

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
F-16C, S/N 88-0397
HILL AIR FORCE BASE, UTAH
13 NOVEMBER 2002

On 13 November 2002, 1400L (2100Z) an F-16 fighter aircraft, S/N 88-0397, call sign Thud 3, crashed on the Utah Test and Training Range. The aircraft, assigned to the 419th Fighter Wing, Hill AFB, Utah, was participating in a four-ship, opposed Surface Attack Tactics (SAT) training mission simulating the delivery of Laser Guided Bombs (LGB) when it impacted the ground in an 80° degree banked left turn and 9° nose down pitch. The pilot was killed and the aircraft was totally destroyed upon impact. There were no civilian casualties. The UTTR is part of a military operating area (MOA) owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Department of Defense (DOD). Therefore, there was no injury to civilians or damage to civilian property.

By clear and convincing evidence, the primary cause of the mishap was determined to be the pilot's loss of situational awareness, resulting from channelized attention and a visual illusion caused by unusual environmental conditions. On the day of the mishap, the white salt flat covering the range was covered by two to three inches of clear, calm water, which created a mirror between the ground and sky. This mirror effect diffused the horizon, giving the illusion that there was unlimited maneuvering space, when in fact; the mishap aircraft was operating perilously close to the ground.

By substantial evidence, the contributing factors were determined to be the preset volume of the low altitude voice warning system, the lack of the "PULL UP, PULL UP" voice warning in Block 30 aircraft, the unrealistic recovery parameters in the Ground Collision Avoidance warning system, and the lack of clear, consolidated, written guidance on the various low altitude warning systems in the F-16C.

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.