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Two of the four downed crewmembers from the B-1B Lancer that crashed into the Indian Ocean are evaluated by Air Force and Navy medical people after being transferred from the Navy destroyer USS Russell to a transport boat Dec 13. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Shane Cuomo) | [High-Res Version of this photo](#)

B-1B crewmembers safe after crash

*by Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service*

12/13/01 - **WASHINGTON (AFPN)** -- The four-man crew of a 28th Air Expeditionary Wing B-1B Lancer who ejected

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from their out-of-control aircraft in the middle of the night over the Indian Ocean were rescued through the efforts of servicemembers in the air and on the water.

Air Force Capt. William Steele, B-1B mission commander, said his aircraft had multiple malfunctions.

"We found the aircraft was out of control and we had to eject," Steele said in a phone interview from aboard the Navy destroyer USS Russell.

The crew suffered minor injuries in the incident.

"Going through an ejection like that was about the most violent thing I've ever felt," he said. "We're all pretty bruised up, and we have some cuts, but overall we're doing very well."

The crew spent about two hours in the water before being rescued.

"In the water, we didn't see any hazards -- no sharks or anything like that," Steele said. "It was actually kind of comfortable. Nice warm water."

After the bomber crashed, a KC-10 Extender refueler from the 79th Air Refueling Squadron at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., began a search.

"We were taking off on a totally different mission when we heard the aircraft in distress," KC-10 pilot Maj. Brandon Nugent said by phone. "When we heard it had crashed, we went toward the last known location and began to search."

His co-pilot, Capt. Mike Dali, had spent time in the search

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and rescue field. They located at least some of the crew via their strobe lights and flares.

"It was pretty tense while we were looking," Nugent said. "We were all very happy when we found them."

The KC-10 and a Navy P-3 Orion circled the area and guided the USS Russell toward the crew. The ship was on picket duty for just such instances -- patrolling to rescue any crews that might have to ditch. The destroyer moved toward the area and readied its boats.

"The area the B-1B went down in is a particularly shallow area," said Navy Cmdr. Hank Miranda, the ship's captain. "We had to navigate very carefully. We brought the ship as close as possible to where we thought the crew was. We had to put our boats in the water about seven miles away from the crew."

Navy Lt. Dan Manetzke was the officer in charge of the boat that picked up the crew.

"When we arrived at the scene and picked up the pilots, our first response was to make voice contact with them and make sure they were all right medically," he said. "We were as happy to see them as they were to see us."

Steele said he had to disagree with Manetzke.

"I think we were much happier to see them than they were to see us," he said.

Because of security reasons, Steele could not give the names of the rest of his crew, but their call signs are Rooster, Iroc and Lost. Two of the crew are from Mountain

Home Air Force Base, Idaho, and two the other two are from Ellsworth AFB, S.D.

"I just want to thank the crew of the KC-10 and the USS Russell," Steele said. "Everybody did an outstanding job."

Miranda seconded that. "Everything worked like clockwork," he said. "It was a great team effort."

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