EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

F-15C, S/N 80-0015
Eglin Air Force Base, Florida
3 September 2002

On 3 September 2002, at 9:15 p.m. local time, an F-15C, Serial Number (S/N) 80-0015, was damaged during a night landing and departed the runway at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Florida. The mishap pilot (MP) egressed the aircraft without injury. The mishap aircraft (MA) sustained damage with the loss valued at $1,555,786.91. The runway surface, as well as lighting fixtures and equipment being installed in an open trench in the underrun to the runway, sustained minor damage. No personal injuries or damage to private property resulted from the accident.

The MA, call sign Nomad 22, assigned to the 58th Fighter Squadron, 33d Fighter Wing, Eglin AFB, was part of a four-ship, two-versus-two night intercept training mission. Following completion of work area events, the flight recovered to Eglin AFB as two, 2-ship elements, with the mishap flight the first to recover for an Instrument Landing System (ILS) approach and landing. The MP maintained a 2 nautical mile trail behind the flight leader and thus was second in the landing sequence. At the time of the accident, construction was ongoing at Eglin AFB for upgrade of taxiway and threshold lights for the runway upon which the MP attempted to land. Additionally, the clear zone immediately prior to the threshold of the runway, also called the underrun, was closed due to an open trench cut for new threshold lighting. The MP landed short of the runway, in the underrun, and almost immediately struck the open trench and a surrounding dirt berm, damaging the left main landing gear. The right main landing gear sustained a blown tire. The MA continued down the runway before departing the left side of the runway surface.

There were two causes of the accident, both supported by clear and convincing evidence. First, the mishap pilot incorrectly executed his landing sequence and landed 60 feet short of the runway, in the underrun, which was closed due to construction. Second, the mishap aircraft struck a 3-feet wide by 3-feet deep by 75-feet long trench 6 feet prior to the runway threshold. Both causes equally contributed to producing the damage to the MA. But for the combination of these two causes this accident would not have occurred.

In addition, three additional factors substantially contributed to the accident, each supported by substantial evidence. First, a breakdown of information flow from airfield management, civil engineering inspectors, and safety organizations to flight operations supervisors detailing dimensions of the open trench and close proximity to the runway threshold, precluded further supervisor risk assessments. Second, contract requirements specifically designed to minimize risks to flying operations resulting from open trenches, ditches, and dirt berms were not fully recognized and therefore were neither complied with nor enforced, resulting in an open, unmarked hazard. Third, failure by the MP to adequately assess the risks of the closed underrun precluded him from planning a longer landing to avoid the open trench hazard.

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 an aircraft 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.