

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

F-16B, S/N 78-0100

EDWARDS AFB, CALIFORNIA

17 JULY 2001

On 17 July 2001, at 0646 PDT, F-16B S/N 78-0100, assigned to the 412th Test Wing, Edwards Air Force Base, California, crashed on the China Lake Naval Weapons Station's Echo Range. The mishap aircraft's pilot and aerial photographer were fatally injured upon impact with the ground. The aircraft was destroyed.

The mishap aircraft was flying photo/safety chase for a second F-16 on a test mission to demonstrate reliability improvements of a Miniature Air Launched Decoy (MALD). The two aircraft took off at 0623 PDT and proceeded to China Lake Echo Range where they conducted a practice pass before launching the MALD at 20,000 feet MSL and 0.8 Mach. Following launch, the MALD's engine failed to start. It descended in a 20-degree dive to 8,996 feet MSL where it deployed a drogue parachute followed by a recovery parachute at 7,000 feet MSL. It drifted to the ground landing in mountainous terrain where the elevation was approximately 3,200 feet.

The mishap aircraft was collecting video coverage of the MALD's launch and flight profile through recovery and landing. The mishap aircraft generally flew on the MALD's left side to maintain optimal lighting conditions for video coverage. During the descent of the MALD, the pilot twice executed barrel roll maneuvers to avoid passing the MALD and to maintain optimum photo positioning. As the MALD deployed its drogue chute, the pilot executed a third roll placing his aircraft in a very steep inverted dive at high airspeed at an altitude of only 4,500 feet above the ground. The pilot was unable to recover from the dive and the aircraft impacted the ground.

The causes of the mishap were channelized attention on the MALD and loss of altitude awareness that influenced the pilot to fly the aircraft into a steep, inverted, high-speed dive from which he was unable to recover.

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