

COMMITTED DEFENSE

U.S. Air Force bombers demonstrate capabilities during joint training in Europe

By *per Concordiam* Staff
Photos by Tech. Sgt. Chrissy Best/U.S. Air Force

In June 2014, five U.S. Air Force heavy bombers arrived at Royal Air Force (RAF) station Fairford in the United Kingdom for a two-week training mission. The two B-2 Spirit and three B-52 Stratofortress long-range, multirole bombers deployed to Europe to train and integrate with U.S. and allied forces in the region. The deployment was coordinated with U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and NATO and relied on the U.S.'s close, long-standing relationship with the UK and its Armed Forces.

While in the European theater, the Stratofortresses also took part in commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, in honor of the bomber crews who helped set the stage for the successful amphibious landing. The B-52s are part of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, which traces its history to World War II, when it lost more than 26,000 airmen in combat operations helping to secure Allied victory in Europe.

Air crews and ground support personnel conducted 24-hour operations with the long-range bombers flying multiple missions throughout the USEUCOM and U.S. African Command (USAFRICOM) regions, training and integrating with Allied troops. "This deployment of strategic bombers provides an invaluable opportunity to strengthen and improve interoperability with our allies and partners," said Adm. Cecil Haney, commander of U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), which oversees the United States' strategic bomber fleet.

The vigorous training schedule highlighted the U.S. military's readiness, commitment and capability to defend U.S. allies and interests in the region in times of conflict, and to deny or disrupt threats. "The training and integration of strategic forces demonstrates to our nation's leaders and our allies that we have the right mix of aircraft and expertise to respond to a variety of potential threats and situations," Adm. Haney said. The Air Force emphasized that the bomber deployment has been planned for nearly a

year and was not a response to the escalation of tensions in Eastern Europe or the Middle East.

Assurance, deterrence and readiness

Such training missions help the U.S. maintain a strong, credible strategic force to enhance the security of allies and partners. The U.S. military regularly assesses force readiness and positions strategic assets to maintain operational and support capabilities. The Air Force augments overseas assets when necessary to create a forward presence essential for executing full-spectrum global operations.



The "Spirit of Indiana," a B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, prepares to land at RAF Fairford in England in June 2014. The B-2's primary mission is to attack time-critical targets early in a conflict to minimize an enemy's war-making potential.

Detering a strategic attack on the U.S. or its allies is first among USSTRATCOM's missions. These kinds of deployments, in coordination with regional U.S. and allied forces, support global operations and deter strategic attacks by providing a credible, flexible always-ready capability. The B-2 Spirit and B-52 Stratofortress can deliver large payloads of precision conventional or nuclear ordnance over long distances.

The Air Force regularly conducts training missions to improve readiness — sharpening air and ground crew skills, providing unique opportunities for joint training with allied forces and familiarizing aircrews with bases and



operations in the USEUCOM and USAFRICOM regions. “We are worldwide deployable,” said Lt. Col. Bradley Cochran, commander of the 393rd Bomb Squadron at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, home of the B-2s. “Training opportunities like this one are invaluable to us because they get us familiar with the command and control structure, the air traffic control structure and different procedures that are in the area of operations.”

Familiarity with RAF Fairford is important because it is a strategic base capable of supporting a wide variety of flying operations. As U.S. Air Force Europe’s only Bomber Forward Operating Location, Fairford is well-equipped with a 3,050-meter runway and space enough for large-scale operations. NATO combat forces have used the air base in the past: In 2003, 122 sorties flew from Fairford in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The bombers

The B-2 Spirit, possessing ultramodern stealth technology, and the B-52 Stratofortress, the half-century-old workhorse of the U.S. bomber fleet, complement each other. Both warplanes can project force over long distances. Comfortable at altitudes of more than 15,000 meters, the B-52 can fly combat missions beyond 14,000 kilometers without refueling. Although the first B-52A appeared in 1954 and the updated H model in 1961, the current fleet has been extensively upgraded with the most advanced targeting and image processing technology, improving its combat effectiveness in all conditions.

The aircraft displayed its versatility in Operation Desert Storm, during which it delivered 40 percent of all coalition ordnance dropped. It continued its valuable role in Operation Enduring Freedom, precisely striking troop formations, fixed installations and hardened bunkers. In 1996, a B-52 flew a nearly 26,000-kilometer combat mission between the U.S. and Baghdad.

The B-2 has the ability to penetrate an enemy’s most sophisticated defenses and hit its most heavily defended targets — a capability that provides a strong, effective deterrent. It has an effective range of 9,600 kilometers.

The first B-2 was deployed in 1993, and the plane saw extensive action a few years later in Operation Allied Force in the former Yugoslavia, destroying a third of all targets while flying nonstop missions from its base in Missouri. B-2s flew 49 sorties in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, dropping more than 680,000 kilograms of munitions.

Ongoing joint training missions like the B-2 and B-52 deployment to Europe enable the U.S. military to improve interoperability with NATO allies and partners. It familiarizes aircrews with the region while honing their skills. Most importantly, this training demonstrates to friend and potential foe alike the awesome capabilities of the U.S. strategic bomber fleet and the U.S.’s determined commitment to defend its friends and allies from aggression by all means necessary. □

A B-52 Stratofortress takes off from RAF Fairford, England, in June 2014. The bomber deployed to the United Kingdom as part of a multinational training operation.