



Days are long for B-1 aircrews

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40th Air Expeditionary Group Public Affairs

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(AFPN) – The sound is instantly recognizable as the walls of the tents start fluttering. Airmen slowly awoken to hear a light rumbling in their eardrums. Five seconds later they begin to think their tent is sitting on the tarmac of Cape Canaveral during a space shuttle launch.

It takes a lot more than just the 120,000 pounds of thrust to lift the B-1 Lancer off the ground so it can deliver bombs on target.

A typical B-1 mission begins with the crew of four: two pilots and two weapons systems officers. They begin their shift after 12 hours of mandatory crew rest before mission show time. The crew's show time, which may be at any hour of the day, is based on mission requirements.

"Hopefully after some good sleep, the chow hall is open for a meal before we take the crew bus to the operations building," said Lt. Col. Dave Garrett, assistant director of operations for the 37th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron at this deployed location.

In the operations building the aircrew visits the life-support section and checks out equipment for the mission: helmets, radios, handguns, survival vests and ejection-seat harnesses.

"One of the important things is to check your survival radio," said Colonel Garrett. Each radio is assigned to a specific crewmember and includes a built-in Global Positioning System.

"With GPS, if you end up ejecting from the aircraft, satellites and rescue aircraft can identify who you are and where you are without even talking to you," he said.

After the trip to life support, the crew receives its mission



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OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM -- Lt. Col. Dave Garrett inspects his life-support equipment before heading to his aircraft to begin a mission. Colonel Garrett is a B-1 Lancer pilot and assistant director of operations for 37th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Sean Brennan)

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briefing. The briefing begins with the chaplain saying a few inspirational words and a prayer.

"I generally either tell a story or read a scripture passage which relates to God's protection, help or battle against evildoers; the purpose of this is primarily to encourage and give confidence in God's protection and guidance on the mission," said Chaplain (Capt.) Joseph Watson, from the 40th Air Expeditionary Group. "I always close with a prayer asking for safety and success on the mission."



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After the prayer, the crewmembers are given weather and intelligence briefings. The intelligence briefer gives the aircrew information about what is happening on the ground, who they are supporting that day, and any potential threats they may face, said Colonel Garrett.

"They also brief our survival and recovery plan should we end up on the ground in a survival situation," he said.

Mission details include air refueling, communication and equipment procedures for entering the area of responsibility, and finally, very specific rules on when the B-1 crew can drop weapons on potential targets.

"Typically, we are carrying up to 24 2,000-pound GPS-aided Joint Direct Attack Munition weapons in close-air support of the Army, Marine Corps or special forces," said Colonel Garrett.

After the briefing, the crew heads to the step-desk where an aviation resource manager reviews their flight currencies and any last-minute changes. Finally, the aircrew puts on flight gear and proceeds to their assigned aircraft. They have about 90 minutes before takeoff. At the aircraft they are met by the aircraft's crew chief who gives them a sharp salute and a quick briefing on the status of their aircraft. Maintenance crews normally spend five or more hours preparing the aircraft before the aircrew's arrival.

"The inspections, maintenance, and of course paperwork, require a coordinated effort by everyone on the flightline to get a jet ready to fly," said Staff Sgt. Craig Kossow, a crew chief for the 40th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron.

Once airborne, the aircrew will fly five hours before arriving over the area of responsibility.

"During this time we'll check aircraft systems and the status of our weapons," Colonel Garrett said. "As we enter our operating area we'll communicate with numerous agencies, some of which are hundreds of miles away. Most importantly, we'll configure our aircraft to release weapons, including chaff and flares for self-defense.

"In the operating area we'll spend three to five hours on -call," he said. "During the on-call period the crew establishes radio contact with a tactical air controller."

His job is to call in and control aircraft that can drop bombs on the enemy.

"These guys are very impressive. When they call, they are typically in a direct firefight with the enemy, most of the time on foot, in mountainous terrain ranging from 5,000 and 10,000 feet (altitude)," said the colonel.

everything,
communication is key

“While in radio contact you’ll hear machine-gun fire, guys yelling and breathing hard as they chase the enemy... it’s amazing what they do,” he said. “Our job is to be immediately available for him and if called, drop bombs on the enemy who often times are in very close proximity to the friendly forces.”

The B-1 crew may also provide armed reconnaissance while shadowing a friendly convoy as they travel through a suspected hostile area.

Sometimes if the special forces on the ground do not actually need bombs dropped, they may request a low-altitude high-speed pass.

“The low-altitude pass lets the enemy know we are directly overhead, and is usually a morale boost for the troops on the ground,” said Colonel Garrett.

After the on-call period the crew leaves the area of responsibility and begins the journey home.

Later, after the pilot parks the aircraft, the aircrew is met by the crew chief and a team of about 10 maintenance specialists. The aircrew briefs the crew chief and specialists on the performance of the aircraft and any problems they may have encountered.

The aircrew finally heads back to the operations building and completes a 60-minute debriefing with the intelligence officer.

“Upon returning from a combat sortie, the B-1 crew immediately meets with us to discuss, step-by-step, what occurred during their assigned mission, from the time the jet left the tarmac to the moment the wheels are down again,” said Senior Airman Michelle Utrecht, an intelligence journeyman for the 40th Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron. “Specifically, the aircrew informs us about the tactical events that made up their flight, which includes surface-to-air fires and bomb-dropping (specifications).”

“By the time we get back to our rooms it will have been 24 hours or more since we got up, and we do this about every four days,” said Colonel Garrett. “In between fly days we plan missions, preflight aircraft and maintain flying operations.”

It is all part of the job for the B-1 crews supporting the war on terrorism.

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