

## **SFW successfully hits target**

### **UPGRADED SENSOR FUZED WEAPON SHIFTS TO FULL-RATE PRODUCTION**

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FL -- An upgraded version of the Sensor Fuzed Weapon successfully completed its first and only production qualification test, allowing the program to continue with full-rate production, officials told *Inside the Air Force* this week.

During the test, which took place here April 17, officials dropped the SFW with preplanned product improvements from an F-16 at 500 feet above sea level. Dennis Curley, technical director for the Area Attack Systems Program Office (AASPO), said the P3I SFW met the performance criteria.

"The results are initial but all indications point to the test being very successful," Curley said Wednesday. The weapon's chutes deployed, the rocket motors fired at the correct altitude and the individual submunitions dispersed as expected, he added.

Though the P3I model appears to have hit the intended target set -- an array of tanks, trucks and armored vehicles -- officials continue to gather data to verify the weapon's impact, Curley said. They expect to present a final report by early next week.

Designed to destroy targets scattered across a large area, the SFW is a cluster weapon that releases 10 parachute-equipped submunitions, which contain a total of 40 hockey puck-shaped projectiles. The Textron-built P3I variant includes a multifaceted blast-fragmentation ring that creates both a "shotgun" effect to defeat smaller, softer targets and a "rifle shot" capability designed to penetrate harder targets, Col. Ken Merchant, director of AASPO, said during an April 1 interview. Officials have also added an upgraded radar altimeter for improved accuracy and redundant safety features that will shut the weapon's battery off after eight seconds if it fails to find a target.

The weapon did have a Wind Corrected Munitions Dispenser tail kit attached to it during the test; however, the WCMD was not functional. "We wanted to prove that if there was a problem with the [WCMD], the [SFW] would still work without guidance," Curley explained.

The tail kit, which includes an inertial measurement unit, accurately drops the weapon from altitudes up to 40,000 feet -- well outside the range of enemy air defenses. Because the SFW disburses slugs across a wide area, collateral damage concerns previously restricted the use of the weapon from such high altitudes.

"With the introduction of WCMD, our collateral damage concerns are no longer there," Curley said. "In fact, WCMD was a weapon of choice during the Afghanistan conflict because of the capability that it brings putting weapons on target within 100 feet."

Approved for full-rate production in January 2001, the P3I SFW provides at least 140 percent more effectiveness on the targets than the baseline configuration -- with only a 20 percent cost increase, officials said. The baseline SFW costs \$300,000 per copy, and officials expect the P3I variant to cost approximately \$360,000 though they are currently in negotiations to finalize the price.

The Air Force has approximately 2,700 baseline SFWs and bought 300 P3I models last year, the first full production lot for the upgraded variant. The P3I SFW production line will run through 2011.

"The intent is to keep buying the [P3I] SFW at a rate of about slightly more than 300 per year," Merchant said. "We're trying to get that rate accelerated up to our optimal production run -- about 500 per year."

Some Pentagon officials had proposed killing SFW, after the Air Force cut funding in 1999. Officials argued in a draft program budget decision that while Operation Allied Force "required the deployment of almost every type of air-to-ground weapon in the inventory," SFW remained unused (*ITAF*, Dec. 17, 1999, p1).

However, then-Deputy Defense Secretary John Hamre decided to increase SFW funding to sustain the production line. -- *Laura M. Colarusso*

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

**703-416-8500 or**

**800-424-9068**

**custsvc@iwnews.com**

**NEWS OFFICE:**

**703-416-8528**

**Fax: 703-416-8543**

**airforce@iwnews.com**

Managing Editor: Amy Butler

Associate Editors: Jonathan M. Block, Laura M. Colarusso

Production: Lori Nicholson, Daniel Arrieta

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