

# AND THEY'RE OFF



**JIM MCCONNELL**, left, and Fred LaForest are pictured above during the aircraft launch technology installation on the USS Nimitz in October. The two will be deployed on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier next week to test an MSE-developed device.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MSE AND U.S. NAVY

## Butte engineers headed for USS Nimitz

BY JUSTIN POST  
of The Montana Standard

Two Butte engineers from MSE Inc. are deploying aboard the USS Nimitz from San Diego next week to test new aircraft launch technology.

Longtime employees Jim McConnell and Fred LaForest will spend 10 days aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier testing MSE's "launch bar confirmation technology," said Dave Micheletti, vice president of MSE's advanced energy and aerospace division.

Navy officials gave the Butte-based MSE formal approval this week to test the "Autonomous Launch Bar Seating Check Project" as the carrier embarks on a six-month deployment.

The technology developed by MSE would provide an automated system to ensure the carrier's catapult launch gear is properly seated during takeoff, Micheletti said.

Navy jets have crashed when the systems were not properly seated, and sailors have since physically verified a proper connection while working near jet engines, he said.

"There is a couple of safety factors involved there," Micheletti said.

The system developed by MSE uses a remote camera and "sophisticated" software to verify the positioning, he said.

MSE's engineers have been researching their launch confirmation technology with Naval funding since 1999, and Micheletti said the Navy's approval for on-site testing is a major development.

"Getting that formal approval yesterday was a big deal for us," he said this week. "The last step in the process is to install this system on an operational aircraft carrier and test it and demonstrate it works under real-world



**IF THE TESTING** for the aircraft launch technology proves successful, Navy officials plan to leave MSE's system in place on the USS Nimitz for the remainder of the cruiser's deployment. The Navy then may retrofit additional carriers, which would translate into a roughly \$10 million project for the Butte-based MSE, a spokesman said.



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MSE opened in 1976 and employs approximately

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**Dave Micheletti,**  
vice president of MSE's  
advanced energy  
and aerospace division

145 people including engineers, technicians and other technical workers, said Jeff Ruffner, president and chief executive officer.

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