EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
F-16CG, S/N 89-2063
KUNSAN AIR BASE, REPUBLIC OF KOREA
12 JUNE 2001

On 12 June 2001 at 2124 local time, an F-16CG aircraft (serial # 89-2063) assigned to the 35th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Wing, crashed 35 miles southeast of Kunsan AB, Republic of Korea. The mishap pilot, a combat mission ready crewmember, was number 2 in a 2-ship formation on a night training mission. This was the mishap pilot's fourth sortie with Night Vision Goggles (NVGs) as part of a formal NVG upgrade training program. A qualified NVG instructor pilot (IP) was flying as the formation leader and was supervising the mishap pilot.

While operating in military training airspace, the IP began a left turn at an altitude of about 20,000 feet. Flying in NVG fluid position - a cone 30 degrees to 60 degrees behind the flight lead, flying no closer than 1,000 feet and no farther than 6,000 feet - the mishap pilot started a left roll to follow the flight leader's aircraft through the left turn. For the next 23 seconds the mishap aircraft continued rolling slowly to the left while the nose of the aircraft dropped into a dive. The mishap pilot made no control inputs to correct the gradual left roll until the aircraft was established in an inverted steep dive at an altitude of 13,000 feet, traveling at 460 knots, with 59 degrees nose low, and 165 degrees of left bank.

The mishap pilot then began making sudden and erratic control stick inputs characterized by rapidly alternating left and right roll inputs and G forces varying between 2Gs and 8Gs. These control inputs failed to recover the aircraft from the dive. Thirteen seconds after commencing the erratic control inputs, and one second before impact, the mishap pilot initiated ejection outside the survivable envelope for the ACES II ejection system. The mishap aircraft was destroyed on impact with the ground. The mishap pilot's ejection seat cleared the aircraft but impacted the ground prior to man-seat separation - the pilot was killed instantly.

By clear and convincing evidence, the cause of this mishap was the pilot's failure to maintain spatial orientation.

There is substantial evidence that the mishap pilot failed to check attitude references because his attention was channelized on watching the flight leader's aircraft through NVGs. Channelized attention was a significant contributing factor in this mishap.

The erratic and ineffective nature of observed flight control inputs during the dive provides substantial evidence that the mishap pilot was experiencing incapacitating spatial disorientation. Incapacitating spatial disorientation was a significant contributing factor to this 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 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.