



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 fatal aircraft mishap that occurred Feb. 19, 2021. A U.S. Air Force and a Japanese Air Self Defense Force officer died when the T-38C aircraft they were piloting crashed at Dannelly Field in Montgomery, Ala.

The Accident Investigation Board president found by a preponderance of the evidence that the cause of the mishap was the instructor pilot losing situational awareness during a circling approach and failing to take timely and necessary corrective actions.

The board president also found that the student pilot substantially contributed to the mishap by placing and leaving the throttles in idle, due to task saturation in the traffic pattern. As the circling approach progressed, the instructor pilot failed to recognize the aircraft's deteriorating performance caused by the excessive length of time the throttles were in idle. This undetected and uncorrected action resulted in insufficient airspeed and a sink rate that exceeded altitude available which placed the aircraft outside the parameters for safe flight.

The U.S. instructor pilot and Japanese student pilot flew from Columbus AFB, Miss., to Dannelly Field to execute a practice instrument approach with a visual circle to a touch-and-go landing, and planned to continue to Tallahassee Florida International Airport for cross country flying training.

Investigators determined that the student pilot attempted to approach the runway at a speed and angle greater than safe to land during the circling maneuver following the instrument approach. The instructor pilot then directed the student pilot to change course by 40 degrees and reduce speed to align the aircraft with the runway. The student pilot responded by pulling the throttles to idle and rolling out slightly. The student pilot left the throttle at idle, entered a slight descent, and continued a 30-35 degree left bank turn to align with the runway. The aircraft slowed below target airspeed and entered a significant sink rate less than 500 feet above the ground. The instructor pilot then took control of the aircraft, rolled to wings level, pitched up, and then

advanced the throttles to max afterburner. At this time, the throttles had been at idle for 18 seconds. The aircraft continued to sink and contacted 80-foot power lines and then impacted the ground seconds later, at about 1,800 feet prior to the approach end of the runway. Both the instructor pilot and student died upon impact.

“Our instructors provide high-quality instruction in the basics of flying and airmanship and fly thousands of flights in a very complicated environment,” Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, commander of Air Education and Training Command, said. “We continue to grieve the loss of two accomplished and dedicated officers who were following their dreams.”

Both pilots were assigned to the 14th Flying Training Wing and the 50th Flying Training Squadron. The wing conducts specialized undergraduate pilot training in the T-6 Texan II, T-38C Talon and T-1A Jayhawk aircraft. Each day the wing flies an average of 260 sorties on its three parallel runways.