

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION F-16C, S/N 85-1445 LUKE AFB, ARIZONA 13 JUNE 2003

On 13 June 2003, at 0928L, F-16C Serial Number (S/N) 85-1445, call sign GRANT 1 crashed 350 feet outside the perimeter of Gila Bend Air Force Auxiliary Field (AFAF), Arizona, after ingesting a large bird at low altitude. The aircraft, assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing (FW), Luke AFB AZ, was executing a go-around after flying chase position on a student pilot performing a syllabus-directed Simulated Flameout (SFO) pattern. The bird, a Turkey Vulture, caused catastrophic damage to the engine. The Mishap Instructor Pilot (MIP) ejected safely and suffered no injuries. The aircraft was destroyed with no property damage or injuries to civilians.

The mishap mission was briefed and flown as a four-ship, Surface Attack (SA) sortie to include a low level route, conventional bombing patterns, and a drop-in to Gila Bend AFAF for a syllabus required random entry SFO. The sortie was uneventful until the flight entered Gila Bend AFAF airspace. During the go around after the SFO, the MIP accomplished a lead change and began coordinating departure instructions. As he directed his attention forward, the MIP saw a bird disappear below the nose of his aircraft, heard a grinding noise, and felt an immediate loss of thrust. The MIP pulled his aircraft up and to the left in an attempt to intercept a portion of the flameout pattern. Other pilots in the formation and one witness on the ground saw flame, sparks, and smoke trailing his aircraft. After gaining approximately 500 feet of altitude, the engine was no longer producing thrust so the MIP ejected and landed just within the airfield boundary. The aircraft impacted the ground approximately 350 feet outside of the Gila Bend AFAF perimeter.

There is clear and convincing evidence that this mishap was caused by engine ingestion of a large bird and subsequent loss of thrust. The MIP made timely and appropriate actions in his attempts to maximize thrust and gain enough altitude to land the aircraft. Damage to the engine was catastrophic and engine failure was inevitable. Gila Bend AFAF bird status was LOW.

Although not a direct cause of the mishap, this investigation determined that the Gila Bend AFAF Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) program was inadequate. BASH procedures spelled out in the 56th Range Management Office (RMO) contract are insufficient and lack an operational focus. A contractor conducts weekly bird surveys but this information is not used to determine the airfield bird status or the basis for any bird mitigation procedures. There is no capability to actively push or remove birds from the runway environment. While it may not have prevented this mishap, a more dynamic BASH program could have reduced the likelihood that large soaring birds would be around the runway during F-16 pattern operations.

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 as admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.