Task Force 61/2: Strengthening Crisis Response and Amphibious Readiness Across Europe, Africa

U.S. Marines and Sailors with Task Force 61/2 pose for a group photo at Naval Support Activity, Naples, Italy, Oct. 10, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Marc Imprevert)

From Task Force 61/2, Nov. 15, 2024

NAPLES, Italy –Task Force 61/2 (TF 61/2) stands at the forefront of the Marine Corps and Navy's integration efforts in the Mediterranean, enhancing amphibious operations and ensuring that U.S. forces are always ready to respond to any crisis in the region. Based in Naples, Italy, TF 61/2 operates with a scalable presence, supporting Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) deployments in the

U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) theaters. When the ARG/MEU is not forward deployed in the EUCOM and AFRICOM areas of responsibilities, TF 61/2 maintains a smaller staff in Naples, ready to surge forward to command and control the ARG/MEU or respond to emerging crises in the European and African areas of responsibilities. TF 61/2 is currently staffed by Marines and Sailors from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB), a subordinate command of II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF). Currently, TF 61/2 is commanding and controlling the deployed Wasp Amphibious Ready Group (WSP ARG) composited with the 24th MEU Special Operations Capable (SOC), one of the Marine Corps' most adaptable and responsive forces. In addition to the ARG/MEU, when forward deployed, TF 61/2 exercises tactical control of Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team Company, Europe (FASTEUR), as well as reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance (RXR) forces and other deployed II MEF units as part of Marine Rotational Forces-Europe (MRF-E). The task force maintains an unwavering focus on readiness to respond to crisis, providing swift, flexible options for U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF), U.S. 6th Fleet and U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe and Africa (MFEA). TF 61/2 embodies the Marine Corps' commitment to naval integration, ensuring that the ARG/MEU team is capable and ready to execute amphibious operations, humanitarian assistance, crisis operations, and joint missions with NATO Allies and partners.

The 39th Commandant of the Marine Corps' Planning Guidance underscores the critical role of II MEF as the Marine Corps' primary crisis-response force, designed to respond swiftly to emerging contingencies. II MEF is prepared to organize and deploy units through a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) construct, allowing for flexible, mission-tailored force deployment. While II MEF is not directly assigned to any combatant commander, it is structured to be responsive across multiple theaters, including U.S. European Command, Africa Command, Central Command, Southern Command, and Northern

Command. This versatility allows II MEF to remain ready for an array of contingencies, acting as a first response for planned and emerging operations while remaining able to augment, reinforce, or even lead joint task force operations. Within this framework, when the 2d MEB, as a subordinate command of II MEF, deploys forward to Naples, Italy, it assumes the role of TF 61/2. As a forward-deployed extension of II MEF, 2d MEB serving as TF 61/2 embodies this readiness, seamlessly commanding and controlling the deployed ARG/MEU to ensure a crisis response capability is continuously available across Europe and Africa whenever needed.

The ARG/MEU is also prominently featured in the Commandant's Planning Guidance, which underscores its role as the nation's premier crisis response force, combining flexibility and responsiveness. The ARG/MEU provides the United States with a powerful seabasing capability, uniquely equipped to execute amphibious operations, which ensures it can respond to crises swiftly. TF 61/2, currently commanding and controlling the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC), is at the core of this mission, as the ARG/MEU brings forward-deployed, combat-credible forces into the Mediterranean and other high-priority regions. The ARG/MEU's ability to execute complex operations, from humanitarian aid and crisis response to combat missions, aligns with the Commandant's vision of a continuously modernizing force that adapts to geographic combatant commander requirements. TF 61/2, therefore, not only supports U.S. 6th Fleet but also enhances the Marine Corps' ability to provide the crisis response that U.S. national defense strategy demands.

Since 2022, TF 61/2's presence in Naples has been a critical element of the U.S. strategy to maintain a flexible and scalable forward-deployed amphibious force in the region, adjusting its staff as needed to support ARG/MEU operations and regional crises. Under the command of Brig. Gen. Samuel L. Meyer, who assumed leadership of 2d MEB and TF 61/2 in May

2024, the task force continues its mission of readiness and preparation for crisis response. The addition of Sgt. Maj. Elena M. Rodriguez marks the first time 2d MEB and TF 61/2 have had an appointed sergeant major, providing enhanced leadership across all levels, and ensuring that all Marines and Sailors in the task force are fully prepared to execute their missions.

“Our ability to remain forward deployed and ready to respond to crises, is built on the integration of the Navy and Marine Corps,” said Meyer. “TF 61/2, with the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC), is an adaptable force capable of executing a wide range of operations. We’re committed to maintaining the highest standards of readiness, ensuring that we’re prepared for any contingency.”

