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A B-1B Lancer from the 28th Air Expeditionary Wing heads for Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom after receiving fuel from a KC-10 Extender from the 60th Air Expeditionary Group on Nov. 27. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Cedric H. Rudisill) | [High-Res Version of this photo](#)

B-1 is tailor-made for Operation Enduring Freedom

*by Tech. Sgt. Tim Dougherty
Air Force Print News*

03/29/02 - **WASHINGTON** -- It has been called the "monster truck" of the U.S. bomber fleet. It flies low, fast and long distance, and has the largest payload of any bomber, including the B-52 Stratofortress.

For Operation Enduring Freedom, it has been the B-1B Lancer that has done the lion's share of the work, dropping nearly 40 percent of the ordnance, while flying only 5 percent of the strike sorties.

"The picture that is etched into my mind about the B-1 is the picture of an Afghan mountainside and a string of (GBU-31/32 joint direct attack munitions) marching down a trench line," said Maj. Gen. Daniel P. Leaf, director of operational requirements for air and space operations at the Pentagon.

The B-1 can bring 24 JDAMs to the fight. A JDAM is a

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global positioning system-aided bomb that is not technically a "precision" weapon. Tell that to an al-Qaeda terrorist as he watches a string of 2,000-pound explosions tear into his previously unscathed trench line.

"I would venture to say (that) at some point in the conflict the massed JDAM employment by the B-1s is when Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership thought to themselves 'we're not fighting the Soviet Union. This is a different, extraordinarily more capable enemy.' That's played a very big part in the rout of the Taliban and al-Qaeda," Leaf said.

The B-1s success during Operation Enduring Freedom is not a surprise to Air Force leadership. Leaf said the airplane proved itself in combat during Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. However, what the B-1 showed in Afghanistan is the value of massed precision with the JDAM.

"When you're able to precisely drop a series of weapons like that, as they have, to me as a warrior and as someone who has thought about war for my whole career, that's really something," Leaf said. "It is truly transformational in a combat sense."

The work by today's B-1 community to bring their beloved bomber to this level has been transformational as well. They turned a Cold War nuclear bomber into a deadly conventional workhorse and, in the process, picked up a mission that the designers had never planned on.

"If you offered the B-1 with JDAMs in direct support of ground forces as a solution 10 years ago, I would have laughed heartily because it's not what we envisioned," Leaf said. "However, faced with a shift in paradigms and a shift in what we have to do, we adjusted and used the airplane in an extraordinarily flexible manner over Afghanistan. It's part of the intellectual shift that's occurring in the Air Force."

Maj. Randy Allen is a B-1 pilot who took his airplane into the fight over Kosovo. He is currently working for the Air Force's operational training division, air and space operations, providing guidance to pilots in Afghanistan. He said that he loves the B-1 and would not fly any other airplane, but points out that each type of bomber in the Air Force fills a specific need.

"There's a myth that needs to be put to rest," Allen said. "There's a tendency to compare the bombers amongst

themselves -- the B-1, the B-52 and the B-2 (Spirit). They are really three very different platforms and they all bring very different capabilities to the fight."

The B-52 is the only bomber with a cruise missile capability, while the B-2 brings a stealth capability that allows it to knock down the door for the others.

The Air Force plans to add the joint air-to-surface standoff missile to the arsenal employed by the B-1. Like the JDAM, the B-1 will carry 24 of these new weapons that can be launched almost 200 miles away from a target -- far outside any existing surface to air threats. The JASSM is currently in production and should be deployed in about two years.

Future plans for the B-1 include reducing the fleet to 60 airplanes. Leaf said some people thought this was because the Air Force did not like the airplane, but that is not the case.

"The truth of the matter is we like the airplane but we want it to be as capable as it can be. It's a great airplane with a great future," Leaf said. "That's why we're shrinking down to 60 -- not to get rid of it, but to make sure that the ones we have are as capable as they need to be, whether the conflict is in Afghanistan or elsewhere." (Maj. Gerard Goodfellow from the 28th Bomber Wing contributed to this story)

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