigator, US Air Force exchange Capt Gregory Spence Angell, 34, of Palo Alto, California, had more than 1100 hours flying experience in various versions of the F-111.

Capt Angell came to RAAF Amberley in August, 1984 after a tour of duty with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) defence forces in Europe where he flew more sophisticated F-111s.

"We have no grounds to suspect that the aircraft (RAAF F-111) is not totally airworthy," Air-Commodore Westmore said.

"It is now more than six-and-a-half years since the last fatality in an F-111 at the Evans Head bombing range on the northern NSW coast.

"We have flown more than 10,000 missions and over 30,000 hours.



● Ian Westmore ... 'total faith in the F-111.'

"The aircraft pilots and other crew, including myself, have total faith in the F-111."

Air-Commodore Westmore said the F-111 was built to fly near the ground and water with Terrain Following Radar (TFR) controlling its position in an extremely hazardous environment.

He said Air Marshall Radford last week convened a board of inquiry which had to find the cause of the accident.

Air-Commodore Westmore said another team of accident investigation supervisors had a month to report on the cause.

"We may never know the cause. But it will take up to two years for No. 1 Squadron could replace someone of Flight Lt Erskine's experience," Air-Commodore Westmore said.

"Naturally, you can never replace Flight Lt Erskine as a person."

● Capt Gregory Spence Angell's parents — from left — Pat and Roy Erskine share a moment with their daughter-in-law Mary Angell.



● American Legion bugler Vince La Greca, of Shailer Park, plays "Taps" after RAAF bandmaster Sgt Barry Martin played the Last Post and Reveille.



● Cars leave the memorial service flanked by an RAAF honor guard.