The initial deployment of TF 61/2 in the early spring of 2022 marked a new era in U.S. 6th Fleet’s approach to amphibious operations and forward presence in the Mediterranean. Since then, the task force has become a crucial element in real-world crisis response and joint training exercises with NATO Allies and partners. Notably, in early 2023, TF 61/2 was pivotal in humanitarian relief efforts following earthquakes in Turkey. U.S. military personnel assigned to TF 61/2 and the 39th Air Base Wing (ABW) were tasked with building a field hospital for citizens affected by the February earthquakes. Upon completion of the field hospital in March 2023, leaders from TF 61/2 and the 39th ABW conducted a final walk-through with Turkish officials before the Turkish Ministry of Health assumed operations of the facility. This mission underscored the U.S. commitment to NATO Allies and highlighted TF 61/2’s readiness to mobilize forces swiftly in support of humanitarian operations.

In July 2023, TF 61/2 provided wildfire support in Greece. An immediate response team from TF 61/2 deployed as a forward element to Greece to coordinate and exercise tactical control of U.S. European Command forces supporting firefighting and

relief efforts. The Bataan ARG-26th MEU (SOC), forward deployed during this time, also worked closely with local authorities, assisting in firefighting and evacuation operations that demonstrated the versatility and responsiveness of U.S. amphibious forces.

“TF 61/2’s ability to respond to real-world crises, such as the earthquakes in Turkey, and wildfires in Greece, underscores the importance of maintaining a high level of readiness and rapid response posture,” said Col. Andrew Martinez, deputy commander, TF 61/2. “These operations demonstrate the importance of a forward-deployed TF 61/2 command element and ARG/MEU capable of executing missions that protect U.S. interests and assist our Allies and partners in times of need.” The experiences gained from these real-world operations have further strengthened TF 61/2’s preparedness and ability to command and control the ARG/MEU. The task force’s presence in Naples has ensured a continued close partnership with NATO Allies and partners, further enhancing interoperability and joint amphibious capabilities.

Under the command of Meyer and Rodriguez, TF 61/2 has continued to refine its capabilities and ensure the readiness of the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC). The task force’s involvement in Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) in June 2024, a NATO-led exercise in the Baltic Sea, exemplified its commitment to joint operations and amphibious warfare. During BALTOPS 24, key personnel from TF 61/2 operated aboard the Blue Ridge-class command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20), successfully commanding and controlling amphibious forces while integrating in close coordination with NATO Allies. This exercise tested TF 61/2’s multi-domain reconnaissance and amphibious capabilities, reinforcing its role as a crucial command and control element in contested environments.

BALTOPS 24 enhanced interoperability and cooperation among NATO Allies, focusing on freedom of navigation and defending the Baltic Sea region. Throughout the exercise, TF 61/2

combined with Expeditionary Strike Group 2 (ESG-2) and became Commander Task Force 162 (CTF 162), with Meyer serving as Commander, Landing Forces (CLF) and Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson as Commander, Amphibious Task Force (CATF). During BALTOPS 24, TF 61/2 worked closely with the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC), as well as NATO Allies, including Spanish, French, and Dutch naval forces, and played a key role in each of the training phases. The training phases emphasized joint tactical operations and amphibious operations, culminating in a "free-play" scenario to simulate real-world contingencies and build on NATO's interoperability.

"Our participation in BALTOPS 2024 aboard the Mount Whitney highlighted our ability to operate seamlessly with NATO Allies and lead amphibious operations in contested environments," said Meyer. "We've taken those lessons and applied them to our day-to-day mission, ensuring that we're ready to respond to any real-world crisis."

TF 61/2 remains constantly prepared and vigilant, continuously planning for any potential real-world crisis that may arise within the region during its deployment. By maintaining a high state of readiness, TF 61/2 ensures it can swiftly respond to emerging situations, coordinating closely with NAVEUR-NAVAF, U.S. 6th Fleet, and MFEA to assess regional developments and adjust plans as needed. Through regular readiness exercises, crisis response drills, and joint planning sessions with NATO Allies and partners, TF 61/2 continually reinforces its ability to respond to crises at a moment's notice. This commitment to proactive planning and scalable operational flexibility, positions TF 61/2 as a critical force ready to support stability and security across Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa.

"Seamless coordination with our Navy counterparts and NATO Allies and partners is essential to maintaining readiness," said Rodriguez. "The leadership team here at TF 61/2 ensures we stay focused on our mission and maintain the readiness

needed to support U.S. 6th Fleet and MFEA. We stand ready to respond to any situation, anywhere in the region."

This commitment to Marine Corps and Navy integration remains central to TF 61/2's mission, providing U.S. 6th Fleet with a highly adaptable force that can rapidly respond to emerging crises. Regular participation in NATO exercises, such as BALTOPS, ensures TF 61/2's ability to project power, enhance interoperability, and execute complex operations in collaboration with Allied and partner forces.

"Our ability to integrate with the Navy ensures that we can execute our mission and provide the rapid-response capability that our nation depends on," added Martinez. "TF 61/2 and the ARG/MEU remain ready to forward deploy, whether it's for combat operations, humanitarian aid, or supporting our NATO Allies and partners."

As 2d MEB nears the end of its current deployment to Naples as TF 61/2, beginning in May 2024, the task force remains fully prepared to respond to real-world crises. Drawing on lessons from past operations, such as the Turkey earthquakes and Greek wildfires, TF 61/2 has played a crucial role in planning and preparing for potential crisis operations, building on its experience to ensure readiness for any emerging contingency. The task force's command and control capabilities allow it to support NAVEUR-NAVAF, U.S. 6th Fleet, and MFEA, ensuring a vital forward presence that reinforces U.S. commitments to Allies and partners, and enhances stability in the region.

