



Tinker Maintained B-1 Milestone

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TINKER AIR FORCE BASE, OK -- A B-1 Lancer is about to achieve what was previously unimaginable when it reaches the 10,000-hour flying mark by early June. Initially envisioned with a 20-year service life in 1985, Tinker officials said they didn't expect the aircraft to reach such a milestone.

Through the dedication and hard work of the three units at Tinker -- 76th Maintenance Wing's programmed depot maintenance, 427th Aircraft Sustainment Group and the 848th Supply Chain Management Group's structural pieces and avionics section -- the B-1 remains airborne and able to perform its combat mission.

"The B-1 is one of the most precise, lethal, and in-demand conventional weapon systems in the world, fully engaged in the war against terror," said Brig. Gen. Bruce Litchfield, 76th MXW commander. "The fact the B-1 has come so far and continues to improve is a true testament to the dedicated, hardworking folks we have here at Tinker. We must always keep in mind when an aircraft leaves here it could very well be in combat the next day."

The B-1 airframe, which is now scheduled to remain in operation until 2040, has an expansive history stretching back to the 1960s. It was initially envisioned as a replacement for the B-52 Stratofortress, but, its development was delayed and restarted several times. Manufactured by Rockwell International, the B-1 took its first flight in December 1974.

Through the years, it has been upgraded to make it a more viable weapon system and remains the workhorse for combatant commanders. Tinker is the home of the B-1 System Program Office where modernization and new capability engineering is accomplished.

"We turn our Air Force leadership's visions into realities at the SPO," said Col. Charles Sherwin, 427th ACSG commander. "The future of the B-1 is bright and it is going to get brighter."

Colonel Sherwin said the B-1 is slated to integrate directed energy, which transfers energy to its target for an intended outcome, in an Air Force Research Laboratory demonstration using a high power laser.

"In effect, uniting this capability with the sniper advanced targeting pod makes the B-1B a 'first generation' long-range, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance/strike aircraft," Colonel Sherwin said. "That is what is envisioned for the future arsenal of the Air Force - an aircraft that includes ISR, directed energy and network attack, all of which are being integrated or demonstrated on the B-1B in the immediate future."

While the SPO enables the future, much of the maintenance and sustainment work is also performed and supported at Tinker.

Rick Cantwell, 553rd Aircraft Sustainment Squadron B-1 System Program Management Logistics lead, said the 76th MXW performs roughly 13 depot refurbishments of the airframe annually.

"Team Tinker processes are effective, and they are getting more effective or we wouldn't have been able to make this possible," Mr. Cantwell said. "The B-1 is here to stay. It's not going anywhere anytime soon, as far as retirement; this along with improving aircraft availability is why the B-1 was chosen as one of Air Force Materiel Command's prototype platforms for Repair Network Integration and High Velocity Maintenance, or HVM. We plan on sustaining and modernizing it for combatant commanders today and in the future."



Mechanic Trevor Aldridge helps prepare a B-1 for a modification during maintenance at Tinker Air Force Base, Okla. While the Air Force recognizes the first Lancer to reach 10,000 flying hours, Tinker AFB continues to provide the bomber with upgrades and maintenance to keep it flying for 30 more years. (U.S. Air Force photo/Margo Wright)



RNI is part of the Expeditionary Logistics for the 21st Century campaign and the purpose is to increase the number of spare engines, or war-ready engines, so B-1s in the area of responsibility are not grounded due to engine issues. HVM is a part of a campaign within air logistics centers to reduce the amount of time that aircraft spend at depots undergoing overhaul and repairs.

Bill Barnes, deputy director of the 427th ACSG B-1 Systems Program Office, agreed.

"The B-1 fleet is the backbone of today's deployed bomber operations. The fleet provides much needed close air support to ground operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan," he said. "The milestone of the first B-1 airframe to pass 10,000 flying hours is a testament to the continuous service this fleet provides to U.S. and coalition ground forces."

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