



# AMUs fight for the right to be called...

# THE BEST



by Airman 1st Class Stephen Collier  
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The 8th and 9th Aircraft Maintenance Units faced off during the monthly loading competition June 4.

Chief Master Sgt. Michael Tompkins, weapons manager, said the competition allows the loaders to show off their skills, showcase their sections and to prove which unit is the best.

"Any opportunity these troops have to show off their job and to hone their skills, they will take it," Chief Tompkins said.

The competition includes a three-man team that preps the jet for the bomb. After finishing their functional checks and inspecting the bomb bay, the loaders position the munitions under the aircraft and finish loading it.

Master Sgt. Robert Simpson, 8th AMU weapons section chief, said every second counts during the competition.

"As they make their way to the final stages of the evaluation, time

is of the essence," Sergeant Simpson said. "As they prepare the Guided Bomb Unit-27 with its seeker head and fins, precision becomes everything."

"This competition gives these units recognition," Staff Sgt. Kirtis Fisher said. "Our job is to get a bomb loaded quickly and safely. Loaders get a lot of pride in the work they do for their country."

As the competitors came together to be given their final scores and to determine which unit would be named the best for the month, Chief Tompkins stood ready to give the results. Ultimately, the 9th AMU came out on top.

"When a pilot flies into combat, they will have a live weapon on board," Chief Tompkins said. "The greatest feeling for a weapons troop is when there aircraft comes back from a sortie and the bomb isn't there. That's when they can say their bomb was loaded correctly and it functioned as advertised and the pilot was able to carry out the mission. That's all a loader ever asks."



Staff Sgt. Michael DeBaar, 49th Maintenance Group load standardization crew member, keeps time while the 8th AMU loaders prep the GBU-27.



Senior Airman Russell Ragosta, 8th Aircraft Maintenance unit weapons loader, pauses and reflects after his team finished their load.



Staff Sgt. William Reitman (right) uses the jammer to lift a GBU-27 into the F-117A's weapons bay as Senior Airman Christopher Markle adjusts the munitions from the rear. The weapons bay must be adjusted every time a weapon is loaded.

Photos by Airman 1st Class Stephen Collier



Senior Airman Weston Tso, 9th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons loader, searches for the right socket to tighten down the Nighthawk's bomb rack.



Staff Sgt. Joshua Lagania, 9th Aircraft Maintenance Unit weapons loader, goes over final functional checks of the F-117A Nighthawk as Staff Sgt. Kirtis Fisher, weapons loading evaluator, looks on.