



PRESS RELEASE

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July 14, 2020

PARACHUTE ACCIDENT REPORT RELEASED

HURLBURT FIELD, Fla. – An Air Force Special Operations Aircraft Accident Investigation Board report released today found a U.S. Air Force combat controller sustained fatal injuries upon extraction from the aircraft in an accident that occurred on November 5, 2019, when his reserve parachute inadvertently deployed.

Staff Sgt. Cole Condiff, a Special Tactics combat controller with the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, 24th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, went missing in the Gulf of Mexico after his reserve parachute pulled him from the paratroop door of a MC-130H Combat Talon II. He was declared deceased on November 8, 2019. A 17-day search failed to recover his remains.

According to the AIB, Condiff was performing jumpy duties when his T-11R reserve parachute inadvertently deployed into the wind stream during a static-line parachute jump training event. The evidence indicated he likely sustained fatal injuries upon being pulled from the aircraft.

The AIB board president found Condiff's parachute deployed because it was improperly configured—a direct result of the participating jumpmasters' insufficient procedural knowledge. He also found widespread misunderstanding of the regulatory requirements for safe static-line parachute operations, which he attributed to a training deficiency within the 24 SOW.

Among the multiple factors leading to the accident, the board president found another substantially contributing factor; the parachute technical order process failed to deliver information effectively to the unit, resulting in incomplete knowledge of parachute operating standards.

Condiff's death occurred less than a month after the 24 SOW experienced another fatal training accident. Tech. Sgt. Peter Kraines, a Special Tactics pararescueman, died October 8, 2019, while participating in mountain rescue and climbing-related training near Boise, Idaho.

“Our people truly are our greatest asset” said Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, AFSOC commander. “We owe it to them to continually evaluate how we operate and how we can be more effective.”

In response to the wing’s two training deaths, Slife directed an operational suspension of all parachuting, diving, and mountaineering activities across AFSOC in order to complete an extensive review of the equipment, safety procedures and regulations pertaining to these specialized skills. Through this review, AFSOC identified a number of issues related to in-garrison training practices and standards which reached beyond the 24 SOW and affected all of AFSOC.

“It is apparent that these losses are a tragic consequence of a culture shaped by the demands of the last 20 years,” said Slife. “Across AFSOC, we normalized a culture overly focused on mission accomplishment, causing a lapse in training rigor, strict adherence to standards, and vigorous oversight of high-risk activities at all command echelons.”

AFSOC’s conclusions match the key findings of U.S. Special Operation Command’s Comprehensive Review, completed earlier this year. The results of the SOCOM review indicated that across the special operations enterprise, mission execution was prioritized to the detriment of leadership, discipline, and accountability practices.

Slife acknowledged that since 9/11, AFSOC prioritized operations over in-garrison training and predictable deployment scheduling, resulting in stressed units across the command and leaders accepting unnecessary risk for the sake of mission completion.

“Our Airmen have always found a way to do what we’ve asked of them,” said Slife. “It is our responsibility now to improve how we resource and develop them in order to remove as much risk from their missions as possible.”

In accordance with AFI 51-307, Aerospace and Ground Accident Investigations, the accident investigation board conducted a legal investigation to inquire into all the facts and circumstances surrounding the accident, prepared a publicly-releasable report, and obtained and preserved all available evidence for use in litigation, claims, disciplinary action, and adverse administrative action.

For questions concerning the AIB, please contact Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs at 850-884-5515. A releasable version of the report is available under the ‘AIB’ menu on the Air Force Judge Advocate General Corps website at <http://www.afjag.af.mil>. To submit an electronic request for the full report including tabs, visit <http://www.foia.af.mil/>.