

For Immediate Release

Drew Pearson Special

--ADMIRALS REVOLT OVER F-111B--

An admirals' revolt against the controversial F-111B supersonic fighter erupted the other day behind closed doors of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The revolt was led by Vice Admiral Thomas Connolly, chief of the Navy's air arm, who has been going behind the backs of his civilian bosses to seek bids on a substitute fighter.

He sat in silence while Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius patiently defended the F-111B. When Sen. John Stennis, D-Miss., turned to Connolly for information, however, the admiral exploded.

"There isn't enough power in all Christendom," he declared, "to make that airplane what we want."

Startled, Ignatius countered: "Mr. Chairman, I hate to appear to disagree with my technical adviser in this committee, but I must bring up a point. I rely on Admiral Connolly for his technical judgment and experience in building airplanes."

Then the secretary reached into his brief case and pulled out a secret memo which Connolly had written to him last year. The memo not only defended the F-111B but specified that its 832 engine would "meet or exceed" the Navy's requirements.

"I stand corrected," said Connolly sheepishly.

Referring to Connolly's back-door negotiations with other manufacturers for a substitute plane, Ignatius also snapped: "I am not going to choose between a paper airplane and an airplane I have five flying prototypes of!"

--ADMIRAL REVERSES--

Connolly's current opposition to the F-111B has confused Congressmen who remember his testimony before the House Military Appropriations Subcommittee last year. In the salty language of the sea, he praised the plane he now condemns.

His main argument now is that the F-111B is too heavy to land on carriers. But last year, he told the House Subcommittee: "I think this F-111B is going to land on that carrier like a lady. If there is anything great about the airplane, it has a fine low-speed performance. I have never seen an airplane come around the pattern as easily and slowly as this F-111B."

(MORE)

Connolly has been supported in his revolt against the F-111B by Rear Admiral G. E. Miller, chief of the Navy's plans and requirements division, and George Spangenberg, the Navy's top civilian aerodynamicist. They have sought estimates from other manufacturers on designing a new plane that would satisfy the admirals.

The Navy's own estimate is that it will cost \$8,100,000 apiece to produce the F-111B, not counting research costs which have already been paid. In contrast, the Navy figures that a new plane would cost \$8,970,000 each to produce. This also doesn't include the unpaid research costs which, the Navy figures, would boost the price to \$10,447,000.

These figures are higher than the secret estimates submitted to Connolly by the manufacturers. Grumman estimated that it could build a new plane for \$7,790,000 each. With research costs, the total would be \$8,754,000.

McDonnell-Douglas estimated the production cost at \$8,300,000 or \$9,688,000, counting research. North American submitted the same production figure but gave a lower estimate on research. The total: \$9,080,000.

The lowest estimate came from Ling-Tempo-Vought, which claimed the new fighter could be built for \$7,320,000 each or \$8,640,000 with the research added.

--A COURT MARTIAL FOR REBELS?--

Some experts doubt the manufacturers' estimates because of the high titanium specifications. The secret estimates were based upon a requirement of 40 per cent titanium, 30 per cent aluminum and steel, 5 per cent composite, and 25 per cent other materials.

The all-aluminum F-12 was ~~canceled~~ because of the high titanium cost, which ran the production price up to a staggering \$38,000,000 per plane.

The admirals, who would court martial anyone insubordinate to them, have a habit of revolting against their civilian superiors. More often than not, they have been able to get away with it. Those who revolted against the late Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson in the early 1950s over carriers, for example, were rewarded afterward by President Eisenhower.

It will be interesting to see what happens to the latest Navy rebels.

Note: The F-111B will carry Phoenix missiles, designed to knock out the Soviet ship-to-ship missiles. It was a lend-lease missile that the Egyptians used to sink an Israeli destroyer with one shot. What alarms the Navy is that Stix missiles have now been sighted in North Vietnam.

(End Special)