

Washington Roundup

Stretched F-111A

Air Force leaders are studying a stretched version of the General Dynamics F-111A fighter-bomber because of continuing fears that the Boeing B-52s may wear out faster than anticipated. They do not expect to have a new bomber, the advanced manned strategic aircraft (AMSA), until about 1973.

Gen. John P. McConnell, Air Force chief of staff, in relaying this view to the House Armed Services Committee in recent closed sessions stressed that he considered the stretched F-111A only insurance, not a substitute for AMSA. He also emphasized the need for an improved manned interceptor, recommending building one around the Lockheed SR-71 airframe rather than its predecessor, the YF-12A. The SR-71 is a heavier and improved version of the YF-12A.

The YF-12A was derived from the Lockheed A-11 reconnaissance aircraft built for the Central Intelligence Agency. During the closed hearings, Chairman L. Mendel Rivers (D.-S. C.) snapped: "The A-11 was not built for a fighter and you know it." Gen. McConnell responded. "But all the time we were building it we had in mind adapting it to an interceptor."

One of the unsung heroes of the A-11 development was Richard M. Bissell, Jr., who pushed the program while CIA deputy director for plans. He is slated to break his silence on the aircraft this week in a National Broadcasting Co. TV show on espionage.

Relative Confusion

Although the Johnson Administration has failed in its campaign to portray the descendants of the A-11 as new developments, it has succeeded, with the aid of the TFX, in bewildering some members of Congress. This exchange took place during the hearing:

Chairman: What is the 111, what do you call it?

McConnell: That is the TFX.

Chairman: That is your TFX?

McConnell: Yes.

Chairman: F-111 is the TFX. The other one is what?

McConnell: You call it the A-11, it is the YF-12.

Chairman: That is the TFX?

McConnell: No, the TFX . . .

Chairman: F-111 is the TFX, and the other is the A-11?

McConnell: Yes.

Chairman: Wait, now, A-11—

McConnell: No, it is not.

Chairman: SR-71?

McConnell: YF-12.

Rep. William H. Bates (R.-Mass.): RS-71.

Rep. Bob Wilson (R.-Calif.): It is NE-11.

McConnell: Right, the NE-11. Let me clarify this program. . . .

CIA Cites Powers

Francis Gary Powers, who was shot down or crash-landed while flying the Lockheed U-2 (which preceded the A-11) during a spying flight over Russia, received a special commendation from the CIA in a recent secret ceremony at the agency's headquarters.

Nuclear Talk

Source of all those stories that the U. S. was not ruling out using nuclear weapons in Vietnam (see p. 20) was Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara. He discussed the issue with a group of non-Pentagon reporters and editors at a private dinner Apr. 22 in the Metropolitan Club here. McNamara does not believe nuclear weapons are practical in Vietnam right now but does not want to give Red China the idea they will not be used under any circumstances.

INDUSTRY OBSERVER

► RF-12 designation has been used in recent references to the Lockheed A-11 Mach 3 aircraft, indicating that the interceptor version has some reconnaissance capability.