

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

U-2S, S/N 80-1095

OSAN AIR BASE, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

26 JANUARY 2003

On 26 January 2003, at 1459 local (0559 Zulu), a U-2S, S/N 80-1095, crashed 5.65 miles west of Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea. The U-2S, assigned to the 5th Reconnaissance Squadron (geographically separated unit located at Osan Air Base, ROK), 9th Reconnaissance Wing, Beale Air Force Base, California, was conducting a routine high altitude mission. The pilot of the U-2S ejected safely, sustaining injuries to his back. The aircraft impacted the ground at an excavation site, resulting in injuries to three Korean nationals. Additionally, a house and two heavy equipment machines were completely destroyed, and a gas station, pharmaceutical company building, and several vehicles were damaged.

One hour prior to impact, at approximately 60,000 feet MSL, the pilot noticed a loud “chug” from the engine, followed by rapid engine deceleration and moderate airframe vibrations, resulting in a non-recoverable engine failure. The pilot glided the aircraft to the vicinity of Osan Air Base in an attempt to perform a flameout landing, entering solid instrument meteorological conditions at approximately 22,000 feet MSL. Following an unsuccessful airstart attempt, the pilot noticed a failure of the standby airspeed indicator, accompanied by a loss of aircraft responsiveness, and immediately initiated an ejection. The aircraft was completely destroyed on impact. The pilot was promptly and safely rescued by members of the 33d Rescue Squadron.

There is clear and convincing evidence the primary cause of the mishap was catastrophic failure of the number four bearing, resulting in complete engine failure. Due to damage sustained at impact, it is impossible to determine the root cause of the bearing failure; however, there is no substantial evidence to indicate impending bearing failure should have been noticed prior to the mishap flight. Although the pilot was able to glide the aircraft to a position that would have facilitated a flameout landing, there is clear and convincing evidence his airspeed indicator failed as a result of icing conditions, which made it impossible to safely determine aircraft flight parameters. There is substantial evidence the continuously deteriorating weather conditions significantly hampered the pilot's ability to perform a flameout landing. There is also substantial evidence that the battery system was unable to provide necessary power to overcome icing conditions at the time of the failure.

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.