

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 9 September 2003, at 0955 local time, an F-16CG assigned to the 35th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Wing, Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, impacted the water during an instructor pilot upgrade (IPUG) basic fighter maneuvers (BFM) sortie. The mishap aircraft (MA) was destroyed on impact, however, the pilot ejected safely prior to the aircraft impacting the water and sustained only minor injuries. The destroyed F-16CG aircraft was valued at \$20,097,583.15. There were no injuries to civilians or damage to other property as a result of this accident.

The MA was number one of a two-ship formation conducting defensive BFM training over water approximately 60 nautical miles west of Kunsan AB when the mishap occurred. The mishap engagement (ME) was the sixth and final planned engagement of the mission. The mishap pilot (MP) unknowingly set-up and began the ME 800 feet above the briefed maneuvering altitude limit (floor) of 5,000 feet mean sea level (MSL). After the "fight's on" call was made by the mishap instructor pilot (MIP), the MP almost immediately began a series of aggressive tuck-under vertical defensive maneuvers with the power at idle and the speed brakes extended. The MP quickly maneuvered the MA below the floor and remained below the floor until impact with the water 25 seconds after the "fight's on."

The MP failed to crosscheck the MA's altitude during the ME and had no situational awareness of his altitude or proximity to the water until he reached approximately 1,500 feet MSL. When the MP recognized his altitude he immediately ceased maneuvering, called "terminate" and began to recover the MA to wings level flight. Within a second of calling "terminate" the MP determined that he was about to hit the water and initiated ejection. The MA impacted the water immediately following the ejection by the MP. The MP boarded his raft and was rescued by Republic of Korea Air Forces (ROKAF) search-and-rescue (SAR) forces approximately 95 minutes later.

The MIP failed to recognize the non-standard set-up prior to the start of the ME. Despite visual and aural cues, the MIP failed to maintain situational awareness regarding his altitude or that of his wingman. The MIP was not aware of either aircraft's proximity to the floor or the water until the MA impacted the water. The MIP recovered his aircraft 450 feet above the water.

Through clear and convincing evidence, the mishap was caused by the MP's and MIP's poor situational awareness from the beginning of the ME until the "terminate" was called and the MP's reliance on a poor technique for maintaining floor awareness. Both pilots were in a position to easily discover the low altitude condition but neither gained enough situational awareness early enough to prevent impact with the water by the MA. The 8 FW narrowly escaped the loss of both aircraft and pilots.

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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 of the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.

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