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Ellsworth squadron makes history during Coronet Spider 28

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ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (ACCNS) -- Aircrews from the 37th Bomb Squadron here flew 10 non-stop 21-hour missions Feb. 14 to 18 as part of a series of Global Power missions.

Coronet Spider 28, known here as Tiger Strike, consisted of daily, two-ship sorties that flew a circuit west from Ellsworth to the Alaskan Yukon Range, south to Hawaii, and east over the southwestern continental United States back to Ellsworth, for five straight days.

"The historical significance of this endeavor is huge," said Lt. Col. Jeffry Smith, 37th BS commander. "This wing is tasked by Air Combat Command to fly one long-duration sortie, called a Global Power sortie, each quarter. We've been tasked to fly 10 Global Power sorties in one week. This is something the B-1B community has never done in the past, and to our knowledge is something done by no other bomber community since the Vietnam War.

"We attempted and succeeded to prove not just this warfighting machine's capability, but the tenacity of the aircrews and maintainers to carry out this challenge," Smith added.

The aircrews dropped inert 2,000-pound weapons against targets in Alaska, and then tested the United States' air defense systems in Hawaii before returning to the mainland.

"Testing America's air defense systems is something this strike bomber (the B-1B) is well suited for," said Capt. Jason Combs, 37th BS Tiger Strike project officer. "Although the east and west coasts of the United States are often tested by friendly aircraft, Hawaii rarely gets challenged due to its long distance from the mainland. We pushed the envelope with the Federal Aviation Administration and the 'Hawaii Air National Guard,' and provided great training for all."

Global Power training missions are designed to demonstrate the worldwide deployment and strike capability of the ACC bomber force.

"The United States' national security depends on long-range bomber capability," Smith said. "Our mission, not unlike any other bomb squadron in the Combat Air Forces, is to guarantee America's freedom--and that's why we're here."

Throughout the week, Tiger Strike aircrews flew more than 87,000 nautical miles and took on more than 2.5 million pounds of jet fuel in-flight. Tanker support for these historic missions involved active-duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve aircraft from units at Fairchild and McChord Air Force Bases, Wash., Travis AFB, Calif., McConnell AFB, Kan., Grand Forks AFB, N.D., and Bangor, Maine.

Coronet Spider 28 missions, planned by the 28th Operations Support Squadron, also included aircrews and maintainers from the 77th Bomb Squadron "War Eagles."

Aircrews took off at approximately 9:15 a.m. daily and returned the next day around 6:45 a.m., for a single sortie duration of 21.5 hours.

"This was a historic mission for the maintenance community as well," said Maj. Dale Orvedahl, 37th BS maintenance officer. "Never before have we tested the aircraft's sustained flight performance to this degree. Until now, Global Power was a test of the individual aircrew and aircraft, and now we've tested the sustainability of the parts and supply system to meet our warfighting demands - and we did remarkably well."

The 37th BS launched four aircraft daily with the plan that two would act as 'air spares' for the two primary strike aircraft. After the first refueling, the 'spare' aircraft went on to strike targets in the Utah Test and Training Range before returning to Ellsworth. Then, some 10 hours later they were regenerated as the next day's primary strike aircraft in keeping with the intent of the exercise - sustainability and regeneration of strike bombers.

"This is exactly how we must be prepared to fight from home during any conflict, and certainly falls in the realm of our upcoming Air Expeditionary Force responsibilities," Combs said.

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