



# Air Combat Command NEWS SERVICE



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## B-1 crew provides CAS, destroys heroin cache

**CORRECTION: This mission did not, as was previously reported, set a record as the longest B-1 combat sortie to employ weapons.**

By Staff Sgt. Zachary Wilson  
40th Air Expeditionary Group Public Affairs

04/05/2004 - **SOUTHWEST ASIA (ACCNS)** — A 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron crew here recently completed a marathon mission that included providing close air support to U.S. troops and the destruction of a heroin cache.

The mission, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, lasted 21.3 hours and centered around a call from friendly troops requesting close air support.

The mission began March 19, when the 40th Air Expeditionary Group launched a B-1 on a mission to patrol an area near Kandahar, Afghanistan. Maj. John Nichols was the aircraft commander of the four-man crew.

“Prior to (the call for assistance), the situation was basically calm,” Major Nichols said.

After more than 14 hours in the air with no calls for help, the crew had finally been cleared to return to base.

Just minutes before they were out of Afghanistan, the crew heard over the radio that ground troops were engaged in a firefight with anti-coalition forces in a compound, but their support aircraft were refueling and could not help out.

“This initiated a discussion amongst the crew members, and without batting an eye, we all agreed that we had to get involved,” said Capt. Christian Senn, defensive system officer for the B-1.

Major Nichols agreed.

“It had been a long day,” he said. “But we had the fuel and weapons to help, and troops on the ground were in harm’s way.”

After receiving coordinates, the B-1 swiftly made for the area where the hostile forces were located.

“Did we get anxious? Absolutely,” said Captain Senn. “Three of the four on board were looking at our first combat strike — a big deal as an aviator.”

Major Nichols was the only member with combat experience. He had flown

<b>OSS aids pilot in peril</b>	dozens of combat missions when OEF first began and lent his experience to the mission.
<b>Senior officer assignments announced</b>	As they approached, the crew realized the friendly forces were completely surrounding the compound and they would not be able to safely drop their bombs without putting U.S. Soldiers in danger.
<b>OSI detachment wins ACC award</b>	“Dropping weapons over the heads of fellow Americans is just too dangerous save in an emergency situation,” said Captain Senn.
<b>Reshaping 8th Air Force</b>	The crew notified the joint terminal air controller on the ground of the situation. Within minutes, the ground commander had moved his troops south of the enemy position and gave the B-1 crew the okay to drop.
<b>Langley teams with Habitat for Humanity</b>	The crew notified the joint terminal air controller on the ground of the situation. Within minutes, the ground commander had moved his troops south of the enemy position and gave the B-1 crew the okay to drop.
<b>HAWC reaches out to local community</b>	“Here, another part of our training kicked in as a safety catch,” said Captain Senn. “We confirmed the target coordinates nearly a half-dozen times to ensure we were putting ‘iron’ on the target and not on our guys on the ground. We weren’t going to have any mistakes.”
<b>PRM and the art of hog farming</b>	Seconds later the bomber released three of its 2,000-pound guided munitions.
<b>Officials release Predator accident report</b>	“There was a painfully long pause between the ‘thump’ of (the bombs) leaving the aircraft and the (Joint Terminal Air Controller) giving us words,” said Captain Senn. “His voice finally broke the silence, and it was said as if with a smile, ‘Direct hit!’”
	The JTAC then requested the B-1 make a re-attack just in case.
	“We began the second run, but could never get the final clearance to release. And therefore, could not make another drop,” said Major Nichols.
	“The other aircraft were back from refueling, and we were at ‘Bingo fuel,’ the minimum necessary to get back safely,” Major Nichols said. “So, we were cleared to exit the area.”
	As they were leaving, the JTAC radioed that the initial run had been successful and the enemy forces had been eliminated.
	“As we left, we were satisfied and extremely tired,” said Captain Senn. “We had been flying over Afghanistan for nearly 10 hours.”
	The crew finally returned to base after 21.3 hours in the air.
	The crew later learned the results of the drop from an air liaison officer from the Army division headquarters of the ground unit. The ALO told them six anti-coalition militia forces and an estimated \$6 million in heroin had been destroyed in the attack on the compound. He also recognized the effort expended by the crew during the marathon mission.
	“The guys ability to extend on station and ultimately bring airpower to bear w

a huge success,” said the ALO.

The ALO for the ground forces in the area agreed.

“They did an outstanding job under difficult conditions,” he said in an email to the crew. “Their actions helped to save the lives of the men I work with on a daily basis here.”

The words meant much to Captain Senn who saw the email from the ground troops within hours of landing. “When I read the email, the true significance of our role that day came to light,” he said.

“As for the destruction of the heroin, in the end the 40th AEG prevented that \$100 million from funding further terrorist attacks, operations and efforts around the world or even at home,” said Col. Jeffrey Beene, 40th AEG commander.

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