

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MINUTEMAN III MISSILE TRANSPORTER-ERECTOR ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

TRANSPORTER-ERECTOR #89W00012

CONTAINER #89W00016

MISSILE #73-831

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, NORTH DAKOTA

31 JULY 2008

On 31 July 2008, at 0820 CDT, 1320 Zulu, a Transporter-Erector (TE) carrying a Minuteman III (MMIII) unarmed missile booster without reentry vehicle or guidance set, overturned on to its side south of Foxtrot 08 Launch Facility, in Mountrail County, North Dakota while preparing to negotiate a ninety degree left turn. The TE, assigned to the 91st Missile Maintenance Squadron, Minot Air Force Base, was transporting the MMIII booster for emplacement at Foxtrot 08. The TE Driver and the TE Safety Observer suffered minor injuries. The TE tractor, container, support equipment, and MMIII booster were being assessed for possible salvage and reuse. The maximum potential total cost for damage, repair and recovery was \$6,372,994.95.

Planning, vehicle maintenance pre-operational checkout, and pre-dispatch briefings were nominal. Two pre-convoy route surveys determined the route was acceptable. The TE Driver and TE Safety Observer were current and qualified to execute the mission. Weather was not a factor.

Testimony and physical evidence indicated the TE was moving 3 to 5 mph and positioned within 0-2 feet of the weeds and grass on the right side of the gravel road in the moments prior to the mishap. Although the shoulder did not fail, standard penetration tests and soil boring analysis determined the TE's 140,323-pound weight exceeded the shoulder's load-bearing capacity. This road also had a 1-foot "false shoulder" of unsupported dirt and gravel at the edge of the road that was indistinguishable from the load-bearing road.

The Accident Investigation Board President found by clear and convincing evidence the accident was caused by Driver and Safety Observer error. The Driver and Safety Observer team maneuvered the TE beyond the right edge of the reinforced gravel roadway and shoulder while preparing to make a left turn. The unreinforced dirt and gravel surface was unable to support the heavy vehicle, which tipped onto its right side.

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