



PRESS RELEASE

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-RANDOLPH, Texas – Today, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command released its Accident Investigation Board report from the F-35A Lightning II aircraft crash that occurred May 19, 2020, at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

The Accident Investigation Board president found by a preponderance of the evidence that the cause of the mishap was twofold. The pilot attempted to land the aircraft while at excessive speed, and a previously-undiscovered anomaly in the aircraft’s flight control logic caused the tail of the aircraft to not respond to pilot input.

The AIB president also found by a preponderance of the evidence that four additional factors substantially contributed to the mishap: the pilot landed with Speed Hold engaged and using an alternate cross-check method, the pilot’s Helmet Mounted Display misalignment distracted the pilot during a critical phase of flight, the pilot experienced cognitive degradation due to fatigue, and that the pilot lacked systems knowledge on flight control logic and experienced negative training from simulator experiences.

Following the conclusion of a two-ship formation night training sortie, the pilot approached the runway and did not follow procedure to adjust his speed. As a result the aircraft touched down with excessive speed and angle, causing significant bouncing of the aircraft on the runway.

For the next five seconds the pilot made corrective actions consistent with post-bounce recovery, which stressed the control system’s ability to respond to pilot input and stabilize the aircraft. In situations where there is a significant difference between the pilot’s inputs and the anticipated input, the flight control system resets and the pilot inputs may have a minimal effect on flight control surfaces for a period of time. In this instance, the series of multiple and increasingly violent pitch oscillations coupled with the pilot’s attempts to recover and take off over-saturated the flight control system and cued it to direct the horizontal stabilizers to default to, and remain in, a position that prevented response despite the pilot’s inputs to go airborne.

The pilot successfully ejected and sustained non-life threatening injuries. There was no loss of civilian property. The aircraft was destroyed upon impact.

The 58th FS trains Air Force operators and maintainers on employment and maintenance of the F-35 Lightning II "A" model, as part of the overall 33rd FW mission of training aircrews and maintainers from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and international air forces.