"Our focus is on integrating with the Navy, to ensure that we can respond to any crisis quickly and decisively," said Meyer. "We have an amazing team here at TF 61/2, and I'm confident in our ability to meet any challenge."

Since its initial deployment to Naples in 2022, TF 61/2 has cemented its role as an indispensable asset in the European and African theaters. Under the steadfast leadership of Meyer

and Rodriguez, the task force has built on its amphibious operations legacy, continually enhancing its readiness, command and control capabilities, and integration with NATO Allies and partners. TF 61/2 scales back its presence in Naples once the ARG/MEU redeploys, but always maintains its readiness to surge forward as needed for crisis response. Whether participating in major exercises, responding to humanitarian needs, or maintaining its forward-deployed posture, TF 61/2 exemplifies the Marine Corps' commitment to amphibious warfare and crisis response. As the task force looks ahead, it remains focused on its mission to be always ready, always prepared, and always poised to meet any challenge at any time.

General Officer Announcements

From the U.S. Department of Defense, Nov. 13, 2024

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced today that the president has made the following nominations:

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Robert C. Fulford for appointment to the grade of lieutenant general, with assignment as deputy commander, U.S. European Command. Fulford is currently serving as commanding general, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, California.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Adam L. Chalkley for appointment to the grade of major general. Chalkley is currently serving as inspector general of the Marine Corps, Arlington, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Joseph R. Clearfield for appointment

to the grade of major general. Clearfield is currently serving as senior military assistant to the deputy secretary of defense, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Mark H. Clingan for appointment to the grade of major general. Clingan is currently serving as commanding general, Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command and Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Mark A. Cunningham for appointment to the grade of major general. Cunningham is currently serving as commanding general, Force Headquarters Group, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Kyle B. Ellison for appointment to the grade of major general. Ellison is currently serving as deputy director for Current and Integrated Operations, J-3, Joint Staff, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Walker M. Field for appointment to the grade of major general. Field is currently serving as deputy director for Operations, National Joint Operations Intelligence Center, Operations Team Three, J-3, Joint Staff, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Anthony M. Henderson for appointment to the grade of major general. Henderson is currently serving as commanding general, Training Command, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Valerie A. Jackson for appointment to the grade of major general. Jackson is currently serving as commanding general, 4th Marine Logistics Group, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Matthew T. Mowery for appointment to the grade of major general. Mowery is currently serving as deputy director, Requirements and Capability Development, J-8, Joint Staff, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Andrew M. Niebel for appointment to the grade of major general. Niebel is currently serving as commanding general, 1st Marine Logistics Group, Camp Pendleton, California.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Farrell J. Sullivan for appointment to the grade of major general. Sullivan is currently serving as director, Capabilities Development Directorate, Department of Combat Development and Integration, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Jason G. Woodworth for appointment to the grade of major general. Woodworth is currently serving as commander, Marine Corps Installations Command; and assistant deputy commandant for Installations and Logistics, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Col. Joseph A. Katz for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Katz is currently serving as chief of staff, Marine Forces Reserve, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Marine Corps Col. David K. Winnacker for appointment to the grade of brigadier general. Winnacker is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, G-7, Force Headquarters Group, Marine Forces Reserve, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Leidos Awarded $93M Contract to Support Navy and Marine Corps Weapons Systems

SEAPOWER
The Official Publication of the Navy League of the United States

From Leidos

RESTON, Va. (Oct. 30, 2024) – Leidos (NYSE:LDOS) announced today a new contract to provide critical supply support for weapons systems that keep the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces mission-ready. The Technical Assistance for Repairables Processing (TARP) contract was awarded by the Naval Supply Systems Command (NAVSUP) Fleet Logistics Center, supporting NAVSUP's Weapon Systems Support (WSS). The contract has a base period of performance of one year with four one-year options and one six-month option.

"Leidos' solutions in advanced traceability and control support our Navy and Marine forces in moving, controlling, and tracking depot-level repairables worldwide – ultimately helping to reduce repair pipeline time and the cost of future investment," said Jason McCarthy, Leidos senior vice president, Engineering, Integration & Operations. "We are proud to continue to deliver mission-enabling technology and data-driven logistics to our long-time customer."

New under this contract, Leidos plans to develop a business intelligence dashboard with live data and reporting to put a powerful decision support system at the fingertips of the

NAVSUP WSS customer, including in offline environments.

Under the TARP program, global field representatives train and assist the U.S. Navy field and fleet on all aspects of the Reverse Supply Chain (RSC). The training covers the proper packaging of expensive military assets as well as use of the electronic Retrograde Management System (eRMS), an IT system that provides visibility and accountability for repairables moved through RSC transportation channels.

This is the seventh TARP program contract awarded to Leidos. Since 2000, the Leidos team has consistently delivered innovations, including automated reporting and multi-platform mobile applications to capture project data.

