



# Spirits of Guam

Airmen of USAF's 325th Bomb Squadron took their bombers from Missouri to Guam in the most ambitious B-2 deployment yet.



*High above the Pacific, B-2 bomber pilots carry out a training mission in Spirit of Texas. It is one of four stealthy Spirits that operated from Andersen AFB, Guam, for six months, the longest B-2 deployment yet.*

**G**uam, a US territory in the Western Pacific, has become an important staging area for Air Force bombers. Various long-range aircraft—B-1s, B-2s, and B-52s—based on the US mainland rotate through Andersen Air Force Base, an immense facility on the island, maintaining a continuous presence in the region. While at Guam, units report to Pacific Air Forces and US Pacific Command. The bomber rotations in Guam began in early 2004. When on station, aircraft and airmen are under the 36th Air Expeditionary Wing. Individual aircraft are attached to expeditionary bomb squadrons.

The bombers deployed to Guam give PACOM greater force-projection and global strike capability. Moreover, regular flying from Guam gives units valuable deployment training and allows personnel to participate in coalition training exercises. The four B-2As most recently in Guam were deployed with their unit, the 325th Bomb Squadron, part of the 509th Bomb Wing of Whiteman AFB, Mo. The 325th deployed its entire squadron, which included 24 combat ready pilots and more than 200 other personnel.



Photos by Ted Carlsson



Above, SrA. Kristopher Castro of the 325th BS guards a B-2 parked at Andersen. Security is heavy throughout the base.

At left, flight equipment specialist SrA. Joshua Buckholtz assists two B-2 pilots—Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets IV (center) and Capt. Ryan Bailey—in the flight equipment shop. Buckholtz is helping Tibbets adjust his survival vest.

Each B-2 staged three or four seven-hour sorties per week, and each pilot flew about three sorties per month. In addition, PACAF sent the stealth bombers on longer global power sorties. Below, Tibbets and Bailey (in flight suits) review a mission with two maintainers under the B-2 Spirit of California.



Above is a view from the rear of a B-2 cockpit, with its two crew positions. Despite the cramped quarters, B-2 pilots regularly fly missions lasting 20 hours or longer, and there is room for a pilot to lay down and rest during a mission.



The sophisticated B-2s recently received a designation of "forward operating location approved." Andersen is one of three forward locations to which the stealthy bombers deploy. The other two are RAF Fairford in Britain and the Indian Ocean atoll of Diego Garcia. In April, the 325th BS replaced the 393rd BS, another B-2 outfit. During the latest deployment, the B-2s carried weapons such as 500-pound and 2,000-pound versions of Joint Direct Attack Munitions.

In the photos from top to bottom, a maintainer performs a final check on airplane #88-0330, Spirit of California; the same airplane prepares for launch; and the B-2 gets airborne.



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Taking to the skies over Guam are Spirit of Hawaii (left) and Spirit of Texas (below).

