

Beat: Technology

U.S. jets forced to drop bombs on Australia's Great Barrier Reef

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USPA News - Two U.S. fighter jets dropped four unarmed bombs on Australia's Great Barrier Reef earlier this week after a training exercise went wrong, the U.S. Navy confirmed on Sunday, but there was no immediate risk to the public or the environment. The U.S. 7th Fleet said two AV-8B Harrier aircraft were launched Tuesday from the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) to conduct a training exercise as part of Exercise Talisman Saber.

They had intended to drop the 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. 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 selected emergency jettison area was in a deep channel away from the reef to minimize the possibility of reef damage," the 7th Fleet added in its statement. It said the jettison area is approximately 50 to 60 meters (164 to 196 feet) deep and does not pose a hazard to shipping or navigation. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps have launched an investigation into the incident in coordination with Australian authorities. "We are coordinating with Australian officials to ensure an appropriate navigation notice is issued until charts can be updated showing the location of the unexploded ordnance," the 7th Fleet added.

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