HEADLINES

GR.5/7s. Plans to deploy the
missile on the Tornado F.3 and
the Royal Navy's Sea Harrier
FRS.2 have been dropped, as
have plans to equip the former
with the AIM-120 advanced me-
dium range air-to-air missile
(AMRAAM).
Raytheon's Improved Side-
winder is 3.1m long, 22cm (9in)
longer than the AIM-9M,
120mm in diameter and weighs
84.1kg, including a 10.15kg
warhead with laser-proximity
and contact fuzes. The missile
has greater maximum range and
40% shorter minimum range
with a new reduced-smoke
rocket motor.

Raytheon says: "Testing to
date has proven that Raytheon's
advanced low-cost seeker will
substantially improve the AIM-9
detection range and reject
known countermeasures." •
Additional reporting by Simon Elliott.

Aerospatiale studies air-launched booster
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erospatiale has set up a
study group for the develop-
ment of an air-launched rocket
to place civil and military satel-
lites weighing between 500kg
and 1,000kg in low-earth orbit.
Aerospatiale's space and stra-
tegic systems manager Michel
Delaye says that a retrievable
single- or two-stage rocket could
be launched from an Airbus
aircraft flying at Mach 0.8 at an
altitude of 3,9,000ft (12,000m).
A third stage, using a liquid-
hydrogen and solid-hydrogen
propellant, is also under study.
The main market is expected

to be small military observation
satellites and also civilian scien-
tific research satellites.
The French Aerospace com-
pany says that the new project
need not call for a partnership
within the European Space
Agency, but an alliance with a
US partner may be essential.
A decision on whether to go
ahead with the programme
should be made in 1992-3, for
production and entry into serv-
ice in 1998-2000.

US company Orbital Sciences
already produces a similar sys-
tem, called Pegasus. •

Thailand to purchase second F-16 batch
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he Thai government has ap-
proved plans to acquire a
second batch of 18 General Dy-
namics F-16 fighters. Thai prime
minister Anand Panyarachun
says the aircraft, valued at $607
million, will be delivered
during 1994.
Delivery of the initial Royal
Thai Air Force squadron of 18
F-16A/Bs was completed in
1991. In September, the US De-
partment of Defense notified
Congress of its intention to offer
Thailand an additional 18
F-16A/Bs plus six sets of Martin
Marietta LANTIRN night-naviga-

tion and targeting pod systems.
It is not known if the Thai
Government has accepted the
full package, although is it be-
lieved that acquiring LANTIRN
is high on the air force's list of
priorities. At present, LANTIRN
can be fitted only to F-16C/Ds;
F-16A/Bs would need modifica-
tion to carry the navigation and
targeting pods.
Thailand is the largest opera-
tor of the F-16 in South-East
Asia and would be the first in
the region to receive LANTIRN.
The Government has also ap-
proved an air force request to

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LITHUANIA LEASES BOEING 737
Lithuanian Airlines is to wet-lease a GPA Boeing 737-200 from Hungarian national carrier Malev. The aircraft made a demonstration tour of the Baltic states at the end of October last year. Lithuanian Airlines will take over the lease itself as soon as the necessary structures are in place, and flight crew and other personnel trained. The aircraft was due to be delivered in the first week of January.

purchase four Lockheed C-130
Hercules. A contract is expected
to be ready for signing by next
month. The purchase brings to
12 the total number of heavy
transport aircraft, which will be
deployed as a single squadron.
The air force plans to have 16
C-130s eventually, according to
one air force logistics officer. •

Compass inquiries start

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hree separate Australian
Government inquiries have
been announced following the
collapse of deregulation start-up
airline Compass.
In the most significant in-
quiry, all aspects of current Gov-
ernment aviation policy, includ-
ing the possible allowance of
Qantas domestic operations, will
be reviewed.

In a second inquiry, Austra-
lia's Trade Practices Commission
will conduct a broad-based in-
vestigation until early ^February
into aspects that were subject to
ongoing conflict during Com-
pass' 13-month life. , , ;••
A third inquiry to be uiider-
taken by the Australian Securi-
ties Commission will investigate
routinely Compass' corporate re-
sponsibilities and whether they
were duly observed. •
See Air Transport P 8.

USA ATC renewal

almost complete

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he $22 billion National
Airspace System Plan to
revamp US air traffic control is
essentially complete, with the
award to Harris of a $1.66
billion Federal Aviation Ad-
ministration (FAA) contract to
modernise the critical voice-
communications network.
Harris was selected over
AT&T to develop, produce and
install the voice switching and
control system (VSCS), which
will provide air-to-ground and
ground-to-ground communica-
tions at the FAA en-route con-
trol centres vectoring traffic
between US airports. The con-
tract covers the installation of
25 systems with options on an
additional 24.

Dick Pitts, senior systems
engineer at Harris Air Traffic
Control Systems division, says
VSCS will exceed the require-
ment for 99.99999% reliability
— no more than 3s downtime
a year — through redundancy
and automatic fault mitigation.
The system will handle 570
ground-to-ground trunk lines
and 350 air-to-ground radios
simultaneously, and twice the
specified 1,500 calls per min-
ute, he says.
Communications provided
to each console in a control
centre will be configured auto-
matically to match the number
of controllers on duty, which
can range from two at night to
200 at peak times, says Pitts.
The capacity to handle growth
to 430 positions has been dem-
onstrated in tests of a pre-
production prototype VSCS, he
says. Harris and AT&T were
awarded competitive prototype
development contracts in 1986.
The FAA says the VSCS will
help avoid communications
failures such as the 17 Septem-
ber, 1991, incident affecting
the New York regional control
center. VSCS bidder AT&T was
criticised for the failure, which
resulted in aircraft losing con-
tact with the ground for up to
5min. The disruption caused
more than 500 flight delays
and 650 cancellations, the FAA
estimates. D

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