

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

F-16CM, T/N 89-2108
UTAH TEST AND TRAINING RANGE
22 JUNE 2009

On 22 June 2009 at approximately 2227 local time (0430 Greenwich Mean Time or Zulu time), an F-16CM aircraft, tail number 89-2108, assigned to the 421st Fighter Squadron, 388th Fighter Wing, Hill Air Force Base, Utah, impacted the ground during controlled flight on the Utah Test and Training Range, approximately 100 nautical miles southwest of Hill Air Force Base. The mishap pilot (MP) did not initiate a recovery nor attempt ejection and was fatally injured upon impact. The mishap aircraft was destroyed upon impact and there was no damage to private property.

The mishap occurred on a night close air support training sortie as part of the unit's preparation for an upcoming Air Expeditionary Force deployment. The flight was conducted in accordance with applicable service and unit guidelines, and the MP and mishap flight lead were current and qualified to perform the planned mission events. The MP had 1,571.9 total flying hours, but was considered inexperienced in the F-16, with 155.6 hours in that aircraft. He was a former T-6 instructor pilot and was on his first operational F-16 assignment. At the time of the mishap, he was attempting a simulated (no actual ordnance) night high-angle strafe (HAS) event with the aid of night vision goggles.

The board president found, by clear and convincing evidence, this mishap was caused by the MP's failure to recognize his altitude during a night HAS attack.

The board president also found the following five factors substantially contributed to the mishap:

1. Limited total experience: Despite the fact that the MP was current, qualified, and appropriately supervised, he had limited experience in this type of event.
2. Channelized attention: The MP channelized his attention on attempting to visually prosecute the attack, to the exclusion of visual and audible cues of a more immediate priority.
3. Breakdown in visual scan: MP failed to perform an effective visual scan of his flight instruments.
4. Expectancy: MP's mental expectation of his aircraft parameters was distinctly different from reality, making it difficult to mentally process data appearing contrary to what he was expecting, altering his perception of the target, ground cues, and altitude indications.
5. MP inability to distinguish terrain features: Low illumination conditions and lack of contrast made it difficult for the MP to visually distinguish terrain features and recognize his proximity to the ground.

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