

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 13 November 2000, F-16CJ, tail number 90-0811, and F-16CJ, tail number 90-0801, assigned to the 14th Fighter Squadron, 35th Fighter Wing, Misawa AB, Japan, collided, then crashed in the Sea of Japan. The collision occurred at 0856L, 32 nautical miles west of Matsumae, Hokkaido, Japan. One pilot ejected and was rescued, and one pilot was declared lost at sea and presumed dead. There was no damage to private property as a result of the mishap.

The mishap aircraft were number 1 and 2 respectively in a four-ship dissimilar air combat tactics sortie participating in Exercise Keen Sword, a joint U.S./Japan air defense exercise. Mishap pilot 1 was an experienced F-16 pilot and a new four-ship flight lead. Mishap pilot 2 is a highly experienced F-16 pilot and the Commander, 35th Operations Group, Misawa AB. The sortie profile included an air defense scramble takeoff from Misawa to fly an air defense combat air patrol (CAP) against simulated adversaries. The sortie proceeded without incident from engine start through departure. En route to their assigned CAP point, the mishap flight initiated a standard air-to-air G-awareness turn of an in-place 90-degree right turn followed by an in-place 180-degree left turn. They began the maneuver from a Spread 4 formation, heading approximately 300 degrees, 420 KCAS, 14,800 feet MSL, line abreast, with roughly 6,000 feet between aircraft. The flight rolled out of the 90 degree turn in trail with each other--number 4 in the lead, then number 3, then mishap pilot 1, and mishap pilot 2 last. They rolled out heading 030 degrees, between 13,500 and 14,500 feet MSL, with 4 to 6,000 feet separation, and mishap pilot 1 offset 10 to 15 degrees right of mishap pilot 2's flight path. Mishap pilot 1 and mishap pilot 2 collided during the 180-degree turn, at approximately 12,900 feet MSL, 13 to 14 seconds after mishap pilot 1 directed the turn.

Both mishap aircraft sustained major damage in the collision and were uncontrollable. None of the pilots in the mishap flight saw mishap pilot 1 eject from his disabled aircraft. After an extensive 48 hour search and rescue effort, he was declared lost at sea. Mishap pilot 2 successfully ejected from his disabled aircraft 15 to 18 seconds after the collision, parachuted injury free to the Sea of Japan, and was rescued at 1037L. Both aircraft crashed into the Sea of Japan, sank, and were a total loss.

The Board President opined that the cause of the mishap was pilot error on the part of mishap pilot 1. Mishap pilot 1 failed to visually acquire mishap pilot 2 during the 180-degree turn and deconflict their flight paths. Had he seen mishap pilot 2 and deconflicted their flight paths, this mishap would not have occurred. The Board President also opined that mishap pilot 2 failed to maintain adequate distance between he and mishap pilot 1 before or at the start of the 180-degree turn, causing a flight path conflict that mishap pilot 1 may not have expected, and thereby significantly contributed to the mishap. He also opined that flying the 180-degree G-awareness turn from a visual, in-trail formation did not provide adequate flight path deconfliction opportunity for either mishap pilot, thereby substantially contributing to the mishap.

Under 10 U.S.C. 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause or causes 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.
