

(3) BLU-82: *Commando Vault, the Biggest Conventional Bomb*



Nicknamed "Commando Vault," the BLU-82 is the largest conventional bomb in existence, weighing 15,000 lbs. It was used in Vietnam to instantly vapourize large, unwanted swaths of jungle so the clearings could be used for artillery emplacements and helicopter landing zones. It's main use in Iraq was as a psychological weapon. Nowadays, in Afghanistan, "The intent is to kill people."

Vietnam: Nicknamed "Commando Vault" in Vietnam, the BLU-82 was originally used to instantly vapourize large, unwanted swaths of jungle so that the clearings could be used for artillery emplacements and helicopter landing zones.

Iraq: The US Air Force, says it dropped only 11 BLU-82 bombs on Iraq. This was initially said to test the bomb's ability to clear mine fields. Later, the psychological effect of the bomb was said to be its main function.

Afghanistan: During their use in Afghanistan since October 2001, BLU-82s have been used as an anti-personnel weapon and to intimidate anyone who survives its wrath. Peter Pace, vice-chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff said of the BLU-82: "As you would expect, they make a heck of a bang when they go off. The intent is to kill people." It has confusingly been nicknamed the "Daisy Cutter" bomb after its fuse, although this type of fuse is also used on other bombs.

The BLU-82 is the largest conventional bomb in existence, weighing 15,000 lbs. It contains a wet slurry mixture of ammonium nitrate, aluminum powder and polystyrene that weighs 12,600 lbs. This slurry, when mixed with air, forms a mist covering a huge area near ground level.

The bomb's 38-inch fuze, called a "Daisy Cutter," detonates this mist just before the bomb hits the ground. Ground-level destruction is optimized giving the bomb a "very large lethal radius" that is variously reported as somewhere between 300 feet and 900 feet. This means that the area vapourized is somewhere between 26,000 and 240,000 square metres. The massive explosion creates a flash, sound and shock wave which can be felt miles away. At its epicentre, the blast creates an overpressure of 1,000 pounds per square inch, which is more than enough to level buildings.

BLU-82s are similar to fuel area explosives (FAE) and are often confused with them. However, while BLU-82s have a flammable agent and an oxidizer, FAEs use the oxygen in the air as the oxidizer.

