



U.S. Air Force photos by SUE SAPP

Above, Joe Harbin, Staff Sgt. Christopher Williams and Master Sgt. Patricia Logue load an AIM-120B onto a missile stand.

Below, Staff Sgt. Christopher Williams straps an AIM-120B in place. A total of 690 of the missiles will undergo a rocket motor transfer here.

AIM-120 missile undergoes rocket motor transfer to improve launch capability through teaming effort at Robins

BY HOLLY L. BIRCHFIELD

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Robins is working with the Raytheon Company on a three-year project that will give fighter aircraft the right power at the right time.

Five munitions workers from the 78th Logistics Readiness Squadron are teaming up with four Tucson, Ariz.-based Raytheon workers in a three-year, \$4.6 million project which started its first phase Feb. 5. About 360 missiles out of 690 to undergo rocket motor transfers will take place here during fiscal 2007.

The air-to-air missile, designed to shoot down enemy aircraft, is the primary weapon for the F-15 and F-16. The AIM-120C is the primary weapon for the F-22 and eventually it will go on the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Master Sgt. Patricia Logue, senior inspector in the 78th

LRS Munitions Storage Area, said the change over in the weapon was necessary to address problems in the missile's makeup.

"Basically, what we're doing is we're moving the rocket motors off of the AIM-120A and we're moving them over to the AIM-120B," she said. "It's called a rocket motor transfer. They have a service life of 10 and a half years and they're ending (their viability)."

Edward Louie, senior multidiscipline engineer at Raytheon, said the swap out on the AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles comes as the missile's initial model is aging and losing its programming capability.

"The AIM-120A is the first generation AMRAM and they don't have any program memory, so they're less capable than the B and C versions that can be



reprogrammed," he said. "The AIM-120As have all the good rocket motors in them, while the AIM-120 Bs and Cs have the faulty rocket motors. The Air Force wants to start decommissioning the A missiles because they're 15 years old now. So, we're going to take all the good rocket motors out before we take them (to Letter Kenny Army Depot in Pennsylvania) so they can be demilitarized, and we're put-

ting our good rocket motors into the B and C missiles, which can be reprogrammed and have a higher capability and they're going to be updated with software."

Mr. Louie said previously, the missiles posed a danger of blowing up once they left the aircraft.

Raytheon and Robins identified problems with the missiles

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about a year and a half ago, Mr. Louie said. But plans for the project didn't begin until October 2006, after Global War on Terrorism funds became available in September to support the effort.

Field units from around the country have been shipping the missiles to Robins for the swap outs.

Mr. Louie said in addition to Robins, his team has worked with Hill Air Force Base, Utah; and Ramstein Air Base, Germany, in the project. The team plans to visit Robins 12 more times throughout the year, spending about two weeks at the base each time.

The Raytheon worker said the transfer provided a safer

capability for the warfighter.

"By swapping out these rocket motors to the Bs and Cs, we've given the warfighters multiple capabilities and we're protecting them at the same time, by giving them the correct rocket motors," he said. "We're just really excited to be out here because we know how important it is for the Air Force to get this done and we're hoping to get it all done on time and on schedule."

Joe Harbin, a 78th LRS munitions inspector, assisting Raytheon munitions inspectors in disassembling and reassembling missiles in the project, said he has learned a lot as the physically-challenging project has begun to unfold.

"The Raytheon people have been real professional," he said. "It's been a real challenge for us

each and every day to find out new schemes and new ways of doing things."

Once completed, the B and C models of the missile will be shipped to units across the Air Force and Air National Guard who use them.

Sergeant Logue said the project will ensure Airmen who are stateside and in the area of responsibility are mission ready.

"Basically what we're doing by taking the motor off the model that has the ending service life and transferring it over, we'll get the right missiles back out to the right place at the right time to hit the right target to defend our country and our fellow Airmen," she said.

Raytheon representatives are set to visit Robins March 3 to continue the project, Mr. Louie said.

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