



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION  
F-15C, S/N 80-0030 F-15C S/N 83-0040  
53RD WING (WG), 422ND TEST AND EVALUATION SQUADRON (TES)  
NELLIS AFB, NEVADA  
17 March 2003**

On 17 March 2003, at 0844 local time (1644 Zulu), an F-15C assigned to the 422nd TES, 53rd WG, S/N 80-0030, impacted the ground after a mid-air collision with another F-15C in the flight (S/N 83-0040), and was destroyed on the Nellis Test and Training Range, Nevada. The F-15s, flying out of Nellis AFB, were part of an Air Combat Maneuvering (ACM) training mission. The pilot of the destroyed F-15 sustained minor, non life-threatening injuries received during his ejection and parachute landing. The second F-15 received moderate damage. The pilot of the second F-15 received no known injuries and returned back to Nellis AFB after assisting in search and rescue operations and landed uneventfully, discovering the damage to his aircraft after having it brought to his attention by ground personnel. The destroyed F-15 was valued at \$31,015,194. The second F-15 sustained damage valued at \$479,632. There was no injury to civilians or damage to other property as a result of this accident.

Shortly before ground impact, the two aircraft had been maneuvering as part of a fighting element against a "Bandit" (simulated red-air adversary) in a visual ACM engagement. The pilot of the destroyed F-15 had been designated the "supporting fighter" for this engagement. As such, one of his many responsibilities (the primary of which is flight path deconfliction) is to take "shots of opportunity" in an attempt to "kill" the Bandit. This mishap pilot had just taken such a shot, but then misjudged his leader's geometry and failed to deconflict, thinking his leader was "not in the way" as he continued to press the fight against the Bandit. Seconds later, he collided with his leader, who felt some minor "buffeting", but did not realize he had been hit. The primary mishap aircraft went almost immediately into an uncontrollable spin. After several initial recovery attempts, the mishap pilot determined that he could not recover the aircraft and ejected at what he perceived to be his minimum controllable altitude.

By clear and convincing evidence, I have determined that this mishap was caused by the failure of the mishap pilot to properly clear and deconflict his flight path with that of his leader prior to entering lead's fighting airspace during their pre-briefed ACM engagement. The mishap pilot recognized the impending collision at the last moment and attempted to avoid the collision, but there was insufficient room and time for him to avoid striking his leader's aircraft. The resulting impact put the destroyed aircraft into an uncontrollable left spin from which the mishap pilot could not recover. He ejected and the aircraft impacted 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.**