



OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM -- A B-1 Lancer continues its mission after refueling in the sky near Iraq. An Air Force B-1 Lancer crew rode an "adrenaline rush" as they prepared to strike a recently discovered target of opportunity believed to be the site of a high-level Iraqi leadership meeting April 7. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby) | [High-res version of this photo](#)

B-1 crew describes taking out 'The Big One'

*by Master Sgt. Scott Elliott
Air Force Print News*

04/08/03 - **WASHINGTON** -- An Air Force B-1 Lancer crew rode an "adrenaline rush" as they prepared to strike a recently discovered target of opportunity believed to be the site of a high-level Iraqi leadership meeting April 7.

"There wasn't a lot of time for reflection," Lt. Col. Fred Swan told Pentagon reporters via telephone from his deployed location. Swan is a B-1 Lancer weapons systems officer assigned to the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing.

According to Swan, the B-1 was engaged in midair refueling when a call came from an airborne control aircraft telling them "this is the big one" and directing them to the new priority target.

"I knew it was important, so it really doesn't matter who was attending the high-level meeting," he said. "We've got to get the bombs on target, and we've got 10 minutes to do it.

"There are four crew members on the B-1 and we all have separate jobs to do, but we have to work in concert to make it happen," Swan said.

That coordination included locating the target, planning an escape route, checking out enemy air defenses, staying in contact with airborne and ground controllers, selecting the appropriate weapons, and "dialing in" the target coordinates, Swan said.

"The key is not what the target is, but making sure we are 100-percent accurate with the proper weapon and our coordinates are right," said Capt. Chris Wachter, the pilot of the strike aircraft, who was also interviewed. "And, oh-by-the-way, we're going into an area where we're going to get shot at, so we want to make sure we have a way to protect ourselves."

While the desired effect of the mission was to destroy the building, Swan said the target's suburban location made preventing collateral damage a primary concern. To reduce the danger to innocent people and nearby facilities, mission planners chose the "Version 3" of the GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition.

"It's a hard-target penetrator that buries itself in before it explodes," Swan said. "It will take out the particular structure, but it's going to minimize the fragmentation ... into outlying areas."

As important as limiting fragmentation is to reducing collateral damage, accurate delivery is also key, said Col. James Kowalski, 405th AEW commander, who also participated in the interview.

"We've dropped about 2,100 JDAMs," Kowalski said. "Based on a sampling of ... areas we've hit -- airfields, bunkers and leadership targets -- the weapon is performing well above 99 percent."

The global positioning system-guided JDAMs typically strike within 40 feet of the target, Kowalski said.

"They hit where we want them to hit," he said.

Related Images

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM -- A weapons loader prepares a GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition for a mission at a forward-deployed location. Similar bombs were used April 7 on a target in Baghdad, Iraq, believed to be a the site of a high-level Iraqi leadership meeting. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jessica Kochman)

