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### **405th Commanders, Bomber Pilots Talk War's Optempo**

By Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2003 -- Right now, deployed at an undisclosed location, the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing is in what Col. James Kowalski calls "surge operations." That means that all the unit's aircraft, primarily B-1 bombers, are flying at rates higher than what would normally be planned in time of war.

That much is evident, as U.S. planes are on daily bombing raids over Baghdad.

Today at the Pentagon during a long-distance teleconference, Kowalski, the 405th Wing commander, talked with reporters about the operations tempo that has kept his unit busy during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

During the first phase of "Shock and Awe," Kowalski said the 405th launched 10 aircraft and struck all their 240 planned targets with Global Positioning System-guided JDAMS 2,000-pound bombs. The B-1 can carry 24 JDAMS.

Since then, the wing has conducted almost daily bombing missions as well as responding to calls for close air support from ground units. "Sometimes, just having an aircraft in sight makes all the difference," B-1 pilot Maj. Jeff Paterson said.

Since the war began, the wing's mission has been fluid. Pilots and aircrews scramble in and out of cockpits on missions that can last from six to 14 hours and then get 12 hours of rest between missions.

Although the unit has yet to lose an aircraft to Iraqi defenses, bombing runs are dangerous work and the pace of operations can be relentless. Paterson, joining the teleconference and fresh off a sortie, said pilots must be prepared to get the job done.

"You plan for it, you go over the mission in-depth, you look at the target, the threat the enemy poses, you minimize his capabilities against your strengths," Paterson said. "You think about all the things that could go wrong and all the things that could go right, but basically, you fall back on your training.

"Once you take off and the wheels go into the gear well, you don't really dwell on it a lot. You just get the job done."

For the 405th, "getting the job done" has everyone from pilots to maintenance crews to communications specialists working 12-hour shifts around the clock.

Kowalski said that many of his personnel "have not had a day off in quite some time. But that's OK," he said. The medical clinic that normally sees 20 patients each day from the wing's 1,800 or so personnel now sees none. "Everybody is just staying on the job getting things done," he added.

Which, the 405th seems to be doing a lot of lately.

The unit has been deployed since October and is currently supporting operations on three fronts at once -- the Horn of Africa, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The wing's vice commander, Col. Peter Kippie, who still flies sorties and hopes to see his 30-year retirement in a few months, said he knows what has kept the unit going.

"We all still remember 9-11," he said.

"We're anxious to bring this to an end," Kippie explained further. "Everyone here, like our civilian counterparts, want to get on with their lives. But at the same time, we know that the job that we're doing here is important, too."

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