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B-1 aircrews participate in air defense capability exercises

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ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (ACCNS) -- Aircrews from the 77th Bomb Squadron participated in an evaluation in the skies off the Florida coast and over Georgia Feb. 29 - March 9 that examined the challenges military members encounter trying to identify friendly or hostile forces.

During the evaluation, conducted by the All Service Combat Identification Evaluation Team, Ellsworth B-1B aircrews simulated the tactics of Russian Tu-22 Bear bombers attacking Navy Aegis Destroyers, United Kingdom Frigates, and U.S. Army Patriot missile batteries defending targets at Fort Stewart, Ga. This is the first time aircrews from the 77th BS participated in the ASCIET exercise.

"Our primary objective was to conduct maritime reconnaissance and simulated attacks against U.S. and British naval combatants," said Lt. Col. Steve Dickman, 77th BS commander. "The ships employ self-protection surface-to-air missiles and are protected by F/A-18s. Our aircrews simulated launching air-to-surface missiles performing conventional attacks on the ships. Our second objective was to eliminate the ground targets at Fort Stewart."

Flying both night and day sorties against the friendly forces, the 77th BS employed three jets modified with special equipment to allow accurate tracking of the B-1B's during the exercise. The aircrews flew two, two-ship missions per day from Ellsworth AFB to support the exercise.

"Each two-ship was scheduled to cover two exercise fly periods," said Capt. Hans Miller, 77th BS mission planner for the evaluation. "The missions were about eight hours long ... six hours getting to the play area and two hours in the exercise area."

Supported by F-15C's simulating Su-27 Flankers, the base aircrews went up against the Navy F-18s intent on "eliminating" the B-1Bs before they got into range to launch simulated anti-ship missiles.

Once the over-water maneuvers with the ships were complete, the base aircrews and their counterparts descended to low altitude and headed toward the coast south of Savannah, Ga., for simulated strikes against targets on the Fort Stewart range. Patriot missile batteries protected the targets. The ASCIET evaluators put the responses of the ships and missile batteries under the microscope to determine how well they countered the 'enemy' attacks.

"The overall objective of the ASCIET evaluations is to employ and evaluate the capability of joint

forces to detect, sort, identify and target enemy forces," Dickman said. "The results help joint force commanders determine current combat identification capabilities, test new systems and assess the future needs of our forces. To do that, they need a broad base of 'enemy forces' to train against including large, small, fast and slow jets, and other attack platforms like helicopters."

Dickman added that ASCIET evaluations, which cover a broad spectrum of combat identification areas including doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures and combat systems, are the Defense Department's primary means to critically analyze how the military identifies enemy targets in the joint combat environment.

"The evaluations provide a unique opportunity for the military to evaluate emerging combat identification technologies in a joint operational environment and provide a forum for communication between industry and military combat identification systems developers and warfighters," he added. "It also provides participants a chance to train in a joint, tactical environment and get experience in mission areas we don't get to train in often, such as maritime operations like those our crews flew over the water and attacking ships."

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