Bataan Amphibious Ready Group Returns from Deployment



The dock landing ship USS Oak Hill transits the Strait of Hormuz on April 3 as part of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Andrew Waters

NORFOLK, Va. – The Bataan Amphibious Ready Group and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit are returning from deployment this month, marking the end of seven months attached to the U.S. 2nd, 5th and 6th Fleets.

The first of the ARG ships, the Harpers Ferry-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Oak Hill, returned to Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach, Virginia, on July 15.

"I am tremendously proud of what the Sailors and Marines of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group and 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit accomplished during this deployment. Our team worked tirelessly to remain fully mission ready during the unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic," said Capt. Lance Lesher, who was commander of Amphibious Squadron 8 through its pre-deployment workup cycle and deployment until conducting a change of command at sea on July 12.

The Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan and San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New York are expected to return to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, and Naval Station Mayport, Florida, respectively, in the coming days. The MEU departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, over the weekend.

"As a 'certain force in an uncertain world' the 26th MEU was flexible, resilient, and adaptable while forward deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet and 6th Fleet areas of operation," said

Col. Trevor Hall, commanding officer of the 26th MEU. “This deployment presented unique challenges, but the Navy-Marine Corps team prevailed and incessantly provided our fleet commanders with a responsive, sea-based Marine air-ground task force – even during the global novel coronavirus pandemic.”

The ARG ships and MEU departed for deployment from their respective home bases in December and remained at sea for more than 150 straight days before returning home.

“The crews onboard USS Bataan, USS New York and USS Oak Hill should feel great satisfaction and fulfillment knowing that, during this deployment, they played a crucial role as part of a premier crisis response team across the U.S. 2nd Fleet, 5th Fleet and 6th Fleet,” said Lesher. “The daily actions of our Sailors and Marines over the past seven months have made a positive impact on the world, and I’m pleased they will now be reunited with their friends, families and loved ones.”

Lesher turned over command of PHIBRON 8 to Capt. Jason Rimmer during a change-of-command ceremony at sea onboard Bataan in the Atlantic Ocean.

While in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, the Bataan ARG and 26th MEU remained healthy and fully mission ready while working with regional partners. The Blue-Green team worked with partners from Saudi Arabia to coordinate multiple complex training evolutions on the uninhabited Karan and Kurayn islands in the Arabian Gulf as well as with partners from the United Arab Emirates to hold training in an isolated location within that country.

While in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, the ARG-MEU increased interoperability with regional allies and partners by conducting maneuvering operations and at-sea exercises with navy and coast guard ships from Bulgaria, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania and Turkey in the Black Sea. The crew

additionally worked with allied ships from France and Italy during their time in the Mediterranean Sea.

U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venoms and AH-1W Super Cobras assigned to the 26th MEU additionally participated in a live-fire training exercise in Bize, Albania.

The Sailors and Marines of the ARG-MEU also strengthened international partnerships by hosting the head of the Royal Jordanian Navy and deputy commander of Kuwait Naval Forces aboard Bataan in separate visits that reinforced shared goals and fostered personal relationships.

There are more than 4,000 Sailors and Marines assigned to the units of the ARG-MEU, nearly 2,500 of which were aboard the Bataan. Also embarked on the ships of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group were the staff of Amphibious Squadron 8 and personnel from Tactical Air Control Squadron 22, Fleet Surgical Team 4, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28, Naval Beach Group 2, Assault Craft Unit 4 and Assault Craft Unit 2.