

## SUMMARY OF FACTS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION F-15C, S/N 86-0169 AND F-15C, S/N 86-0180 BEN MACDUI, SCOTLAND 26 March 2001

On 26 March 2001, two F-15C aircraft assigned to the 493<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom, crashed near the remote summit of Ben MacDui in Scotland. The crash site was located at N57° 04.10' W3° 39.55' at an elevation of 4,058 feet. Both pilots were fatally injured in the crash and both aircraft were destroyed. The crash site and one pilot were located the next day. The second pilot was located on 30 March 2001. The two aircraft crashed in close proximity with impact points separated by approximately 66 feet. Wreckage covered an area one third of a kilometer wide by one kilometer long on an axis of 344 degrees.

The crash occurred approximately 50 minutes after takeoff. The planned flight profile was a low altitude training mission in the Scottish low fly area. Following departure and a high altitude cruise north, the flight of two F-15s, call sign BITE 21, descended in the vicinity of RAF Leuchars near Dundee, Scotland. Although below the weather (clouds), the flight lead of BITE 21 remained with Leuchars radar as the weather ahead did not look clear enough to proceed visually. When he then asked for a climb, Leuchars cleared him to 6,000 feet and then to 8,000 feet. As BITE 21 proceeded north, he asked for a second descent to Leuchars' minimum vectoring altitude. Leuchars cleared BITE 21 to 4,000 feet. As the flight approached the limits of Leuchars airspace, the controller attempted to effect a handoff to Lossiemouth radar service. During this time, BITE 21 dropped off the radar screen and did not reply to radio calls.

Both aircraft were functioning normally. Weather at the time of the crash consisted of scattered to broken clouds at 2,500 to 6,000 feet with hill fog. However, the situation was changing continuously and, in the mountainous area of the flight profile, valleys could have 2,000 to 3,000-foot ceilings and the higher elevations could be in the clouds. Snow covered the higher elevations. BITE 21 was operating under Radar Information Service from RAF Leuchars Air Traffic Service Unit. The pilots were completing a descent to 4,000 feet when they impacted the ground. A breakdown in terrain avoidance responsibilities between the pilot(s) and air traffic controller(s) on the ground led to a descent below safety altitudes without having positive visual contact with the ground.

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.