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ACC commander dedicates upgraded B-1B Lancers

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DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (ACCNS) -- Air Combat Command Commander Gen. Ed Eberhart culminated a two-day visit with the dedication of Dyess' first Block D upgraded B-1s here Jan. 25.

Hundreds of Dyess AFB people, area civic leaders and media members attended the afternoon ceremony to hear the general as he spoke of the new capabilities the Block D upgrade brings to the base and the B-1 community, as well as the role of the Lancer in future contingencies.

"It does, in fact, make this airplane more lethal than it has ever been," said Eberhart. "We've seen this capability in action. We know exactly what the B-1, properly supported, properly maintained and properly funded, can do - and I know of nowhere that this airplane will be better taken care of and this capability better utilized than here at Dyess."

In a post-ceremony press conference, the general expanded on the capabilities of the upgraded Lancer.

"This upgrade will ensure Dyess has the most modern capability on its B-1s. This means the B-1 will be able to be used in all weather, day or night," the general explained. "It also gives the crews, with the towed decoy system, the ability to go into threat environments where otherwise we probably wouldn't send them. This will make the B-1 even more relevant on today's battlefield.

"As I was growing up in the Air Force, we talked about how many sorties we had to generate to kill a target. With this capability, we can talk about how many targets we can kill with a sortie, so we go in harm's way a lot less with our men and women," Eberhart said.

"It's also important that we keep collateral damage to a minimum," he continued. "There is no reason to destroy things we don't need to destroy.

"Finally, it makes common sense that if you're able to do the job with fewer weapons and fewer sorties, then you have to take fewer weapons and other assets forward. There are so many advantages to precision weapons," Eberhart concluded.

The general also found time during his visit to fly the B-1 for the first time and promote two Dyess non-commissioned officers under the Stripes for Exceptional Performers program. Tech.

Sgt. Darrell Payne, 9th Bomb Squadron commander's support staff superintendent, was promoted to master sergeant Jan. 24 and Staff Sgt. Tom Ritter, 7th Communications Squadron NCOIC of Maintenance Support, was promoted to technical sergeant Jan. 25.

Eberhart also visited various duty sections on the base to talk with airmen about the quality of life initiatives Department of Defense leaders are working to bring service members.

During a visit to the 7th Communications Squadron, Eberhart told members of the squadron that his biggest concern was retention of Air Force professionals. "We can always buy new parts, equipment and airplanes, but we need to make sure we recruit and retain good people.

"Thank you for serving, whether you serve for four years, six years, twelve years or any period of time. I hope you choose to stay with us for 20 or 30 years," he said. "We need you. You are an outstanding group of people and we're glad you're with us."

Eberhart will pass the reigns as ACC commander to Gen. John Jumper Feb. 8. Eberhart, a 31-year veteran, has been selected for reassignment as commander in chief, North American Aerospace Defense Command; commander in chief, U. S. Space Command; commander, Air Force Space Command; and Department of Defense Manager for Manned Space Flight Support Operations, Peterson AFB, Colo.

ACC Director of Communications and Information Brig. Gen. Dale Meyerrose and ACC Command Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Estrem accompanied Eberhart during his visit.