

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

F-16C, S/N 86-0226

TERRE HAUTE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, INDIANA

26 JULY 2001

On 26 July 2001, at 14:36 Central Daylight Time, 19:36 Universal Coordinated Time, an F-16C, serial number 86-0226, crashed near Parkersburg, Illinois, approximately 65 nautical miles south-southwest of Terre Haute International Airport (IAP), Indiana. The F-16, assigned to the 181st Fighter Wing (181 FW), 113th Fighter Squadron (113 FS), Terre Haute IAP (Hulman Field), Indiana, was part of a four-aircraft ("four-ship") Air Combat Maneuvering (ACM) mission in the Red Hills Military Operating Area (MOA). Approximately 6 acres of a private cornfield were damaged; however, there were no military or civilian injuries in the mishap.

The mishap aircraft (MA) was conducting ACM as the third aircraft in a four-ship local sortie. The mishap pilot (MP) was operating in the southwest corner of the MOA when he reported an engine failure. Approximately one and a half minutes later, the MP safely ejected and was recovered one and a half miles northeast of Parkersburg. The MA crashed into a corn field approximately 2 miles east of Parkersburg and was destroyed on impact.

The MP demonstrated outstanding airmanship, poise, and situational awareness throughout the mishap sequence. After correctly applying all critical action procedures, the MP remained with his crippled aircraft prior to ejection, long enough to turn away from the small town of Parkersburg, Illinois. The MP's selfless actions, above and beyond required emergency procedures, by deliberately maneuvering his aircraft away from the town only moments before impact, averted a potential disaster.

The primary cause of the mishap, supported by clear and convincing evidence, was a fracture in a portion of the number 7 disk post in the High Pressure Turbine (HPT) section of the jet engine. The disk post is the supporting structure for 72 HPT fan blades. The piece broken from the disk post caused higher stress to the number 7 blade, eventually resulting in the blade cracking and breaking free. The number 7 fan blade, once liberated from its supporting structure, caused catastrophic damage to the HPT and led to the failure of the engine. Once the HPT failed, the engine could not produce thrust nor could it be restarted following critical action procedures. Because the catastrophic engine failure occurred at low altitude, recovery to a useable runway was impossible, regardless of pilot action. Therefore, the MP's decision to eject was prudent and proper under the circumstances.

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*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.*

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