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Air Force, Navy wrap up joint mine exercise

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11/13/2006 - **ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam (AFPN)** -- B-52 Stratofortress aircrews assigned to the 23rd Expeditionary Bomb Squadron and Sailors with the Navy's Mobile Mine Assembly Unit 8 completed a week-long joint sea mine-laying exercise here Nov. 3.

The 10-sortie exercise marked the largest number of weapons released by B-52s since they arrived here in August. During the sorties the bombers dropped 92 Mk 62 "Quick-Strike" mines and four Mk 56 moored mines.

"The Navy designates target areas to be mined," said Capt. Scott Case, 36th Expeditionary Operations Group mission planning cell team chief for the exercise. "The areas might number in the hundreds. There isn't a single asset that can mine all of them. (Navy commanders) have to use us to cover them all."

The two 3-mile long, mile-wide training mine fields were located over the Marianas Trench and in deep waters south of Guam. All weapons released were inert training munitions.

"Mines provide a defensive deterrent and offensive strike capability, limiting enemy naval movement in and around their waters," said Senior Chief Petty Officer John Pipkin of MOMAU 8. "When we need to lay a lot of mines quickly, bombers are the platform of choice. It's very efficient."

A B-52 can carry 45 Mk 62 or 12 Mk 56 mines. The Mk 62 mines are converted gravity bombs designed to lay on the sea floor. They are used primarily in anti-submarine operations. The Mk 56 mines are much larger and are suspended at specific depths to disrupt enemy sea traffic.



Staff Sgt. Joshua Sweet (right) guides Airman 1st Class Wayne Robinson as he positions an Mk 56 mine under the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress. Staff Sgt. Jason Smith (on ladder) and Sergeant Sweet will secure the weapon once it is in position. The three are weapons loaders with the 36th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Eric Petosky)

In combat, if either mine "senses" a ship or submarine, it explodes, sending a bubble of rapidly-expanding gasses toward the surface, according to Senior Chief Pipkin. This bubble "breaks" on ships or subs, damaging or destroying them. If the mine doesn't explode within a certain time limit, it will disarm and sink to prevent accidentally destroying unintended targets.

In addition to the air drops, 36th Munitions Squadron Airmen and 36th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapon loaders trained with MOMAU 8 Sailors at Naval Magazine Guam. They learned how the mines are built and then loaded onto an aircraft.

"We simulate dropping mines at home station," said Captain Case, "but to actually train with the Navy and drop the real thing. You might never get a chance to do that in a 20-year career. It exceeded all my expectations."