

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
F-16C, S/N 83-1148
177th FIGHTER WING
ATLANTIC CITY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, NEW JERSEY
15 MAY 2007

On 15 May 2007 at 1408 hours Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), the pilot of an F-16C (F-16), serial number (S/N) 83-1148, deployed several MJU-7A/B flares during flight training maneuvers at the Warren Grove Range (WGR), a detachment of the 177th Fighter Wing (177 FW). The mishap pilot (MP) was the wingman in a flight of two F-16s assigned to the 177 FW, New Jersey Air National Guard. During this training mission, each pilot of the flight conducted a "show of force" maneuver, as requested by the WGR range control officer (RCO). While executing this maneuver, the MP deployed multiple self protection flares below the WGR minimum release altitude of 500 feet above ground level (AGL). Several of these flares contacted the range while still burning and ignited fires. One of these fires spread rapidly beyond the boundary of the WGR due to extreme environmental factors and consumed between 15,500 and 18,000 acres. Reports have indicated the fire destroyed four homes, damaged other structures and vehicles, and resulted in injuries to two individuals. The accident investigation board (AIB) president found by clear and convincing evidence that the cause of the mishap fire was pilot error, committed when the MP deployed flares at an altitude that allowed the flares to contact the range while still burning.

The AIB president also found certain factors substantially contributed to the mishap. The lead pilot (LP) for the flight did not communicate with the MP concerning the MP's intended use of flares and therefore failed to properly coordinate with the WGR concerning the MP's intent to use flares. Furthermore, there should have been no flare deployment on the WGR on the afternoon of 15 May 2007 based on the extreme environmental factors at the WGR. The RCO failed to convey this additional restriction concerning flare use to the pilots of the mishap flight prior to the mishap. The MP was unaware of any additional imposed restrictions on the range for the flight and indicated if he had known of additional restrictions concerning flare use at the range, he would not have used flares at all during the flight at the range. Finally, the RCO requested a show of force maneuver, an event that led the MP to perform a low altitude simulated bombing pass that was not planned or briefed prior to the flight.

The failure of the LP to communicate with the MP concerning the use of flares and to properly coordinate the MP's intent to use flares during the flight substantially contributed to the RCO's failure to convey additional restrictions concerning flare use to the pilots of the flight. Further, the failure of the RCO to convey additional restrictions concerning flare use to the pilots of the flight substantially contributed to the MP's lack of information concerning additional restrictions on flare use. The MP's lack of information concerning additional restrictions on flare use that were in place on the WGR substantially contributed to the MP's deployment of flares during the mishap flight. Finally, the MP's performance of the unplanned show of force maneuver substantially contributed to the MP's low altitude flare deployment.

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.