

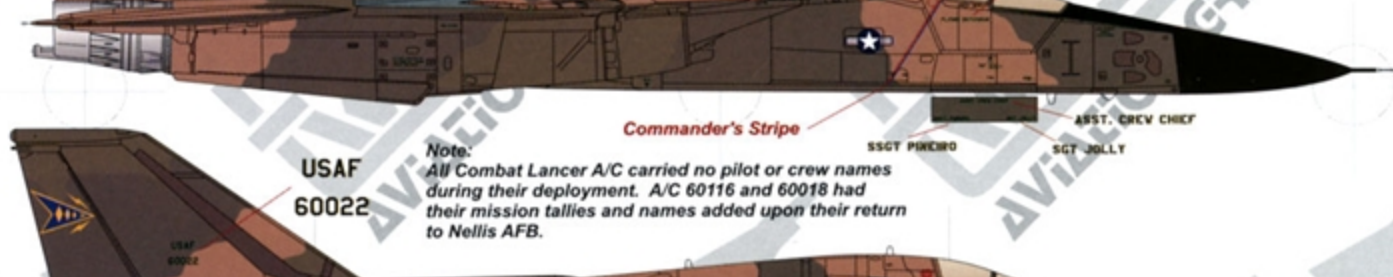
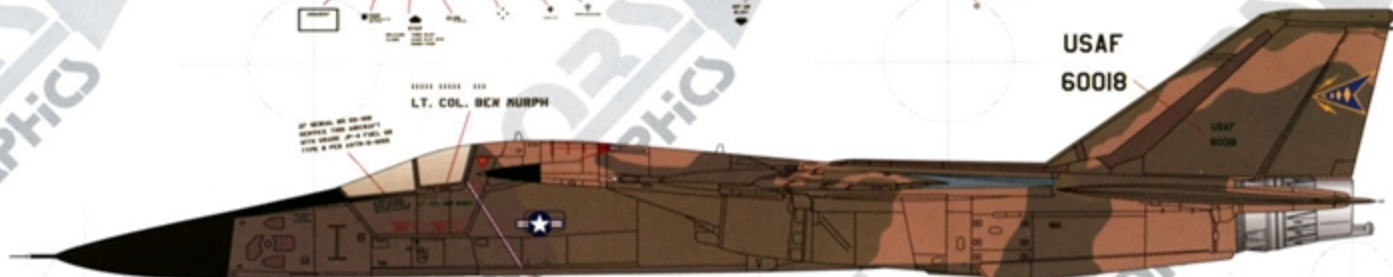
Two Accurate, Two Colorful Twobobs!

**WHAT'S OUT THERE?**

- 1/48th Academy F-111A
- Scaledown F-111 Burner Cans
- Scaledown F-111 Wheels
- Scaledown F-111 Undercarriage Doors
- Scaledown Slats/Flaps Set
- Scaledown Long Range Fuel Tanks
- Scaledown F-111 Munitions
- Eduard Exterior Detail Set
- Paragon F-111 Slats/Flaps



Col. Ivan "Ike" Dethman, Commander, 428th TFS, mounts up for a Combat Lancer mission in 1968.



