

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
UH-1N, S/N 69-6602
F.E. WARREN AFB WY

On 3 Oct 99 at approximately 1523 hours, a UH-1N helicopter (S/N 69-6602) from the 37th Helicopter Flight, 90th Space Wing, F.E. Warren AFB, WY, crashed near Cameron Pass, Colorado. The helicopter was involved in a search and rescue mission for a missing three year old boy in a heavily wooded valley at altitudes above 8500 feet.

The mishap aircrew consisted of 1Lt Sean Stevens (Mission Pilot), 1Lt Joseph Alkire, (Mission Co-pilot), Capt (Dr.) Kyle Van De Graaff (Mission Flight Surgeon), and TSgt Lawrence Mason (Mission Medical Technician). A civilian search and rescue worker, Mr Mark Sheets, was aboard the mishap aircraft at the time it crashed. 1Lt Stevens, 1Lt Alkire, and TSgt Mason suffered minor injuries. Capt Van De Graaff and Mr Sheets each required three days in the hospital due to fractures and contusions.

The aircrew departed F.E. Warren AFB at 0747(MDT) that morning, enroute to the search area, approximately 60 miles south southwest. Due to low ceilings and visibility, they flew to the search area generally following Interstate 25 south and then Colorado Highway 14 west. At 0832 (MDT), the crew landed at the search and rescue command post. Following a briefing, the crew flew a sortie over the SAR area. After refueling and during the second search sortie, the crew landed and picked up Mr Sheets. After again refueling at Fort Collins/Loveland Airport, the crew returned to the SAR area and began what they planned to be their final sortie. Shortly after crossing the base camp for a pass up the valley, the mission co-pilot sensed the helicopter sinking. He pulled up to maximum power in an effort to arrest the sink, but that failed and the mission pilot came on the controls. The mission pilot also tried to increase power and airspeed, but this too did not work. The helicopter impacted the trees and came to rest on a sloped rocky mountainside at approximately 8,600 feet. The helicopter was damaged beyond repair. There was no damage to private property.

This mishap occurred primarily due to the mission pilots flying too low and too slow for the altitude, terrain, and winds/turbulence. Once the aircraft began to sink, they did not have enough power, airspeed, or altitude to recover - - they had no escape route. A contributing factor to the accident was the unit's overconfidence in their high altitude flying abilities coupled with a high motivation to succeed at the SAR mission.

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 or 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.