



Report from Whiteman AFB

Let me be the first to say hello from the active duty B-2 Reapers at Whiteman AFB, MO! It's been a busy time for the 13th around here and we thought you'd like an update. Don't forget the source here (a lowly captain), so if you are looking for a grand view of the strategic nature of the B-2 you might want to put this down now. If you're curious about how the flying is going, what it's really like and what kind of beer is on tap at the squadron bar keep reading.

Flying the world's most respected weapon system is still pretty cool. We started off the year with flying in the first Red Flag exercise that incorporated Low Observable platforms (B-2 & F-117) with UK and Australian forces. It went really well and we were able to show off the world class capabilities of our platform to our most trusted allies. The professionalism, warrior spirit and good humor of our UK and Australian friends added to a worthwhile event. The B-2 debuted its 80 JDAM capability at this exercise. The ability to hit 80 targets with precision munitions gives tremendous flexibility to the war-planners. More importantly you sound better in the strike debrief! Following each mission the flight leads have to report their successes so it gets passed to the mission commander. Typically you hear strikers reporting, "Bozo flight 8 for 9!" or "Cheetah flight 13 for 13" so its better being the guy who reports, "Kong flight 160 for 160!"

Following Red Flag we deployed the B-2 to its forward operating location in England for some training and validation. This was a short deployment to demonstrate the ability of our weapons system to deploy at a moment's notice and to validate some practical aspects of deploying. (That is an official way to say we were making sure it fit in the new hangars!) It went off without a hitch and the crews received valuable training dropping on UK ranges. I believe there may have been some fun had by a few in spite of the overwhelming hardship of deploying to England. If I sound bitter it's because I was in instructor upgrade and didn't get to go!

From a lowly captain level it's a pretty good assignment. We get to select and interview pilots from around the Air Force to fly the B-2. You can't swing a dead cat in our squadron and not hit someone who isn't a combat veteran, test pilot school select or #1 from their base! One desk over from me is a MIT graduate with a 5.0 GPA from his masters, across the hall is combat experienced former heavy driver headed to test pilot school. Down the hall we have the first RAF exchange pilot to fly the B-2. He is a former Tornado weapons school graduate with Scud hunting experience in Iraq! Usually in a unit you have the top 10%, the one slacker or two and then everybody else. It hit me personally after I'd been at Whiteman a while

that the reason I never saw that bottom guy was that it was probably me!

The flying is different from a lot of other assignments. We are dual qualified in two aircraft. We fly the T-38 companion trainer in addition to the B-2. So any given week you may be flying low-level, formation or aerobatics in the T-38. Given the numbers of B-2 available, we depend on the T-38 program to build and keep the airmanship and flying skills necessary to take the B-2 to war. Oh yeah it's a lot of fun too! The B-2 simulators are right here at Whiteman so crews will spend quite a bit of time dealing with emergencies and rehearsing tactics in the sim. Many of you who attend the September reunion will probably have a chance to fly the sim! The number one question I'm asked is about having to sit in the sim for a long time. B-2 combat missions have exceeded 40+ hours and so crews have to be ready to deal with the long duration experience. During initial training, we will send new pilots on a 24 hour simulated mission to learn to manage fatigue. We also schedule new dads for 24 hour sims to get some sleep! (not really but it's been requested!)

Flying the B-2 is usually a two day experience that starts with mission planning the day prior. Crews will set up a tactical scenario, study threats, weapons, systems and emergencies. Then they will study and brief the specific targets that are to be struck. Most of the local training missions are 3-5 hours long so we generally simulate striking targets in the local area. If Kansas ever invades Missouri it won't be pretty. We get to drop real weapons on a fairly regular basis and use ranges throughout the world to do it!

The flight wrap up with debrief and lessons learned and you get ready for your next events that week.

Fridays, are normally training and meeting days but the highlight is normally roll call. Due to security concerns I can't elaborate too much, but it involves our Reaper elder, a keg of hometown Boulevard Wheat and a telling of the week's buffoonery. We're very proud of our squadron heritage and it reflects in our bar! Many thanks to those of you who have donated pictures and items for display-we keep them under the glass display case or hanging on the wall so nothing ever gets spilled on it! All Reapers past and present are welcome at our bar any time (just takes some paperwork to get though the entry control point).

It's a busy life around the squadron but we are reminded daily of the sacrifices made around the world by others in uniform. We just want to be ready to do our job for the country when it's our turn to be called. It's a privilege to be a part of the Reaper heritage and we are looking forward to September. Until then, just like we toast at the bar...Reaper Pride!