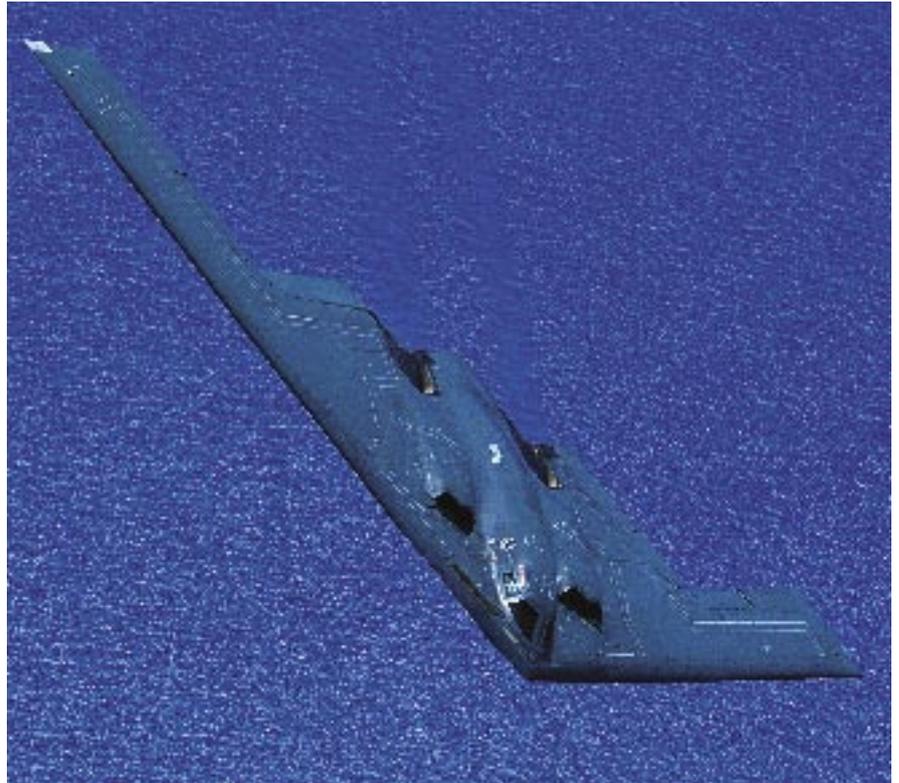
Throughout the Guam deployment, USAF's 325th Bomb Squadron and Navy units conducted joint, large-force exercises. B-2s operated alongside Navy E-2C Hawkeyes, F/A-18 Hornets, and EA-6B Prowlers. The 325th also worked with F-15E fighters deployed from Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. About 30 percent of the B-2 sorties involved integration training with other aircraft, and more than 25 percent featured weapons drops.

In the photo at bottom left, Spirit of Hawaii takes on gas from a KC-135R refueler flown by a crew of the California Air National Guard's 163rd Air Refueling Wing.

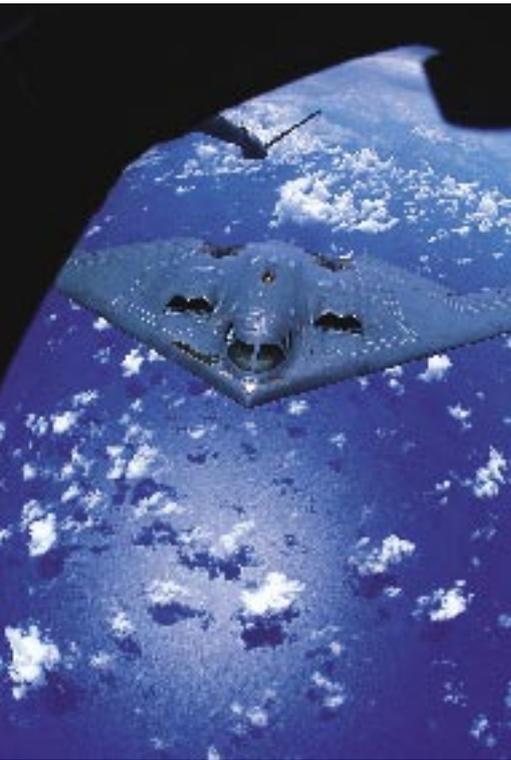


Above, pilot Lt. Col. Tom Pritchard and copilot Lieutenant Rick Alvarez, from the ANG's 163rd ARW, fly a KC-135R as it refuels Spirit of Hawaii. SMSgt. Jim Blucher (not shown) was the boom operator on this mission. At right, a pilot checks an aircraft display.





