

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

MQ-1B, T/N 06-3175, MARCH JOINT AIR RESERVE BASE 3 October 2009

At 0353 Zulu (Z) / 0723 Local, Afghanistan on 3 October 2009 (2053 Pacific Daylight Saving Time on 2 October 2009), after normal maintenance and pre-flight checks, the Mishap Remotely Piloted Aircraft (MRPA) taxied and departed from Kandahar Air Field for a reconnaissance mission. There were two mishap crews involved in this mishap, as the mishap occurred shortly after crew swap. Mishap Crew 1 (MC1) consisted of Mishap Pilot 1 (MP1) and Mishap Sensor Operator 1 (MSO1). Mishap Crew 2 (MC2) consisted of Mishap Pilot 2 (MP2) and Mishap Sensor Operator 2.

During the flight, MC1 received a direct tasking from the Combined Forces Air Component Commander to provide close air support to United States and Afghan ground forces under attack by Anti-Afghan Forces (AAF). At the time of the tasking, AAF carried out a large, coordinated attack against U.S. and Afghan ground forces at two remote outposts. Several U.S. troops were killed during the attacks. Given the circumstances of the AAF attack and the immediate and urgent need for CAS, both Mishap Crews (MCs) were consumed with a high-degree of urgency.

While en route to the tasking, MC2 assumed control of the MRPA at approximately 0905Z. At approximately 0918Z, despite efforts by MC2 to avoid the terrain at the last minute, MC2 failed to prevent a Controlled Flight Into Terrain of the MRPA. The impact completely destroyed the MRPA.

The Accident Investigation Board President determined, by clear and convincing evidence, that the mishap was the result of pilot error caused primarily by MP2's channelized attention away from flying the MRPA and an inattention to the high terrain in the MRPA's immediate vicinity. Furthermore, inattention by both MP1 and MP2 resulted from a perceived absence of threat from the environment. Specifically, they both failed to appreciate the need for a significant increase in altitude required to safely overfly the mountainous terrain located between the MRPA and the target.

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.