

BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) Returns Home From 8-month Deployment



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[26th Marine Expeditionary Unit \(Special Operations Capable\)](#) — —

Marines and Sailors assigned to the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) will return home in several waves beginning Mar. 16, 2024 after successfully completing an extended eight-month deployment embarked aboard the amphibious warships of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (BATARG) in U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa/6th Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/5th Fleet areas of operations.

The BATARG is comprised of the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5), the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19), and the Harpers Ferry class dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50).

Upon leaving the east coast of North Carolina for deployment in July 2023, the Secretary of Defense directed the BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) to support operations in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) in response to attempts by Iran to threaten the free flow of commerce in the Arabian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. The 26th MEU(SOC) took deliberate actions to task-organize an element aboard the USS Mesa Verde with the appropriate staff depth and operational capabilities to execute operations and activities in support of U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) theater security objectives, while the majority of the 26th MEU(SOC) Marine Air-Ground Task Force, embarked aboard USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall, was postured in USCENTCOM to deter Iranian malign activity and increase maritime security in the waters surrounding the Strait of Hormuz.

The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's deployment marked the first time the U.S. Marine Corps and II Marine Expeditionary Force were able to certify and employ a special operations capable Marine Expeditionary Unit in over two decades. This historical milestone demonstrated the Marine Corps' commitment to joint naval integration and partnering with forward-deployed special operations forces in support of crisis response and Fleet campaigning priorities, reinforced throughout the 26th MEU(SOC)'s voyage with the BATARG.

Throughout the deployment, the 26th MEU(SOC) executed distributed operations spanning across the Tri-Geographic Combatant Command to include USEUCOM, USAFRICOM, and USCENTCOM, contributing to increased maritime security and regional stability, while also participating in activities

with Allies and partners to enhance mil-to-mil relationships, showcase interoperability, and sustain high operational readiness.

In the High North, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC), embarked aboard USS Mesa Verde participated in bilateral exercises with elements of the Norwegian Brigade North and Italian partners to exchange tactics, techniques, and procedures in the coastal regions and littorals.

While operating in the Baltics, the 26th MEU(SOC) participated in Exercise Northern Coasts, a German, multi-national naval exercises series in the Baltic region, aimed at delivering realistic, live training for a broad range of amphibious operations. The 26th MEU(SOC)'s participation in Exercise Northern Coasts marked the first time U.S. Marine Corps forces participated in this large-scale NATO-exercise.

Concurrently, in USCENTCOM, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC), embarked aboard USS Bataan and USS Carter Hall participated in a series of bilateral exercises with the Kuwaiti Marine Corps, Bahrain Royal Marines, and the Bahrain Royal Air Force. Additionally, the BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) supported Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Prosperity Guardian. Moreover, the 26th MEU(SOC) showcased an ability to integrate and partner with other forward-deployed Special Operations Forces within the littorals as a part of the MEU/SOF-I3 continuum and efforts to increase maritime security and stability while deterring any potential malign actors.

When the terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 Oct. dynamically changed the security environment across the region, the 26th MEU(SOC) rapidly transitioned from participating in a readiness and sustainment training exercise in Kuwait to posturing to rapidly respond to emergent operational requirements and to safeguard U.S. national interests within the Red Sea.

The Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC), embarked aboard the three ships of the aggregated BATARG in the Mediterranean Sea, remained postured in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea from Dec. 28 to Mar. 1 as the immediate response force with the operational capabilities needed to provide leaders across the Geographic Combatant Command with options in USEUCOM and USCENTCOM. The 26th MEU(SOC) also conducted several enhanced interoperability training sustainment exercises with NATO Allies and partners in the Mediterranean Sea.

Through rapid planning, coordination, and execution, the BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) team successfully completed multinational training events with Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), the United Kingdom, Türkiye, and NATO Maritime Group Two at the end of February prior to transiting towards the United States.

“History has proven the necessity of having forward-deployed Marines, embarked aboard amphibious ships. Over the past eight months, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC) have showcased the value, utility, and unique all-domain operational capabilities you only find in a Marine Expeditionary Unit,” said Col. Dennis Sampson, Commanding Officer of the 26th MEU(SOC). “When coupled together, the ARG and the MEU(SOC) form a flexible naval expeditionary force capable of reassuring our Allies and partners of our commitment to maritime security and capable of dominating within the littorals against any adversary in any clime or place.”

From the High North of Norway, to the Baltics, to the Mediterranean, Horn of Africa, to the Middle East, the BATARG and the 26th MEU(SOC) successfully completed over 15 bilateral activities with over 30 NATO Allied and partner countries in Plymouth, United Kingdom; Narvik and Setermoen, Norway; Riga, Latvia; Dublin, Ireland; Cartagena, Spain; Athens, Chania,

Volos, and Lidochorro, Greece; Dubai and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Manama, Bahrain; Saudi Arabia; Yemen; Kuwait; Larnaca, Cyprus. In addition to bilateral exercises, the BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) engaged with multiple representatives from embassies, ministries of defense, and local government, military, and civilian officials to strengthen relationships with NATO Allies and partners through in-person key leader engagements and subject matter expert exchanges, including ship tours, ceremonies and receptions, and community service projects during each port visit.

“Throughout our time in the U.S. 5th and U.S. 6th Fleet regions, the Sailors and Marines of the BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) showcased the unique capabilities that we bring as a response force to our Allies and partners,” said Capt. Martin Robertson, Amphibious Squadron 8 Commodore. “Our presence in the Eastern Mediterranean was exactly what our Nation needed: an integrated Navy and Marine Corps force ready to respond when called upon.”

The 26th MEU(SOC) serves as one of the United States’ premier crisis response forces capable of conducting amphibious operations, crisis response, and limited contingency operations, to include enabling the introduction of follow-on forces and designated special operations, in support of theater requirements of the Geographic Combatant Commander. The 26th MEU(SOC) serves as a premier stand-in force with the unique all-domain operational capabilities necessary to compete and win within the littorals and within the weapons engagement zones of an adversary in any climate or place.

“I am very proud of the steadfast professionalism of every Marine and Sailor assigned to the 26th MEU(SOC) and the BATARG. They have made a difference and highlighted the relevance of the ARG and MEU to our national security interests across the Tri-COCOM region,” Sampson said. “More so, I am truly grateful for the steadfast support from our

26th MEU(SOC) families and friends. I know they are proud of their Marine or Sailor and I know they are ready for our homecoming in a couple of weeks.”

The BATARG and 26th MEU(SOC) presence in the U.S. 6th Fleet and U.S. 5th Fleet areas of operation supported strategic objectives and contributed to regional security and stability, reassuring the United States commitment to Allies and partners in the High North, Baltics, Mediterranean, and Middle East. Coupled with the BATARG, the 26th MEU(SOC) showcased the value, utility, and operational flexibility a forward-deployed ARG-MEU provides Geographic Combatant Commanders.

From responding to contingencies to enhancing bilateral relations with key Allies and partners, the constant theme of the 26th MEU(SOC) was being ‘Ready, Relevant, and Capable’ of aggregating other joint, coalition, or special operations forces and deploying with limited notice in support of crises, expeditionary operations on land or from the sea, or other emergent operational requirements.