



Released: April 9, 2003

B-1B unit carries on Doolittle Raiders' tradition

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (ACCNS) -- In a flight similar to a page from its own history, a 34th Bomb Squadron B-1B bomber continued its proud heritage set by its Doolittle Raider forefathers when it used precision-guided munitions to strike a suspected meeting of senior Iraqi regime leaders in the al Mansour section of Baghdad Monday.

The bomber, tail number 86-0138, which is nicknamed "Seek and Destroy," was flown by a crew of four: Capt. Chris Wachter, aircraft commander; Capt. Sloan Hollis, pilot; 1st Lt. Joe Runci, weapons systems officer; and Lt. Col. Fred Swan, weapons systems officer.

They delivered four GBU-31 satellite guided Joint Direct Attack Munitions in the strike. Two penetrating versions with delayed fusing struck first, followed by two standard versions with delayed fusing. This bomb mix was chosen to achieve the desired effect of destroying the building while minimizing collateral damage.

Battle damage assessment from the strike is ongoing.

Coalition forces target only legitimate military targets and go to great lengths to minimize civilian casualties and damage to civilian facilities. The 34th Bomb Squadron's most notable event dates back to April 18, 1942, when 34th aircrews took part one of the most famous mission in flying history -- the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo, Japan. However, the unit has a much longer lineage, which dates to 1917 when the Army organized the 34th Aero Squadron on June 11, 1917.

Originally a ground training unit, the 34th eventually gained bombers in 1939. It went on to perform antisubmarine patrols from December 1941 to March 1942. It also flew combat operations in different theaters during World War II, the Korean War and Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, as well as supporting a number of other military operations over the years.

This B-1B's heritage also includes that of its home unit, the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., and its deployed unit, the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing.

Initially activated as the 28th Bombardment Wing in July 1947, the home unit began as a bomber unit. Through the years, it also had an aerial refueling mission beginning in 1959, and a post-attack command and control system for 15th Air Force in January 1965.

The 28th BW spent a total of almost four years deployed to Southeast Asia from March 1966 to March 1970. It also provided tanker support for restoration of democracy in Panama from December 1989 to January 1990, and deployed tanker and airborne command post aircraft to Southwest Asia from August 1990 to March 1991.

Established as 405th Fighter-Bomber Wing in October 1952, the deployed unit is now designated the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing. Among its historical accomplishments, it frequently deployed subordinate components to Southeast Asia bases for air defense and combat operations from mid-1962 until the end of the conflict in Southeast Asia.

From Aug. 4, 1966, until Jan. 4, 1968, it was commanded by then-Col. Charles E. Yeager, who made world history on Oct. 14, 1947, when he became the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound. During February and March 1973, the unit also provided medical, logistical and administrative support for former prisoners of war who were returning to the United States from North Vietnam.

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