Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. recovers bombs accidentally dropped on Australia`s Great Barrier Reef

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USPA News - Two unarmed bombs which were dropped by American forces on Australia`s Great Barrier Reef after a training exercise went wrong have been safely recovered by a joint U.S.-Australian Navy dive team, the U.S. Navy confirmed on Sunday. The incident happened on July 16 when two AV-8B Harrier aircraft were launched from the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) to conduct a training exercise as part of Exercise Talisman Saber.

They had intended to drop two inert and two unarmed bombs in the Townshend Island Range, but controllers had reported the area was not clear of hazards. "Due to low fuel and inability to land with the amount of ordnance they were carrying, the on-scene commander determined it was necessary to designate an emergency jettison area for the ordnance," the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a statement in late July. The jettison took place approximately 16 nautical miles (29 kilometers) south of Bell Cay in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Each fighter aircraft jettisoned one BDU 45 and one GBU 12, for a total of four bombs, in what is the world`s largest collection of coral off the coast of Queensland in Australia. The GBU 12s were jettisoned in a safe, unarmed state while the BDU 45s are inert ordnance, and none of the bombs exploded. The inert and unarmed bombs were located by Royal Australian Navy minehunter HMAS Gascoyne on August 16, but it took until Thursday before divers from Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) Five were able to recover the two unarmed but live rounds. The recovery operation ended on Friday, when both bombs were recovered. The joint U.S.-Australian dive team used lift balloons to bring the ordnance safely to the water surface, after which they were transported to the approved Triangular Island ordnance demolition area and destroyed. No environmental damage was seen before or during the recovery operation, U.S. officials said. The selected emergency jettison area was in a deep channel away from the reef to minimize the possibility of reef damage. It is approximately 50 to 60 meters (164 to 196 feet) deep and its location did not pose a hazard to shipping or navigation, although a navigation notice was issued as a precaution. The two inert rounds, which are cement-filled training facsimiles of the real ordnance, were left on the sandy sea floor due to difficult diving conditions. They pose no danger to the environment, as the inert rounds contain no explosives, electronics, propellant or fusing mechanisms. "Survey images confirm the ordnance landed on a sandy bottom, well away from coral and any sensitive habitat," said Russell Reichelt, chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. "Our personnel will continue to monitor the area in the coming days for any potential impacts following the recovery and disposal part of the operation."

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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