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B-52 STRATOFORTRESS

Mission

Air Combat Command's B-52 is a long-range, heavy bomber that can perform a variety of missions. The bomber is capable of flying at high subsonic speeds at altitudes up to 50,000 feet (15,166.6 meters). It can carry nuclear or precision guided conventional ordnance with worldwide precision navigation capability.

Features

In a conventional conflict, the B-52 can perform strategic attack, air interdiction, offensive counter-air and maritime operations. During Desert Storm, B-52s delivered 40 percent of all the weapons dropped by coalition forces. It is highly effective when used for ocean surveillance, and can assist the U.S. Navy in anti-ship and mine-laying operations. Two B-52s, in two hours, can monitor 140,000 square miles (364,000 square kilometers) of ocean surface.

All B-52s are equipped with an electro-optical viewing system that uses platinum silicide forward-looking infrared and high resolution low-light-level television sensors to augment targeting, battle assessment, and flight safety, thus further improving its combat ability and low-level flight capability.

Pilots wear night vision goggles (NVG) to enhance their vision during night operations. Night vision goggles provide greater safety during night operations by increasing the pilot's ability to visually clear terrain, avoid enemy radar and see other aircraft in a covert/lights-out environment.

Starting in 1989, on-going modifications incorporates the global positioning system, heavy stores adapter beams for carrying 2,000 pound munitions, and a full array of advance weapons currently under development.

The use of aerial refueling gives the B-52 a range limited only by crew endurance. It has an unrefueled combat range in excess of 8,800 miles (14,080 kilometers).

The aircraft's flexibility was evident in Operation Desert Storm and again during Operations Allied Force. B-52s struck wide-area troop concentrations, fixed installations and bunkers, and decimated the morale of Iraq's Republican Guard. The Gulf War involved the longest strike mission in the history of aerial warfare when B-52s took off from Barksdale Air Force Base, La., launched conventional air launched cruise missiles and returned to Barksdale -- a 35-hour, non-stop combat mission.

During Operation Allied Force, B-52s opened the conflict with conventional cruise missile attacks and then transitioned to delivering general purpose bombs and cluster bomb units on Serbian army positions and staging areas.

Background

For more than 40 years B-52 Stratofortresses have been the backbone of the manned strategic bomber force for the United States. The B-52 is capable of dropping or launching the widest array of weapons in the U.S. inventory. This includes gravity bombs, cluster bombs, precision



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guided missiles and joint direct attack munitions. Updated with modern technology the B-52 will be capable of delivering the full complement of joint developed weapons and will continue into the 21st century as an important element of our nation's defenses. Current engineering analyses show the B-52's life span to extend beyond the year 2040.

The B-52A first flew in 1954, and the B model entered service in 1955. A total of 744 B-52s were built with the last, a B-52H, delivered in October 1962. Only the H model is still in the Air Force inventory and is assigned to Air Combat Command and the Air Force Reserves.

The first of 102 B-52H's was delivered to Strategic Air Command in May 1961. The H model can carry up to 20 air launched cruise missiles. In addition, it can carry the conventional cruise missile that was launched in several contingencies during the 1990s, starting with Operation Desert Storm and culminating with Operation Allied Force.

General Characteristics

Primary Function: Heavy bomber

Contractor: Boeing Military Airplane Co.

Power plant: Eight Pratt & Whitney engines TF33-P-3/103 turbofan

Thrust: Each engine up to 17,000 pounds

Length: 159 feet, 4 inches (48.5 meters)

Height: 40 feet, 8 inches (12.4 meters)

Wingspan: 185 feet (56.4 meters)

Speed: 650 miles per hour (Mach 0.86)

Ceiling: 50,000 feet (15,151.5 meters)

Weight: Approximately 185,000 pounds empty (83,250 kilograms)

Maximum Takeoff Weight: 488,000 pounds (219,600 kilograms)

Range: Unrefueled 8,800 miles (7,652 nautical miles)

Armament: Approximately 70,000 pounds (31,500 kilograms) mixed ordnance -- bombs, mines and missiles. (Modified to carry air-launched cruise missiles)

Crew: Five (aircraft commander, pilot, radar navigator, navigator and electronic warfare officer)

Accommodations: Six ejection seats

Unit Cost: \$53.4 million (fiscal 98 constant dollars)

Date Deployed: February 1955

Inventory: Active force, 85; ANG, 0; Reserve, 9

Point of Contact

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