

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 20 March 2002, at 2108L (2008Z), an F-16CJ assigned to the 52d Fighter Wing, Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, impacted the ground in a wooded area 1.9 nautical miles northeast of runway 23 at Spangdahlem Air Base. The F-16CJ mishap aircraft, Serial Number 91-0415, was destroyed upon impact. The mishap pilot, assigned to the 23d Fighter Squadron, 52d Fighter Wing, was fatally injured.

The mishap pilot, call sign Wolf 03, was number 3 of a 4-ship formation conducting a night tactical intercept training mission. He was current and qualified to fly the planned mission. Mission supervision, preparation, and planning were sufficient. Preflight, departure and training engagements were uneventful. Upon reaching bingo fuel, Wolf 03 departed the formation and began his return to base. The pilot flew a PAR approach to runway 23. The radar final controller, a trainee, conducted the approach under supervision of a qualified trainer. The pilot was qualified to fly the PAR to approach minimums of 300 ft and 1 mile visibility.

The forecast recovery weather briefed to the mishap pilot was 1000 ft broken, 2000 ft overcast, visibility 8000 meters (5 miles) and light rain. The weather encountered by Wolf 03 on departure was a 3000 ft ceiling and 8000 meter visibility. The weather provided to the pilot during arrival was an inaccurate 1924Z pilot report (PIREP) for an aircraft breaking out at 3000 ft above ground level with 2 mile visibility. Based on observations, PIREPs, and witness testimony, the weather on final approach at the time of the mishap was most likely a 500 ft ceiling, visibility 6000 meters (4 miles), and light rain. The approach was flown in darkness, 2 hours and 22 minutes after a 1746Z sunset.

The mishap aircraft was functional at the time of the mishap. The aircraft was fully mission capable at launch time and the mishap pilot contacted the squadron 10 minutes prior to the mishap reporting no maintenance problems.

Based on clear and convincing evidence, the primary cause of this accident was the mishap pilot's failure to initiate a missed approach as directed by the radar final controller. While still in the weather and too far right of course for a safe approach, the pilot acknowledged the controller's safety alert, lowered the aircraft nose and turned toward the runway in a continued attempt to position the aircraft for landing. An inadequate crosscheck then resulted in an excessive rate of descent followed by controlled flight into terrain.

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.
