



AGM-88

slides into second

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This is a weapons loader "there I was" story, but I have a dilemma. Telling a weapons troop about weapons safety is like telling an electrician about screwing in a light bulb. We get all the training one could hope for, and we think we know everything there is

to know about all munitions. We also are evaluated monthly and quarterly to keep our certifications current. We can be de-certified for not meeting time standards, violating a warning or a caution, or missing or over marking steps in a checklist. These things make weapons loaders

My first thoughts were, "Is everyone all right? What happened? Was it mechanical failure or human error?"

I didn't know what to think! As it turned out, a load crew was downloading a missile using the "slide" method. When you are sliding a HARM off of a rail, you have to install a forward track safing pin. This pin goes in the launcher rail to stop the missile from coming off completely. About 3 inches in front of the hole for the forward track safing pin, there is another hole for the pin that holds the yoke assembly in the UP position. This yoke secures the missile umbilical to the launcher. You guessed it. The #2 load crewmember installed the forward track safing pin in the wrong hole. The load crew chief, also known as the #1 man, glanced at it and did not notice that it was the wrong hole. As the crew slid the missile off the rail, the missile slid completely off of the launcher and landed on the #2 man. The #1 man and the #3 man rushed over and rolled the missile off their #2 man. Thankfully, he was not seriously injured in the incident. He did get an infection at the hospital when they "bore scoped" him checking for internal injuries. Nothing major, but I am sure that the #2 man would disagree with me on that account.

extremely safety conscious. That being said, I still am all too familiar with complacency on the flight line.

Here's my story. I was deployed a few years back to Base "X" with 12 jets and eight load crews. We were flying Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) missions. To a weapons troop, that means AGM-88 HARMs (High Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles). My load crew and two other crews were working the swing shift. I took my crew back to the support section to get some additional tools for a pending job.

As we were heading back out to the flight line, the following warning came across the radio, "Evacuate 4,000 feet from spot 'G,' an AGM-88 was just dropped on the ramp!"

A couple of different factors contributed to this mishap. The pin was installed in the wrong location, the #1 man did not notice this fact, and it was dark and not very well lit. So, was it a tech data violation, mechanical failure, or the environment? In my opinion, all of those things were factors, but the fact of the matter is, the load crew just got complacent.

We get so involved in loading the same munitions on the same jets night after night and we start thinking, "Nothing bad can happen to us. I can do this with my eyes closed."

False Statement!! No matter how many times you do something, it can go south in a hurry. There-

fore, we must continue to stick to our tech orders, maintain our situational awareness, and pay attention to the task at hand regardless of how proficient we feel on the job. Think it can't happen to you? Think again and take the necessary steps to make every missile upload or download a safe one. ✪



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