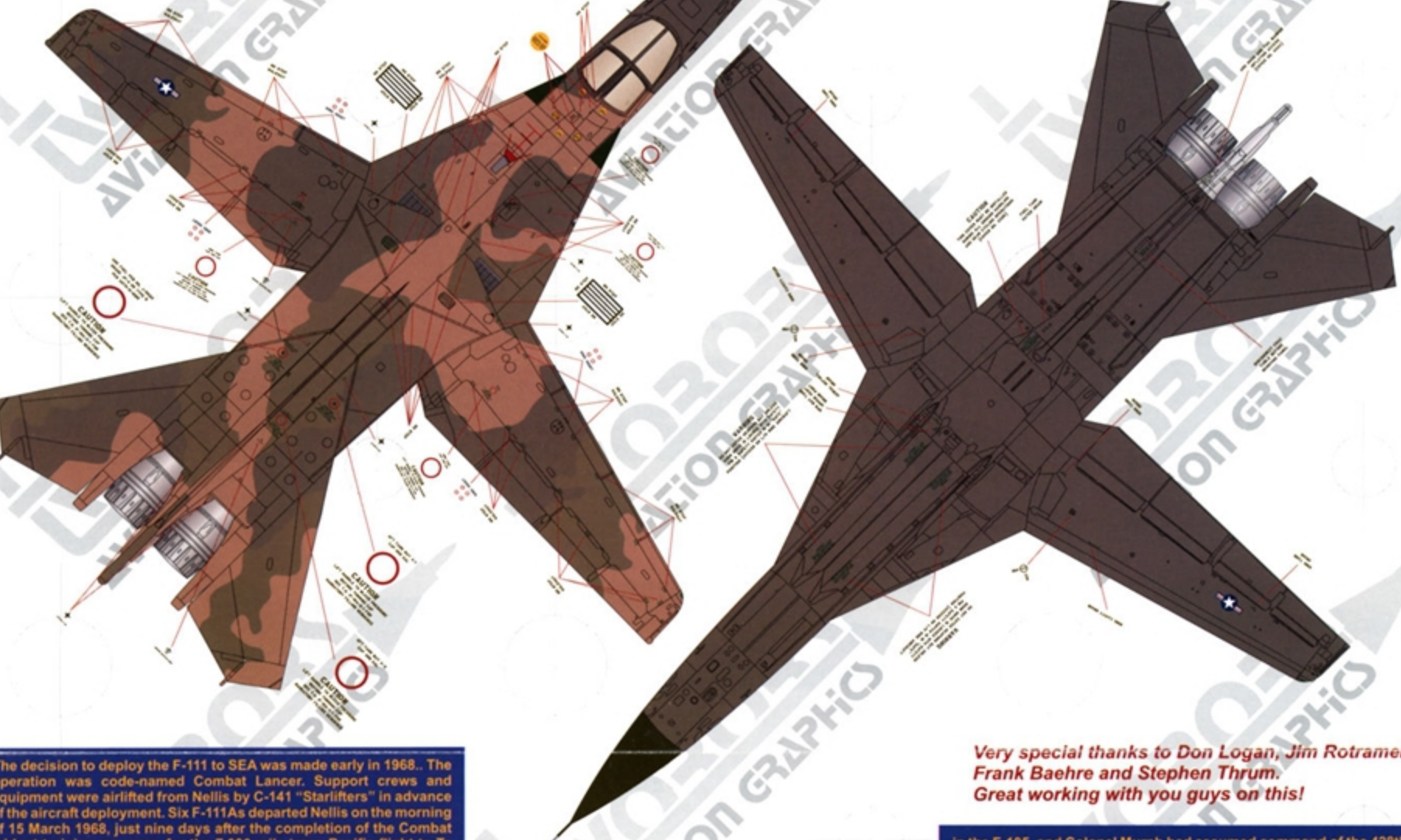
**Note:** All Combat Lancer A/C carried no pilot or crew names during their deployment. A/C 60016 and 60018 had their mission tallies and names added upon their return to Nellis AFB.

Aircraft 66-016, 66-017, 66-018, 66-019, 66-021, and 66-022 were the first six jets that deployed to Takhli Royal Thai Air Base in Thailand. The disposition/history of the six aircraft as well as the two replacement aircraft is listed below. Information is courtesy of Donald Logan.

- 66-016 - Flew first Combat Lancer mission on 18 March 1968.
- 66-017 - Crashed due to maintenance FOD on it's first mission on 30 March 1968. Crew ejected and was recovered.
- 66-018 - Flew its first mission on 25 March 1968.
- 66-019 - Scheduled to fly it's first mission on 27 March 1968 but ground aborted due to a hydraulic problem. Became the first ever F-111A combat ground abort.
- 66-021 - No information available.
- 66-022 - First combat loss on 28 March 1968. Crew was not recovered and the crash site was first located in 1989.
- 66-024 - Replacement aircraft that deployed to Takhli on 1 April 1968. Crashed on 22 April 1968. Crew was not recovered.
- 66-025 - Replacement aircraft that also deployed to Takhli on 1 April 1968.