FRCE Delivers Final AV-8 Harrier to Fleet

Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) celebrated its final AV-8B Harrier maintenance event with an informal celebration in the facility's AV-8B hangar Sept. 20. FRCE delivered the completed aircraft to Marine Attack Squadron 223 onboard Marine Air Station Cherry Point Sept. 26.

From Naval Air Systems Command, Oct. 28, 2024

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) marked the end of an era with the completion of its final AV-8B Harrier maintenance event, delivering the aircraft to Marine Attack Squadron 223 onboard Marine Air Station Cherry Point Sept. 26.

FRCE celebrated the platform's depot maintenance finale with an informal ceremony Sept. 20 in the command's AV-8 hangar. FRCE Commanding Officer Capt. Randy Berti and leaders from the AV-8B Weapon Systems Program Office (PMA-257) recognized members of the depot's Harrier team, both past and present, for their efforts in supporting the legendary aircraft throughout the years.

Berti said the command's AV-8B team has been instrumental in ensuring readiness within the Harrier community.

"It's an honor to lead a facility with such a remarkable legacy," said Berti. "For five decades, FRC East has been a cornerstone in supporting the Harrier program for both the Marine Corps and our nation's international allies. Our AV-8 platform's success is directly attributed to the hard work and dedication of multiple generations of FRC East employees. I am proud of all this team has accomplished throughout the years and I look forward to what's next."

FRCE has supported the Harrier since 1973, beginning with its assignment of the AV-8A Harrier and F402 engine workload. With the platform sundowning as the Marine Corps replaces it with the F-35 Lightning II, the depot's Harrier program will continue its transition to supporting other weapons platforms, including the F-35.

Many of the depot's AV-8 aircraft maintenance professionals have spent a significant portion of their careers working on the Harrier. Aircraft Overhaul and Repair Supervisor Mike Stewart said it's hard to see the platform come to an end.

"I've been working on the AV-8 platform for the past 30 years," said Stewart. "It's the only platform I've ever known, dating back to the start of my career in the Marine Corps in 1994 to 2011, when I began working here at FRC East.

"With that, I know that every aircraft has its service life," Stewart continued. "We must evolve by improving our technology and tactics. F-35 is that new technology; it's how we keep up and move to the future. Although the AV-8 is a great aircraft, it has served its purpose. It's time to move on to the newer weapons platforms with more capabilities."

Jeff Broughton, business operations specialist, said the depot's Harrier team has an impressive track record, often working under budget and ahead of schedule. On average, the

team completed AV-8B depot-level maintenance events nearly 10% faster than originally estimated, according to Broughton.

“Our goal is to stay within our customers’ budgets and be good stewards of their funding,” Broughton said. “We have met and exceeded that goal time and time again. Many of the aircraft we have worked on have been returned to the fleet earlier than originally planned and under our original cost estimates.”

Broughton said during his 22 years on the AV-8B platform, he has witnessed many successes, with the most memorable being in 2015.

“One of our more outstanding inductions was an AV-8 that was damaged during the attack on Camp Bastion, Afghanistan,” said Broughton. “It was one of our fastest turnarounds for a special rework induction, and I think that was partially because we knew the circumstances and were highly motivated to get it back to the squadron. Not only did we return that aircraft nearly a week ahead of schedule, we also did it under the original estimate.

“We play an important role in warfighter readiness here at FRC East,” Broughton continued. “When something tragic like that happens, we come together and do whatever we can to help get the fleet back up and running.”

The AV-8 team’s reputation has set FRCE up to be the repair facility of choice for future squadrons, according to Broughton.

“For many years, we have established ourselves as being a successful and affordable option for the AV-8 community,” said Broughton. “We have established good rapport with our customers and local squadrons because they know we get the work done. They know we provide high-quality product within a good price range that is in-line with their funding.

“We continue to be good stewards of their funding and continue

to provide this quality of work, so they continue to choose us," Broughton continued. "As time goes on and platforms evolve, the way the AV-8 is transitioning to the F-35, we hope to remain their preferred depot source of repair."

Broughton said working together has been a key factor in the team's success.

"Our day-to-day plan is teamwork," said Broughton. "We do everything we can to be role models to each other. Instead of just having one mentor or role model, we strive to all be a role model because a supervisor may be strong in one area, while the planner may be strong in another. We all come together as one team, one fight, all strong."

Ike Rettenmair, head of the AV-8 and F-35 branches at FRCE, said while the change in focus from the AV-8B Harrier to F-35 Lightning II is bittersweet, it represents an important step forward in the depot's support of the warfighter.

"I was filled with mixed emotions the day we rolled the last Harrier out," said Rettenmair. "I've supported the Harrier for 30 years in some capacity, starting with my time in the Marine Corps as an airframe mechanic. Throughout my time on the platform, I've had the privilege of meeting many remarkable individuals who possess a warrior mentality and take great pride in their service to the fleet. Even though this transition will be a big change for many of us, we remain proud and motivated in our support of the warfighter."

