

Elevator Control Failure Blamed for Crash of Jet

General cause of a Montana Air National Guard jet plane's fatal crash here April 18 was in the elevator control system of the aircraft, an accident investigating board determined Tuesday.

"However, the final specific cause of the accident is undetermined, due to the extent of destruction of the aircraft," the board ruled upon completion of its investigation.

Maj. William D. Lewis, the pilot, and 1st Lt. Ronald Poland, the radar observer, were killed when the F89J fighter-interceptor crashed and burned in a wheat field immediately southwest of Great Falls International Airport seconds after taking off. Both were Air Force advisors to the local guard unit.

The board, assisted by specialists from Hill Air Force Base, Utah, representatives from the Air Force's flying safety division and the 29th Air Division at Malmstrom, made an exhaustive study of every possibility and every piece of the wreckage, Col. Rodger D. Young, Montana ANG commander, reported.

"Many possibilities of causes were eliminated positively by the board," Col. Young said.

The board, in ruling the general cause to be in the elevator control system, said this prevented the pilot from moving the control stick forward after breaking ground, thus causing the aircraft to stall.

"There are still four or five possibilities within the system that could have caused this—which one caused it, is the undetermined factor," the board ruled.

"The personal concern and interest that everyone took in this investigation made it the most thorough and exhaustive possible," Col. Young said. He expressed appreciation and gratitude to all personnel involved and to the many agencies involving people of Great Falls, "whose understanding and assistance greatly contributed to this investigation and the many problems involved."