

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
F-15C, S/N 80-0022
40th FLIGHT TEST SQUADRON (40 FTS), 46TH TEST WING (46 TW)
AIR ARMAMENT CENTER (AAC)
EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE (AFB), FL
30 APRIL 2002

On 30 April, 2002 at 0915 local time, the mishap aircraft (MA), an F-15C, S/N 80-0022, crashed in the Gulf of Mexico about 127 nautical miles southeast of Eglin AFB, FL. The F-15C was conducting a standard Compatibility Flight Profile test mission to support store certification of the AIM-9X Captive Air Training Missile (CATM) for the F-15 aircraft. The mishap pilot (MP), assigned to the 40th Flight Test Squadron, Eglin AFB, was fatally injured in the mishap.

Shortly before the beginning of the mishap sequence, the MA began a high-speed dive from 46,300 feet, and accelerated to 1.97 Mach Number and 780 knots. At about 24,000 feet, the MA experienced a structural failure of the leading edge (front) of the left vertical stabilizer (tail). This caused a large section of the leading edge, approximately 6 feet by 3 feet, to break off from the aircraft. The remaining left tail structure severely increased drag, which caused the MA to yaw to the left at a high rate and depart controlled flight. The departure created further severe structural overloads which caused the MA to break up. The right boom, right tail, and right horizontal stabilizer, departed the MA, followed by the right (#2) engine. The forward fuselage and cockpit area separated from the remainder of the MA, which liberated fuel from the #1 fuel cell and caused a fire.

The MP likely initiated ejection at an unknown altitude, airspeed, and attitude of the MA, but likely very shortly after the beginning of the departure from controlled flight and during the break-up of the MA. During high-speed ejection at over 600 knots, serious injury can and in most cases does occur. Analysis of the recovered ejection seat, MP helmet, and other associated life support equipment, indicated that safe ejection under the prevailing conditions was not possible.

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.