FRCE is North Carolina's largest maintenance, repair, overhaul and technical services provider, with more than 4,000 civilian, military and contract workers. Its annual revenue exceeds $1 billion. The depot provides service to the fleet while functioning as an integral part of the greater U.S. Navy; Naval Air Systems Command; and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers.

15th MEU H-1 Det Conducts Live-Fire Training from USS Miguel Keith in the Indo-Pacific

PHILIPPINE SEA (Sept. 28, 2024) A U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom attached to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 165 (Reinforced), 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, prepares to land aboard the expeditionary sea base USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) in the Philippine Sea, Sept. 28, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Capt. Staci Morris)

by Capt. Brian Tuthill, 17 October 2024

PACIFIC OCEAN – UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper aircrew assigned

to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) conducted a series of day and night close air support training missions with live ordnance Sept. 25 and Oct. 13, launching from the expeditionary sea base USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) to a range west of Okinawa, Japan.

The H-1 helicopter detachment, part of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 165 (Reinforced), 15th MEU, temporarily transferred to Miguel Keith from the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4) on Sept. 21.

This marked the first time a full H-1 detachment has operated from an ESB-class ship during a deployment, allowing the 15th MEU to extend its aviation operations capabilities across the Indo-Pacific.

The live-fire training at Idesuna Jima featured mixed sections of Viper and Venom helicopters launched from Miguel Keith to conduct simulated close air support missions, flying approximately 30 miles to engage simulated targets in both day and night conditions. During each of the training events, the H-1 detachment completed 18 sorties with four aircraft, employing 2.75-inch rockets, 20 mm semi-armor-piercing high-explosive incendiary rounds, and .50 caliber and 7.62 mm crew-served weapons.

This training enhanced pilot proficiency, ensured important skill sustainment and qualifications were met, and also increased overall unit readiness.

“This training was significant for our detachment and the 15th MEU because it resulted in the certification of an aircraft commander and an aerial gunner, as well as the completion of several section leader training events,” U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Michael J. Harper, H-1 detachment officer in charge, VMM-165 (Rein.), said about the September training event. “As part of our long-term aircrew training plan, this means these

crewmembers will return to the MEU aboard Boxer more capable and ready to lead and train Marines in our parent squadron after deployment."

The training in October was similar, and allowing for pilot combat flight leadership progression, trained additional section leads, and qualified Venom aerial gunners in preparation to attend the Weapons Tactics Instructor program next year.

The integration of Miguel Keith as a "spoke" for 15th MEU aviation operations expanded the capability and capacity of the MEU's Marine Air Ground Task Force. The detachment's transfer allowed Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 225's full complement of F-35B Lightning II aircraft to return aboard Boxer, supporting additional operations with partner and allied forces in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations.

"The H-1 detachment operating from an ESB during our deployment expands the concept of employment for the hub-spoke-node construct, where this afloat spoke serves as an intermediate base for aircraft to operate within contested areas," said Harper. "This concept provides the MEU's aviation combat element with enhanced operational utility and demonstrates the versatility of an H-1 detachment to conduct distributed operations ashore or at sea, offering more options to the Joint Force commander."

Elements of the same H-1 detachment previously operated aboard Miguel Keith in April 2022 during training exercises with dummy ordnance and crew-served weapons to advance efforts to certify the ship to for aviation explosive ordnance, said Harper. That evolution marked the first time an ESB-class ship hosted H-1 helicopters in the Indo-Pacific, laying the groundwork for the detachment's current temporary assignment that provided vital experience for the Miguel Keith's crew.

“Our time aboard Miguel Keith has allowed the H-1 detachment to build proficiency and continue to refine standard operating procedures for ordnance storage and handling on ESBs,” said Harper.

The experiences and lessons learned by Harper’s detachment will benefit future forward-deployed aircraft, including CH-53E Super Stallions or CH-35K King Stallions, MV-22B Ospreys, Navy MH-60s, but especially Vipers and Venoms.

“One of the greatest strengths of H-1 aircraft are their relatively small size and logistical footprint compared to other aviation platforms that provide fire support or lift,” Harper said. “We rely on theater lift or forward arming and refueling points to get us closer to the objective. Operating from an expeditionary sea base capitalizes on our mobility and small footprint, while compensating for our range.”

ESB-class ships like Miguel Keith enable sea-based expeditionary forces, such as the 15th MEU, to maintain forward presence anywhere across the globe, with the capability to transition quickly from competition to combat missions. The ESB design showcases the flexibility and agility of naval forces, particularly in vital chokepoints, and demonstrates the range of capabilities these ships can offer. Each ESB is equipped to support aviation, unmanned systems, troop movement, equipment staging, and command and control functions.

Elements of the 15th MEU are under the command and control of Commander, Task Force 76, which 7th Fleet employs to cooperate with allies and partners to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific.

As 7th Fleet’s primary Navy advisor on amphibious matters in the 7th Fleet area of operations, CTF 76 is responsible for conducting expeditionary warfare operations to support a full

range of theater contingencies, ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations to full combat operations.

