

Hughes Official Says Air Force Rushed Complex AMRAAM Test

WASHINGTON

The U. S. Air Force was premature in its attempt to demonstrate that the AMRAAM's ability to intercept multiple targets in a high-intensity countermeasure environment, according to a high-ranking industry official.

The test involving four Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles fired simultaneously from an F-15 against four target drones should have been preceded by additional steps, Malcolm R. Currie, chairman of lead contractor Hughes Aircraft Co., said.

Currie asserted in an interview that the approach leading to the Aug. 2 test was doomed. He also said that the Air Force felt pressure to conduct the test launch that resulted in four misses out of four firings (AW&ST Aug. 14, p. 24).

At the time, a decision by senior Pentagon officials was nearing on whether to move into full-rate production of the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM). Funding uncertainties also loomed because of concern among members of Congress about the program.

The Air Force felt it had to perform

this test because of "all the attention" focused on the missile, but did so "without a careful evolutionary program. That's premeditated failure right from the beginning," Currie said.

Currie did not specify steps the service should have taken prior to the complex test. But he noted that software development is an evolutionary process. "You don't do the whole enchilada at once and hope that it comes out right," he said.

MORE FIRINGS PLANNED

He also complained about the "circus atmosphere" following the test. "It is very, very dangerous to have tests like this because it gives a totally wrong perception to the public and Congress," he said.

Last week, the Air Force disclosed plans to conduct two firings prior to its next major AMRAAM test. This "build up" approach will involve more weapon system analyses, captive carry tests and aircraft simulations. It is to lead to another four-by-four test launch in late November, an Air Force official said.

Under these plans, one missile will be

fired against two separate target drones in a test later this month. The Air Force then plans to conduct a test launch using two missiles against four separate target drones. This test, planned for early next month, was not conducted prior to the failed test launch this summer.

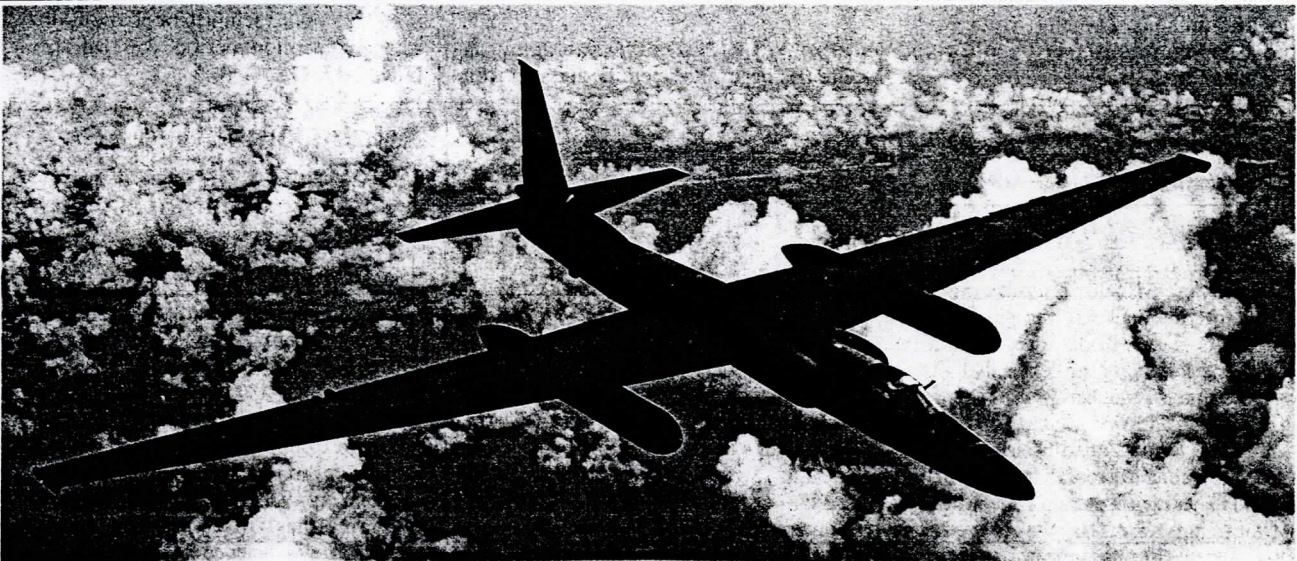
During the Aug. 2 test, the F-15 radar software detected new phenomena that caused it to guide the missiles to the wrong places, Currie said. An early Air Force assessment found that an F-15 fire control anomaly caused wide misses of the targets by three missiles. Missile No. 1 guided to a wide miss because of a missile software anomaly in the terminal tracking mode.

Modifications to the missile and F-15 radars have been made and the "fixes" are being demonstrated through captive carry missions, an Air Force official said.

The Aug. 2 test launch scenario was not representative of an actual battle, Currie said. In a real war, "you would not shoot the missiles like that anyway. You would use a different set of tactics," he said. □

Lockheed, USAF Test TR-1 Aircraft Equipped With F101-GE-F29 Engine

PALMDALE, CALIF.



Lockheed and the U. S. Air Force are testing a TR-1 tactical reconnaissance aircraft powered by a modified version of the engine now flying in the Northrop B-2 bomber. The TR-1 is configured with a General Electric F101-GE-F29, a derivative of the F118-GE-100, according to

Lockheed officials. The derivative engine is lighter and shorter than the Pratt & Whitney J75-P-13B currently installed in production TR-1 aircraft, yet delivers more thrust than the J75 in nonafterburning operation.

Lockheed delivered the last TR-1 to

the Air Force on Oct. 3, concluding a 37-aircraft program that began in 1979. Two of the high-altitude aircraft were designated ER-2s and delivered to NASA for earth resources flight research.

The TR-1 is based on earlier Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance designs. □

