

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
F-16C, S/N 84-1279
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BOARD (AIB)
144th Fighter Wing, California Air National Guard
Fresno Air Terminal, Fresno, California
19 January 2007

On January 19, 2007, at 10:23 a.m. Pacific Standard Time, an F-16C, S/N 84-1279 experienced an engine failure during a local training mission with four accompanying F-16C Falcon aircraft. All aircraft were assigned to the 144th Fighter Wing, California Air National Guard, located at Fresno Yosemite International, Fresno, California. The five aircraft were scheduled to rendezvous with a formation of four Navy F-18 Hornets from nearby China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station in airspace above the southern portion of Owens Valley, California. The F-16's engine failure occurred approximately 70 miles east of Fresno, California, as the aircraft began cresting the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The F-16 was in straight and level flight at an altitude of approximately 20,000 feet and traveling at 400 knots. At 10:23 a.m., the aircraft experienced a loss of thrust as the pilot attempted to accelerate the aircraft. Quickly assessing the engine had ceased normal operation, the pilot initiated emergency procedures for an "Engine Failure/Airstart." The onboard emergency power unit immediately began operating upon sensing the absence of generator-derived electrical power and engine-derived hydraulic pressure. The formation's lead pilot departed the formation and rejoined on the now-powerless aircraft to observe whether the aircraft had sustained damage and to provide additional guidance and aid to the pilot. The lead pilot did not observe any obvious damage. However, he did observe a thin, wispy vapor trail, which extended 20 feet, flowing from underneath the inboard edge of the right horizontal stabilizer at the rear of the aircraft. Two airstarts were attempted; however, both were unsuccessful. The lead pilot instructed the remaining three aircraft to orbit north of Lone Pine, California and provide assistance as directed. Both pilots agreed on an emergency heading in the direction of Owens Lake, a generally dry and sparse lakebed. After clearing the mountains and failing in two attempts to restart his engine, the pilot ejected at 2,900 feet above the ground. The pilot parachuted safely to the valley floor and sustained no injuries. The pilot was screened at a local hospital and then, transported to the China Lake Naval Hospital by Navy rescue services. The pilot was released shortly thereafter. The plane, meanwhile, glided an additional 2.5 miles eventually crashing into Owens Lake. The aircraft was destroyed on impact. There was no damage to private property.

The AIB President found by clear and convincing evidence that the accident was caused by engine fuel starvation as a result of a loose high pressure fuel line. There were no other causes or contributing factors to this accident.

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 the 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.

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