

B-1B Bombers with Greater Capability Go Into Operation

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A U. S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bomber upgraded for greater lethality in conventional warfare made its inaugural operational flight Dec. 3 at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. Gen. Richard E. Hawley, Commander, Air Combat Command, piloted the bomber.

Gen. Hawley flew to the Utah Test Range and dropped Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) on a test range target. JDAM is a low cost smart weapon guided by inertial navigation and Global Positioning Satellite targeting signals. The new JDAM capability gives B-1B substantial increases in bombing accuracy, thus greatly enhancing its lethality. B-1B's speed and global range, coupled with JDAM's precision accuracy and adverse weather capability are expected to produce major improvements in B-1B sortie effectiveness.

JDAMs, produced by Boeing in St. Charles, Mo., are 2,000-pound bombs which can be expected to destroy or disable military targets within a 40-foot radius of the point of impact. Integration tests of JDAMs on B-1Bs yielded even better accuracies.

A B-1B bomber can carry 24 JDAMs - eight in each of its three large weapon bays. A typical B-1B JDAM combat mission would involve targets such as hangars, bridges and command bunkers.

The upgraded B-1B flown by Gen. Hawley is one of seven which will be in operation at the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base early next year. Upgrades also include a new defensive system, a towed decoy, which will enhance the survivability of the aircraft, and a new communication/navigation system which will enable B-1B combat crews to receive more battle zone information more quickly. These three upgrades taken together are known as "Block D."

The upgrades are part of the B-1B Conventional Mission Upgrade Program, or CMUP, a multi-year U.S. Air Force plan to optimize the B-1B's intrinsic capabilities for conventional warfare. The bomber's original mission was strategic nuclear deterrence. B-1Bs stood strategic alert from 1985 until the end of the Cold War. Now they are a key component of U.S. conventional warfighting capability.

The seven 28th Bomb Wing aircraft were put into operation on an accelerated schedule which got them into the field approximately two years ahead of the original schedule. Fleetwide completion of the JDAM and communication/navigation upgrades -- for all 93 B-1Bs -- is scheduled for 2001; towed decoy installations will be completed in 2003. An earlier upgrade, known as CMUP Block C, fielded in August 1997, gave B-1Bs the capability to drop cluster bombs. Further upgrades are being implemented. CMUP Block E will give B-1Bs the capability to deploy wind-compensated munitions, Joint Standoff Weapons (JSOWs), and Joint Air To Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSMs). It is scheduled to begin operational service in 2002. CMUP Block F, a set of further improvements to the bomber's defensive system, will go into operational service in 2003.

Most CMUP modification work is performed by the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center at Tinker Air Force Base.

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