

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

QF-4G, S/N 69-7262

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA

6 AUGUST 2003

On 6 August 2003, between 1355 and 1510 local time (1855 and 2010 Zulu), a QF-4G aircraft, serial number (S/N) 69-7262, sustained damage to both its right and left horizontal stabilators, its left wing, and its left aileron. This damage occurred during flight while the mishap aircraft (MA) was flying a mission that involved chasing a drone QF-4 aircraft from Tyndall Air Force Base (AFB), Florida. The QF-4G was assigned to the 82nd Aerial Targets Squadron, 53d Weapons Evaluation Group, 53d Wing, Tyndall AFB, Florida. The damage was discovered during a post-flight inspection following the mission. The MA sustained damage with the loss valued at \$109,591.00. No personnel injuries or damage to private property resulted from the accident.

The MA, call sign Rhino 82, was an unrestricted, drone-modified aircraft on a target drone chase mission in support of a Weapon System Evaluation Program air-to-air missile firing. The mishap pilot (MP) was flying the mission as a drone chase for the target QF-4. The MA took off from Tyndall AFB at 1355 local time (1855 Zulu). The MP flew the standard drone chase departure and entered a holding pattern east of Tyndall AFB between 400 and 800 feet altitude, awaiting permission to enter the live missile firing airspace. Immediately after approval, the MP initiated the drone launch sequence via a radio call and started a turn at low altitude to fly the drone pickup ground track. During this approximately 180-degree turn, the MA lost altitude and rapidly decreased airspeed to a minimum of 168 knots groundspeed (GS). After rollout from the turn, the MA accelerated to 395 knots GS and climbed above 400 feet. Other than a straight and level descent for drone pickup and the final landing, the MA did not descend below 500 feet on any other portion of the mission.

The crew chief discovered damage to the left wing tip, left aileron, and both left and right stabilators during post-flight inspection. There was no damage to the centerline fuel tank. A subsequent Excessive G Aircraft Minor Inspection revealed no further damage.

There is clear and convincing evidence the mishap was caused by collision with an unknown surface. Substantial evidence indicates the MP flew the aircraft into a situation where he had insufficient altitude and airspeed to avoid colliding with the water in East Bay.

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.