

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

MC-130H, S/N 90-0161

CAGUAS, PUERTO RICO

7 AUGUST 2002

On August 7, 2002, at 2050 local time, an MC-130H aircraft, serial number 90-0161, assigned to the 15th Special Operations Squadron, 16th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, crashed into mountainous terrain near Caguas, Puerto Rico. The aircraft was destroyed. All aircrew and special tactics personnel onboard the aircraft died instantly upon impact.

The mishap aircraft departed Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, Puerto Rico, at 1745L to accomplish bilateral training with special tactics personnel at Borinquen Airfield and to conduct low-level training at night in mountainous terrain. After accomplishing the bilateral training with the special tactics personnel, the mishap aircraft departed Borinquen and proceeded to fly segments of two low-level routes that are used by the Puerto Rico Air National Guard.

The mishap copilot was flying the mishap aircraft during takeoff from Borinquen and for the first 25 minutes of the low-level flight with the mishap Electronic Warfare Officer directing navigation. About two minutes before impact, the MC transferred control of the mishap aircraft to the mishap pilot and the mishap navigator began directing navigation. About twelve seconds before impact, the mishap aircraft crested a ridgeline, the MP reduced power to the engines, and the mishap aircraft began a descent. The mishap crew then received an obstacle warning. Believing the weather was the cause of the obstacle warning, the mishap crew failed to respond to the warning appropriately and they continued to descend. Although the mishap aircraft eventually began a climb, it impacted a ridgeline at 2018 feet MSL.

By clear and convincing evidence, the cause of this mishap was an uncharacteristic loss of situational awareness by the entire mishap flight deck crew and the subsequent lack of an appropriate response to obstacle warnings. The Board President further found the following factors substantially contributed to the mishap: overall crew preparation, a misdirected focus on the weather, crew resource management dynamics, and crew judgment as it relates to existing directives.

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.