

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABBREVIATED AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

MQ-1B, T/N 02-00308 JALALABAD, AFGHANISTAN 28 JUNE 2011

On 28 June 2011, at approximately 0949 Zulu (Z) time, an MQ-1B Predator, tail number 02-003080, operated by the 20th Reconnaissance Squadron (RS) at Whiteman Air Force Base (AFB), Missouri crashed and was destroyed on impact near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The 20th RS is assigned to the 432nd Wing, Creech AFB, Nevada. At the time of the crash, the Mishap Crew (MC) was controlling the Mishap Aircraft (MA) from Whiteman AFB. Damage to the MA was estimated at more than \$4.4 million. There were no casualties, and there was no damage to property on the ground.

After normal maintenance and pre-flight checks, the MA departed from Jalalabad Air Base. The mishap flight was flown in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. At 0939 Zulu on 28 June 2011, the MC lost its satellite datalink with the MA. The satellite datalink is the radio link that the aircrew uses to remotely pilot the MQ-1B. The satellite datalink was momentarily re-established and the MC had indications the MA was in an extreme nose-down attitude. Approximately 10 minutes from the first lost datalink indication, the MC heard from personnel on the ground that an aircraft had crashed near them. The last known position of the MA was in an area northeast of Jalalabad Air Base.

The aircraft entered severe turbulence prior to loss of the datalink. Then the left and right tail servos failed and that the aircraft lost almost 9,000 feet of altitude in 80 seconds. The indications of severe turbulence coincide with the time the MC reported the aircraft flew into clouds and subsequently lost contact with the MA.

The Abbreviated Accident Investigation Board President found by clear and convincing evidence that the mishap was triggered by weather effects, causing the aircraft to depart controlled flight and impact the ground. There is no evidence of a mechanical failure being a factor in the mishap. Substantially contributing factors were the operational need to remain in an area of deteriorating weather to continue supporting units on the ground, the delay waiting for approval from command and control agencies to move to an area clear of weather, the lack of weather avoidance equipment on the MQ-1B, and sand storms blocking the ground weather radar's capability to detect severe weather on the day of the mishap.

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, if any, 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.