



Released: December 7, 1999

Dyess takes delivery of upgraded B-1 Lancer

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DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (ACCNS) -- The 28th Bomb Squadron here welcomed home one of its own Nov. 19 with the arrival of Aircraft 86-0105, the 7th Bomb Wing's first Block D upgraded B-1.

The upgrade, completed at the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center at Tinker AFB, Okla., gives B-1 aircrews increased abilities to accurately put bombs on target with improved weapons and targeting systems, as well as giving them advanced secure communications capabilities.

According to Maj. Evan Miller, 28th BS maintenance officer, the delivery of this plane marks only the beginning of the upgrade process, as the wing is projected to receive another upgraded aircraft in December and two more in January. All Dyess B-1s are projected to have the upgrade and new electronic countermeasures system by May 2004.

This electronic countermeasures system, called the towed decoy system, is designed to defend the B-1 from attack. In addition to the Block D upgrade, the aircraft delivered in December and January will already be equipped with the towed decoy system. According to Maj. Matt Bartlett, chief of wing standardization and evaluation, this system deploys a decoy which is towed behind the aircraft. The decoy lures incoming missiles with electronic jamming, preventing the missile from hitting the aircraft.

Bartlett said improvements to the Lancer will result in aircrews better equipped to fulfill their mission and return home safely. And while the upgrade for the Air Force's entire B-1 fleet costs \$330 million, Bartlett believes this is a small price to pay to increase mission effectiveness and protect Air Force people and equipment. "Anytime an aircrew has more reliable equipment, improved accuracy, and communications, all of this will help them come home safely while successfully executing the mission," he said.

With the upgrade comes the capability to drop near-precision weapons from the B-1, which had previously been equipped to handle only "dumb" weapons. With some additional minor upgrades in the future, B-1s here will have the ability to carry Joint Direct Attack Munitions. The JDAM is a 2,000-pound weapon which uses an internal navigation system and external fins to correct errors in its flight path to ensure it hits the target.

The upgraded Lancer also gives the 28th BS, the B-1 community's only formal aircrew training unit, the opportunity to train pilots and weapon system operators to use the new systems.

"The other B-1 bases are asking us to send them Block D qualified people," Bartlett said. "Having the upgraded planes here allows us to train these aircrews and send Ellsworth AFB, S.D., Mountain Home

AFB, Idaho, McConnell AFB, Kan., and Robins AFB, Ga. Block D qualified people."

The new systems also require additional training for the B-1 maintainers, and with the help of the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth, Dyess maintainers will soon be up to speed on the new procedures.

Tech. Sgt. Scott Marsich, 28th BS defensive avionics system manager, said members of Ellsworth's 28th BW will train several Dyess people to maintain the new equipment. These people in-turn will train other Dyess maintainers.

Col. Douglas Raaberg, 7th Operations Group commander, said the Block D upgrade is a quantum leap forward in the combat capability of the Lancer.

"This means more to us than just a 'Block D upgrade'," the colonel explained. "This is the biggest change since Dyess received the first B-1 more than 13 years ago. Giving the B-1 the capability to move from a conventional or 'dumb' platform to a near-precision platform makes the Lancer a valuable tool to our theater commanders in chief and prepares us for increased challenges in the new millenium."

The majority of Dyess B-1s are currently Block C aircraft, with older technology which is replaced in the Block D upgrade process. According to Miller, as the Air Force performs Block D upgrades to its B-1 fleet, planning and testing has already began for Block E and F upgrades, all of which will ensure the Lancer is able to fulfill its mission well into the 21st Century.

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