EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
MQ-1L PREDATOR S/N 02-3099
DEPLOYED LOCATION
24 NOVEMBER 2004

On 24 November 2004, an MQ-1L Predator, S/N 02-3099, crashed while conducting a Functional Check Flight (FCF) in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) from a deployed airfield. The aircraft, which was being operated by contractor personnel, impacted the ground short of the runway, during an attempted recovery following an in-flight navigation malfunction. The aircraft was destroyed upon impact with a loss valued at $3,555,536. There were no injuries, or additional damage to government or private property in the accident. There was no apparent media interest regarding this accident.

The mishap flight was the second FCF of the aircraft following its reassembly after being transported into the AOR. The first FCF (also flown on 24 November) was aborted in the air following a navigation malfunction. The malfunction caused erratic aircraft heading indications; and when autopilot operations were attempted, caused uncommanded rolling movements of the aircraft. Once the autopilot's heading hold was disengaged, the aircraft's flying characteristics returned to normal. The pilot and avionics technician attributed the malfunction to a magnetic heading component of one of the aircraft's navigation systems. When the aircraft's other navigation system was selected, the erratic heading indications ceased. The aircraft was safely recovered and maintenance replaced the component suspected of causing the malfunction. A second pilot was scheduled to do the second flight. Ground operations were uneventful. However, shortly after take-off, the same malfunction occurred. The mishap pilot (MP) experienced the same indications and flight characteristics. When heading hold was disengaged, the aircraft once again flew normally. The MP did not select the alternate navigation system, so the erratic indications continued. The MP decided on an immediate descent for landing. During recovery, after descending and aligning the aircraft for final approach, the MP realized the aircraft's point of touchdown would be short of the runway. When he attempted to raise the aircraft nose, he perceived that he could not control the aircraft's nose down attitude. The aircraft impacted the ground 300 feet short of the runway.

There is clear and convincing evidence that this mishap was caused by pilot error. The pilot failed to execute his landing checklist. Specifically, failure to disengage the autopilot's airspeed hold mode resulted in the aircraft not being configured to land. While the aircraft did have a navigation malfunction; the malfunction was not causal and did not preclude a safe landing. The aircraft flew as programmed, and impacted the ground due to the pilot's mishandling of the aircraft malfunction. Training, flight discipline and supervision issues contributed to the pilot error.

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.