- FS30219  
Testors 1742  
Humbrol 118  
Gunze Sangyo H310  
Xtracolor X102
- FS34102  
Testors 1713  
Humbrol 117  
Gunze Sangyo H303  
Xtracolor X116
- FS34079  
Testors 1710  
Humbrol 116  
Gunze Sangyo H309  
Xtracolor X110

- FS34087  
Testors 1711  
Humbrol 155  
Gunze Sangyo H304  
Xtracolor X111
- FS37038  
Testors 1749  
Humbrol 33  
Gunze Sangyo H12  
Xtracolor X110



The decision to deploy the F-111 to SEA was made early in 1968. The operation was code-named Combat Lancer. Support crews and equipment were airlifted from Nellis by C-141 "Starlifters" in advance of the aircraft deployment. Six F-111As departed Nellis on the morning of 15 March 1968, just nine days after the completion of the Combat Trident training program, for the 7,000-mile trans-Pacific flight to Ta Khil Royal Thai Air Base, 85 miles north of Bangkok. The aircraft refueled in-flight four times before landing at Anderson AFB, Guam, for crew rest. They continued on to Takhli the following day, again refueling in the air. Due to strong headwinds en route, the 7,000-mile trip took 20 hours flying time with winds extended for long-range cruise. Given the microphone, upon arrival, as he climbed out of his F-111A, 66-0018, "Ike" Dethman told the crowd, "The F-111As are here for a mission, not for a test."

The first Combat Lancer attack mission was flown on the night of 25 March 1968. Again, Colonel Dethman and his right-seater, Captain Rick Matteis, were in the lead in F-111A, 66-0018. The target was a bomb dump on Tiger Island on the coast of South Vietnam; the bomb run was made at low altitude from the west so that the egress from the area could be made over water. Although heavy cloud cover prevented accurate bomb damage assessment, the mission, and the others flown that night, were considered successful. Lt Colonel Ed Palmgren, the unit's operations officer, flew later that same night against targets near Dong Hoi, on North Vietnam's southern panhandle, to which attacks were limited by President Johnson's "bombing pause."

Colonel Palmgren noted, "The only time they knew we were there was when the bombs went off." A pattern of single-ship night interdiction missions at low level in any weather was established that night. It was a pattern followed for as long as the attack F-111s were operational.

Sadly, the pattern of success was broken when the first Combat Lancer loss was experienced just three days later. Major Henry McCann and Captain Dennis Graham, were lost on 28 March 1968, when F-111A 66-0022 went down. They had departed Takhli on a bombing mission and had established voice communications with "Invert," the radar site. They were being tracked on radar as they proceeded toward their target, but they had not made contact with the Airborne Command Center. Since the Rules of Engagement in effect at the time required that contact prior to penetration of North Vietnamese air space, they were forced to turn back toward Takhli. Radar surveillance continued for a time but contact was lost during a shift change at the radar site and the aircraft disappeared. The crew and the aircraft wreckage were never recovered although a generous reward was posted and an intense electronic search was conducted. The North Vietnamese claimed to have shot the aircraft down but the claim was discounted based on reports from the radar site.

The second accident occurred just two days later, on 30 March. F-111A 66-0017 was descending from 10,000 and entering Laotian air space enroute to the North Vietnamese panhandle when a violent