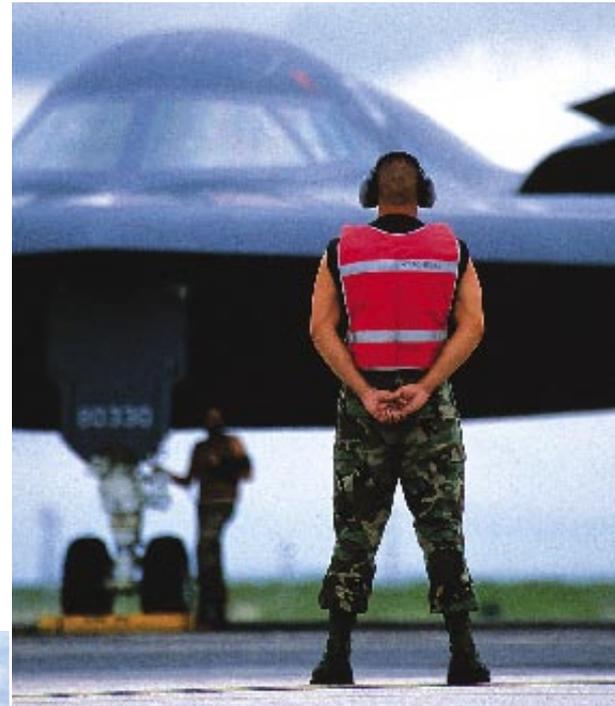
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The top left photo offers a view of Spirit of Texas taken from a tanker aircraft overhead. Left and above, Spirit of Hawaii first pulls back from the tanker then banks into a turn over glistening water.

Lt. Col. Tom Bussiere, commander of the 325th BS, said this was the first time that these B-2s had embarked on a deployment as part of a rotational Air and Space Expeditionary Force, or AEF. Normally, he said, B-2s are in "an AEF in place," meaning they are prepared to fly and fight directly from Whiteman.

In the photo at right, airmen of the 325th BS marshal a B-2 for takeoff. USAF has invested heavily in Andersen. It has lengthened and strengthened the runways, expanded the fuel delivery system, built a concrete, typhoon-resistant hangar, and built new quarters for deployed airmen.



The photo at right provides a side view of Spirit of California.

In the not-too-distant-past—the Vietnam War era—Andersen was a huge center of Air Force operations. Strategic Air Command in mid-1965 launched a raid on Vietnam comprising 30 Guam-based B-52s. It was the first step in a major air campaign emanating from Guam. Use of B-52s in a conventional bomber role lasted, with some interruptions, until 1972. In that year, Andersen hosted more than 150 B-52 bombers and more than 15,000 US troops. So crowded was the base that the Air Force set up improvised quarters such as "Tin City" and "Tent City" in open fields.





Photos by Ted Carlsson

Guam's first regular rotational bombers came from Minot AFB, N.D., in February 2004. The force comprised six B-52s and some 300 support personnel. Since that time, Andersen has never been without heavy bombers in the stable. Because Guam is within relatively easy flying distance of North Korea, Taiwan, and other flash points in the Western Pacific, it is viewed as a linchpin in Washington's commitment to allies in East Asia and to deterrence of aggression throughout the theater. Guam also is valued for its nearly unrestricted airspace and the availability of a nearby naval bombing range.

At left, Tibbets and Bailey return from a sortie. Tibbets (left) is a fourth generation pilot and the grandson of retired Brig. Gen. Paul Tibbets Jr., pilot of the B-29 Enola Gay, which dropped the first atomic bomb. "My grandfather flew in enormous formations with thousands of men's lives at stake, perhaps trying to take out a single bridge," said the younger Tibbets. "Today we can have a B-2 with two guys and 80 500-pound JDAMs ... to surgically hit many more targets."

At right is Spirit of Hawaii against a glorious Pacific sunset, and below is Spirit of Texas on the runway at night.

Members of the B-2 team concluded Guam is an excellent place to train. Having such a base also means the bombers would be much closer to a fight in the Pacific and thus able to respond much faster than would be possible from home base in Missouri. The attitude was summed up this way by B-2 pilot Maj. Brian Gallo: "Being able to forward deploy here and train in a region where we may have to fight someday is important. We learn, grow as a unit, and fight together—crews, support personnel, and maintainers. It helps us know how to work together efficiently and makes our mission happen effectively. You cannot do that well unless you deploy, practice, and train." ■