Multi-Domain Test Event Lets XQ-58A Demonstrate Tactical Data Link Integration

From U.S. Marine Corps Communications Directorate

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLA. – The Marine Corps' XQ-58A Valkyrie completed its latest test flight and first multi-service integration effort during Emerald Flag 2024 at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, this October.

Emerald Flag 2024 is a multiservice and multi-domain test event that incorporates new and developing technology while focusing on the efficiency of joint warfare. The effort includes integrating advanced long-range kill chains – enabling programs through a range of realistic combat training environments on air, space, and cyber space platforms.

The XQ-58A effectively demonstrated its capabilities as a forward deployed sensing platform – providing critical threat targeting data to Marine Corps fifth-generation aircraft to rapidly close advanced kill chains. Using a common tactical data link, the XQ-58A contributed broad airborne and surface sensor awareness information to multiple ground and airborne joint network participants.

“This XQ-58A test marked another milestone in the Marine Corps’ unmanned tactical aircraft program. The flight focused on the use of tactical data links to enable digital communication between the XQ-58A and an airborne four-ship of F-35Bs from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 214 and other joint aircraft. The success of this flight test during Emerald Flag pushed the manned-unmanned teaming concept a step further for the entire Joint Force,” said Col. Derek Brannon, Branch Head for the Cunningham Group, Deputy Commandant for Aviation.

This joint collaboration was supported by the U.S. Air Force’s 96th Test Wing; the U.S. Air Force’s 96th Cyberspace Test Group; the U.S. Air Force’s 53rd Test and Evaluation Group; the Office of Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering; Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory; Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation; Naval Air Systems Command’s Advanced Development Team; Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division AIRWorks; and 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. This broad team facilitated ongoing research, development, test, and evaluation throughout the Marine Corps’ Penetrating Affordable Autonomous Collaborative Killer – Portfolio (PAACK-P) program.

The Deputy Commandant for Aviation’s Cunningham Group, an internal working group responsible for planning and implementing Project Eagle, and MCWL collaborated to see this project through to completion.

“This test flight marked the capstone event for the PAACK-P Rapid Defense Experimentation Reserve project and proved the

tactical utility of uncrewed offboard sensing platforms," said Lt. Col. Bradley Buick, future capabilities officer for Cunningham Group.

Through this successful joint integration, the XQ-58A continues to provide the Marine Corps with a testable platform for integrating new technologies and concepts in support of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Unmanned Expeditionary Tactical Aircraft program.

LMADIS Prepares for Future Fight

U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Angel Lopez, a low altitude air defense gunner assigned to 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, guides a Light Marine Air Defense

Integrated System during a ground-based air defense exercise as part of Weapons and Tactics Instructor course 1-25 at Tacts Airfield near Wellton, Arizona, Oct. 10, 2024. *U.S. MARINE CORPS | Lance Corporal Micah Thompson*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, Ariz. – The U.S. Marine Corps has taken significant strides in enhancing its air defense capabilities since the introduction of the Light Marine Air-Defense Integrated System in October 2022. This ground-based system is designed to deter and neutralize unmanned aircraft systems, addressing the evolving threats faced in modern warfare.

The LMADIS consists of two all-terrain Polaris MRZR vehicles – one serving as a command unit, while the other is equipped with advanced sensors and signal-jamming technology.

For the first time, LMADIS has been integrated into the Marine Corps' premier advanced aviation school at Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1) – Weapons and Tactics Instructor course, WTI 1-25 – as an employable capability throughout each evolution, showcasing its operational viability and reinforcing the Marine Corps' commitment to enhancing air defense.

"The significance of being out here for the first time is us being able to employ LMADIS in a controlled exercise scenario, safely testing limits and seeing what all the systems can provide to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force at large," said 1st Lieutenant Gordon Armstrong, LMADIS Platoon Commander, 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion.

As part of ongoing Force Design initiatives, the Marine Corps is focusing on distributed maritime operations and reintroducing short to medium-range air and missile defense systems to address the need for an organic air defense capability.

LMADIS systems and teams are typically deployed worldwide, limiting exposure to fleet Marine forces in garrison. The

LMADIS team's integration with WTI 1-25 provides a valuable opportunity for Marines to train hands-on with other units and capabilities, integrating their tactics into a broader operational framework.

"Having LMADIS teams here at WTI allows us to integrate with the other agencies and into the broader systems that we test here; it allows us to incorporate everyone else's tactics into our tactics," Armstrong said. "As we grow, we will be working with other aviation units to mobilize and integrate with the other elements by the final exercise, simulating a larger operational scenario."

The WTI 1-25 curriculum offers multiple training evolutions with different scenarios for the LMADIS teams to test when and where the system is most effective. As the course advances, similarly the evolutions and scenarios increase in complexity.

"With the WTI structure, we are able to start small and work to gradually build the scenarios," said Major Dusty Blanchard, Ground-Based Air Defense Division Head, MAWTS-1.

Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric M. Smith, emphasizes a realistic, creative approach to training in his recent planning guidance.

"We must fully integrate constructive and virtual training into our exercises to complement live force actions so that we can train with the full complement of our new capabilities," Smith said.