**F-111A Combat Lancer (Typical Loadout)**

Sta 2/7 Not Used  Sta 4/5 (6) M117LDGP BRU Pylon	Sta 3/6 Not Used  Weapons Bay Fwd ALQ-87 Aft ALQ-87
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Notes:  
Gun Installed in Right Weapons Bay  
AIM-9B on trapeze In Left Weapons Bay

pitch-up maneuver was followed by an uncontrolled roll. Unable to regain control of the aircraft, the crew ejected, and Major Sandy Marquardt and Captain Joe Hodges rode the escape capsule down and landed safely. Fearing that they had landed in Laos, they made their way into the jungle to hide. After they had traveled less than a mile, they were picked up and returned to base by an HH-3E Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopter piloted by Major Wade Oldermann. The F-111A wreckage was found and examined by an Air Force accident investigation team. They concluded that a solidified tube of unused sealant, used to repair the honeycomb skin had caused the accident. They surmised that this sealant tube had somehow become lodged in the flight control system. This conclusion was later disproved, but only after a number of high-level briefings had provided the erroneous information. Major Marquardt and Captain Hodges had returned almost immediately after the accident to the General Dynamics factory and, with the help of the manufacturer and the simulator, they were able to duplicate what they had experienced on the night of 30 March. Careful investigation determined that the structural failure of an actuating valve in the stabilator system, which controls both the pitch and roll axes of the airplane, was at fault in the loss of aircraft control. Here again, North Vietnamese claims of shooting the aircraft down were proven false.

While all of the media attention was focused on the two accidents, scarce note was taken of the missions flown during the next 22 days. Those missions brought the Combat Lancer total to 55 in the month that the F-111As had been in theater. Those missions were flown without one loss to enemy action while delivering their bombs with great accuracy on a variety of targets, facts that were generally ignored in the press and in the Congress. The first two aircraft lost in Vietnam were replaced on 5 April by F-111As, numbered 66-0024 and 66-0025, flown to Thailand by Lt Colonel Ben Murph and Captain Fred De Jong. Both were Vietnam combat veterans

*Very special thanks to Don Logan, Jim Rotramel, Frank Baehre and Stephen Thrum. Great working with you guys on this!*

In the F-105, and Colonel Murph had assumed command of the 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Nellis. He took over command of the Detachment in Vietnam.

The third accident, on 22 April 1968, and a similar one at Nellis AFB on 8 May resulted, first, in the suspension and, then, in the termination of Combat Lancer. Detachment 1 crewmembers, Lt Colonel Ed Palmgren, the unit's Operations Officer, and Lt Cdr "Spade" Cooley, a US Navy ex-change pilot, were lost on a Combat Lancer bombing mission into North Vietnam. Flying F-111A #66-0024, they had been in radar contact until they began their bomb run at altitudes between 200 and 500 feet. Although the aircraft and crew were never recovered, the assumption that they, too, had experienced loss of control due to the failure of the stabilator part is reasonable. At the bomb run altitudes, a loss of control, like that experienced by Maj Marquardt and Capt Hodges, would not have provided any time to eject from the aircraft. Here, too, North Vietnamese claims to have shot the aircraft down were false.

What has been missing is a summary of the gains achieved by Combat Lancer, an admittedly very early application of the controversial aircraft in what was essentially an operational test. The three accidents clearly over-shadowed the overall success of that test. The concept of single-ship low-level penetration in all weather was demonstrated 55 times by the F-111As and the crews from Detachment 1. Most of those 55 missions were flown at night, and more than half were flown in bad weather. On many of those adverse weather missions, bombing accuracy was as good as the daylight accuracy of other Air Force fighter-bombers. The critical element of surprise was regularly achieved and there was no combat damage attributable to the enemy. As the F-111s operating from Ta Khil required no tanker or electronic countermeasures support aircraft and no fighter escort; substantial cost savings were thus demonstrated. Overall, the F-111As provided twice the range with twice the payload, 20 percent more speed, and significantly higher navigational and bombing accuracy than the fighter-bombers they were destined to replace.

These gains were even more clearly demonstrated when the F-111As returned to Vietnam in 1972, in Operation El Dorado Canyon against Libya in 1986, and in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm against Iraq in 1990-91. Even Senator McClellan, the most outspoken of the many Congressional opponents of the F-111, would have to salute the contributions made by the airplane and by the crews and support personnel who made Combat Lancer a successful test of its impressive capabilities.

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