



Air Combat Command NEWS SERVICE

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Aircrew recognized for B-1 first

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ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (ACCNS) - Try landing a B-1B with the flight-control sticks disconnected from each other and see where that gets you. It got a four-person aircrew from the 37th Bomb Squadron here the Air Combat Command Aircrew Safety Award of Distinction for their superior airmanship, professionalism and crew coordination.

During an in-flight emergency, Lt. Col. Jeffry Smith, Capt. Todd Valentine, Capt. Brian Ogawa, and Capt. Kenneth Boillot landed a B-1B using procedures that the developers of the bomber said should never be tried.

"The flight was pretty routine until we arrived at a turn point. Instead of turning left as planned, we turned right," Valentine, the pilot, said. "To fix the problem, I tried to disconnect the autopilot and turn the aircraft with my stick."

That's when he noticed his stick wouldn't move. His first thought was that the crew had to do something new to solve this challenge.

The captain tried to pass control of the aircraft to Smith, the aircraft commander, but the colonel said he found his stick was frozen as well.

Smith directed that the control sticks be separated and allowed to operate independently. While this did nothing for Valentine's stick, Smith's moved freely again, but with very little effect on the aircraft's flight controls.

The B-1B had lost about 800 feet of altitude. It was do-or-die time: The crew had to regain control of the aircraft.

Smith declared an in-flight emergency and Ogawa, the offensive systems operator, determined the crew had to either divert to Hill AFB, Utah, which was 150 miles away, or head home to Ellsworth 300 miles away.

Even though the emergency procedure checklist directed the aircraft be landed as quickly as possible, Smith decided it was best to go home due to the heavy fuel load. They needed to reduce the bomber's weight to gain more control.

"We relied on our training, teamwork, and the leadership and experience of Colonel Smith," Valentine said.

The pilot coordinated with the Ellsworth supervisor of flying to ensure ground emergency support was in place while Boillot, the defensive systems operator, used the technical order to ensure the right procedures were accomplished.

Ground support wasn't needed as Smith landed the B-1B with the sticks disconnected from each other -- a first in the history of the bomber.

During development of the aircraft, engineers determined that the procedure should never be tried due to the difficulty of controlling the B-1B.

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