As the course progresses, the training evolutions begin to incorporate live UAS operations. This live-fire component allows LMADIS operators to practice identifying, tracking, and simulate neutralizing UAS threats in real time, enhancing their tactical proficiency and response capabilities.

A testament to its mobility and versatility, the LMADIS was

rapidly transported on various Marine Corps aircraft platforms throughout the training.

“For the first time, we will be implementing the LMADIS fully capable and fully transportable via MV-22B Ospreys and CH-53E Super Stallions, demonstrating its versatility and readiness for deployment in various environments,” said Sergeant Angel Lopez, LMADIS team leader with 3rd LAAD Battalion. “This allows us to work with the flying divisions within MAWTS-1 to get us to our target location.”

The successful integration of the LMADIS in WTI 1-25 represents a pivotal advancement in the Marine Corps’ air defense strategy, ensuring that LAAD Marines are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and experience necessary to operate effectively on an increasingly complex battlefield.

BAE Systems and Kongsberg Sign Teaming Agreement for New Platform Situational Awareness Tool

PACIFIC OCEAN (March 11, 2022) U.S. Marines assigned to the 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division conduct waterborne training with the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) from aboard the amphibious transport dock USS Anchorage (LPD 23 (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Hector Carrera)

The Integrated Combat Solution tool will give Warfighters the situational awareness they need for any mission, as well as options to respond to potential threats

From BAE Systems

WASHINGTON – October 16, 2024 – BAE Systems has entered into a teaming agreement with Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace to bring Integrated Combat Solution (ICS) to the U.S. defense market. The transformational battlefield situational awareness tool for combat vehicles will provide the Warfighter with the capability to link and share video streams, metadata, target information, slew-to-cue commands, and much more, reducing the typical threat response speed from minutes to seconds. Together, with Kongsberg developing the ICS tool and BAE Systems integrating it onto combat vehicles, the companies

will support technology upgrades through the product lifecycles.

“The ability for troops to rapidly pass targeting information across the battlefield to other platforms and engage a target remotely is critical to their mission,” Andy Corea, vice president and general manager of BAE Systems’ Combat Mission Systems business, said. “The combined talents of Kongsberg’s innovation and expertise in remote weapon systems and our lead systems integration capability provides the Warfighter the opportunity to obtain fully integrated enhanced combat capability – helping them stay aware and unmatched in battle.”

ICS is a tool that can be used across the U.S. Marine or U.S. Army’s fleet of vehicles as a critical enabler of their mission. Built with an open-systems approach, ICS can be integrated on any battlefield platform equipped with a weapon system and on-board sensors – keeping troops aware and safer in the fight. ICS will give Warfighters more options to respond to potential threats, matching the rapid pace of warfare in the future. ICS uses an integrated network to link the sensors on different battlefield assets together, allowing command and control of weapon stations, turrets, jammers and other effectors from a single screen inside the vehicle.

“Together we will deliver ICS as a core enabler of modern warfare, providing all-domain visibility, command and control,” said Kjetil Reiten Myhra, executive vice president defence systems, Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace. “This force multiplier streamlines complicated threat responses, networking mobility platforms and other assets for increased combat capability.”

The ICS capability has already been demonstrated on the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) and Armored Multi-Purpose vehicle platforms, and the combined team of BAE Systems and Kongsberg looks forward to the opportunity to provide it

across the ground combat forces. The ICS system is also featured at the BAE Systems booth (#6041) at AUSA this week on the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV) platform, further demonstrating the team's ability to integrate it on different combat vehicles.

U.S. Marines Complete Typhoon Krathon Humanitarian Assistance Efforts

SEAPOWER
The Official Publication of the Navy League of the United States

From Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia

MANILA, Philippines – U.S. Marines across multiple forward-deployed commands concluded six days of foreign disaster relief efforts in the Philippines Oct. 10, 2024, supporting the U.S. Agency for International Development's humanitarian response to Typhoon Krathon (locally known as Julian) at the request of the Philippine government.

Marines and Sailors from Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia (MRF-SEA); 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (I MAW); III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF); and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15th MEU) embarked aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4) delivered nearly 96,000 pounds of foreign disaster relief supplies to Batan Island, a remote island in the Batanes Province and one of the locations most impacted by Krathon.

Typhoon Krathon originated 155 miles southwest of Okinawa before moving northwest, reaching peak intensity Oct. 1, with sustained winds of 195 kph (120 mph). Krathon heavily battered the northern islands of the Philippines, leading to evacuations, infrastructure damage, and food supply insecurity in affected communities.

At the request of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin directed U.S. Indo-Pacific Command to support USAID's relief efforts due to the unique capabilities and high state of readiness of forward-deployed U.S. Marine Corps forces.

MRF-SEA first arrived in the Philippines in late September to participate in upcoming training exercises with the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Operating out of Fort Bonifacio, Philippines, MRF-SEA immediately began coordination with the U.S. Department of State, USAID, the AFP, and other U.S. Marine Corps units to plan support for the relief effort. Two teams of Marines and Sailors from MRF-SEA integrated with USAID and AFP personnel in Manila and Laoag to plan and prepare for the arrival of KC-130J Hercules aircraft from 1st MAW in Okinawa, Japan, and personnel from 3rd Marine Logistics Group.

