

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

**A-10A, S/N 78-0700**

**EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, ALASKA**

**25 FEBRUARY 2004**

On 25 February 2004, at 2031 Alaska Standard Time (0531 Zulu), an A-10A aircraft, S/N 78-0700, crashed 3.5 miles north of Eielson AFB, AK, shortly after taking off during a night vision goggle (NVG) takeoff and landing upgrade sortie. The A-10A aircraft, assigned to the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Eielson AFB, AK, supports combat search and rescue missions in a forward air control capacity during joint United States Army and Air Force contingencies. The mishap pilot (MP), assigned to the 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, was fatally injured in the mishap and the mishap aircraft (MA) was destroyed with the loss valued at \$12,741,131. There were no civilian casualties as the MA crashed on uninhabited property owned by the State of Alaska.

The MP was the instructor pilot and formation lead for a four-ship of A-10s on an NVG takeoff and landing upgrade sortie. The mishap occurred just two minutes after takeoff. The MA gradually went into a right banking turn without correction. Shortly before impact, the MA rolled to approximately 90 degrees of bank and the nose sliced down to near vertical. The MA descended rapidly from its maximum altitude of over 4,600 feet and impacted the ground at approximately 70 degrees nose low, 95 degrees of right bank and 360 knots calibrated airspeed. The MP attempted to eject safely but, unfortunately, was too late.

There is clear and convincing evidence that the MP became spatially disoriented and was unable to gain situational awareness until it was too late to either recover the MA or eject safely. There is substantial evidence that the weather conditions the night of the mishap made it difficult to see the horizon. In addition, there is evidence that the MP may have been dealing with an unknown instrument problem based on his observed flying behavior that night as captured by the air combat maneuvering instrumentation data system. These two contributing factors severely impacted the MP's ability to fly the aircraft using either outside references or his instruments and led to his spatial disorientation.

The final 23 seconds of the mishap is a classic graveyard spiral. The MP's radio calls and ultimate ejection clearly demonstrate that the MP was spatially disoriented.

*Under 10 U.S.C. 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding arising from an aircraft accident, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.*