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Dyess bombers drop guided weapons

DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (ACCNS) -- The "Bones" just got a bit badder.

Two 9th Bomb Squadron crews conducted the first drop of JDAM weapons from Dyess-based B-1 bombers Aug. 14. JDAM, which is short for Joint Direct Attack Munition, is a guidance tail kit that converts unguided bombs into guided "smart" munitions, Air Force officials said. The Dyess crews made their first drops over test ranges in Utah.

"Our successful JDAM delivery signals a quantum leap in long-range precision strike capability for ACC's bomber force, and provides theater (commanders in chief) with greatly enhanced combat firepower," said Col. Michael Moeller, commander of the 7th Operations Group.

A JDAM kit contains an inertial navigation system and a guidance unit that uses the Global Positioning System of satellite signals to guide the weapon to its target. B-1 crews at Ellsworth AFB, S.D., first tested the munition in 1998.

In the Aug. 14 training missions, four JDAMs were dropped from an altitude of 31,000 feet, Dyess crewmembers said. JDAM has an advertised "circular error probable," which defines a circle the bomb is expected to land inside of 50 percent of the time, of 13 meters, about 42.5 feet. The two Dyess crews were within that range, with the farthest strike being 27 feet from its target and the closest at 13 feet. Another crew that flew a JDAM mission Aug. 21 made a direct hit on the target.

JDAMs can be dropped at low altitudes as well. This allows the weapon to be used with the B-1's low-level, terrain-following capabilities.

"Our war-fighting CINCs and staffs need to be aware of the B-1's capabilities concerning JDAM," said Lt. Col. Jim Rowland, 7th Operations Group deputy commander. "We can employ it above (300 feet) and have near-precision capability with the weapon."

"It's a little more work (to do a JDAM drop) than a normal bomb release, but it gives us a tremendous capability," said Maj. Kirk Hunsaker, who flew on the lead aircraft. "We are no longer limited by the type of weapons we can carry. Before, with the (500-pound unguided bombs), we felt that the weapon limited us on being able to use the aircraft's full capabilities. That's no longer the case."

The training mission provided "a clear demonstration of the B-1B's flexibility," Moeller said. "From high or low altitude, the aircraft can deliver 24 JDAMs – the largest payload of any Air Force weapon system."

Hunsaker said being able to drop 24 weapons is "an impressive load out." It allows a single B-1 to attack 24 individual targets on a single mission.

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