"Before Marine Corps aircraft ever touched down in the Philippines, Marines and Sailors with MRF-SEA were integrated with our partners in the U.S. and Philippine governments, on site at Villamor Air Base and Laoag International Airport,

with the manpower and heavy equipment needed to package and move aid material," said Col. Stuart Glenn, commanding officer, MRF-SEA. "Forward-deployed Marine Corps forces allow us to quickly respond to humanitarian missions because we're already in the region. I am extremely proud that our team was able to set the necessary conditions to quickly provide relief to the Philippine people."

After arriving on Oct. 5, the cargo planes were loaded with supplies at Villamor Air Base and flown to Laoag International Airport in northern Luzon for staging and preparation to move the supplies to their final destination on Batan Island. The KC-130 crews conducted 26.2 hours of flight operations, successfully transported all aid materials to Laoag.

As U.S. and Philippine personnel worked to move supplies north, the 15th MEU arrived aboard USS Boxer and began flight operations to support relief efforts on Oct. 8. MV-22B Ospreys, assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 165 (Reinforced), landed in Laoag, and combined teams from the 15th MEU, MRF-SEA, and Philippine Marines spent the next three days loading Ospreys, the Marine Corps' medium-lift tiltrotor V/STOL platform, with disaster relief supplies for the final leg of the movement to the Basco Airport on Batan Island. Pilots and aircrews from VMM-165 (Rein.) conducted more than 55 flights and successfully delivered the final disaster relief material on Thursday, Oct. 10.

"The primary focus of our mission is helping the people of the Philippines recover as quickly and safely as possible," said Col. Sean Dynan, commanding officer, 15th MEU. "Humanitarian assistance in an expeditionary environment is what we train to do, and it is one of the reasons we are forward-deployed as an amphibious force."

The forward presence and ready posture of U.S. Marine forces in the Indo-Pacific region was pivotal to the rapid and effective response to Typhoon Krathon, demonstrating the

U.S.’s commitment to its allies and partners during times of need.

USS Boxer, 15th MEU Arrive in Philippines to Deliver Emergency Relief Supplies

U.S. Marines assigned to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and Philippine Marines assigned to 4th Marine Brigade load USAID supplies into an MV-22B Osprey during foreign disaster relief operations at the Laoag International Airport in Laoag City, llocos Norte, Philippines, Oct. 8, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Luis Agostini)

By Capt. Brian Tuthill, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit Public Affairs

Oct. 9, 2024

LUZON, PHILIPPINES — Amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4), and embarked elements of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), arrived in the Philippines Oct. 8 to support the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) efforts in foreign disaster response operations following Typhoon Krathon (locally known as Julian), which made landfall on the Province of Cagayan, Philippines, Sept. 30.

Their support is at the request of the Philippine government and directed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

"The primary focus of our mission is helping the people of the Philippines recover as quickly and safely as possible," said U.S. Marine Corps Col. Sean Dynan, commanding officer, 15th MEU. "Alongside the Armed Forces of the Philippines and USAID, our forces will help coordinate and transport relief supplies to those who were most affected in the Batanes Islands. Humanitarian assistance in an expeditionary environment is what we train to do, and it is one of the reasons we are forward deployed as an amphibious force."

The Boxer Amphibious Ready Group and 15th MEU (ARG-MEU) will send personnel and equipment from the ship to transport foreign disaster response (FDR) supplies to remote locations within the Philippines in collaboration with USAID.

"Our condolences go out to all those affected by this devastating typhoon," said U.S. Navy Capt. Tate Robinson, commodore, Amphibious Squadron (COMPHIBRON) 5. "The unique construct of the Navy and Marine Corps team in an ARG-MEU provides us the ability to respond to crises through rapid maneuverability and embarked assets, allowing us to be on station and ready to support however we are needed. I am proud of the way our amphibious force team has come together to work

alongside our Philippine allies in a timely, efficient, and professional manner to provide aid and alleviate suffering for those affected by Typhoon Krathon.”

The USAID supplies being delivered on the ground will include items such as tarps, shelter kits and food packets.

Boxer and 15th MEU will join personnel from I Marine Expeditionary Force’s Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia, who are already located in the country, to help facilitate the efficient distribution of materials. Additionally, U.S. Marine Corps KC-130J Hercules aircraft from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, arrived in Manila from Okinawa, Japan, last week to support the ongoing relief efforts.

The ARG-MEU team is capable of conducting operations from combat missions to humanitarian aid and disaster relief. They exemplify these capabilities with air-borne and sea-based connectors to move people and supplies where and when needed. As such, prior to the deployment, Boxer and 15th MEU conducted training and certification for humanitarian assistance missions.

The U.S. military regularly trains with the Philippines on FDR operations. Recurring exercises, such as Balikatan and Kamandag, provide crisis response training that enhances operational readiness and develops joint interoperability during an actual disaster and the relief efforts that follow.

Boxer and embarked elements of the 15th MEU are conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy’s largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.