

Iwo Jima ARG and 24th MEU Deploy After Redefining Integrated Training



The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and ships of the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), embarked with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, simulate a strait transit during a composite unit training exercise (COMPTUEX) off the Atlantic coast, March 1, 2021. COMPTUEX is a month-long training event designed to test the ARG-MEU's capabilities against the full spectrum of military operations. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Davis Harris*

NORFOLK, Va. – The Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) deployed March 25 after completing an intensive, month-long composite training exercise (COMPTUEX) and brief in-port maintenance period, the U.S. 2nd Fleet said in a release.

The ARG-MEU's COMPTUEX was designed to fully integrate

roughly 3,700 Sailors and Marines into one cohesive contingency force while testing the units' abilities to carry out sustained operations from the sea. During the exercise, the Blue-Green team executed virtual and live evolutions challenging every major warfare area, including responses to surface and subsurface contacts, electronic attacks, surface and air amphibious assaults, and precision airstrikes.

COMPTUEX was led by Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 4 and Expeditionary Operations Training Group (EOTG) staff, during which both groups of assessors provided training and mentorship while evaluating the warfighting capabilities of all units. There were two distinct phases of training that increased in complexity and intensity over time.

At sea, simulated attacks by hostile aircraft, ships, and submarines required active responses by the ARG-MEU in real-time. Additionally, there were several live visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) exercises those fully integrated elements of the ARG and MEU at the tactical team level.

On shore, the landing force conducted raids in daytime and nighttime urban environments. They executed multiple tactical recoveries of aircraft and personnel missions, utilizing Navy as well as Marine aviation assets.

The ARG-MEU team was also assessed on their ability to integrate Navy and Marine Corps forces in a variety of warfare areas, essential to ensuring readiness in a variety of joint mission sets.

"The ARG-MEU proved we are adaptable and can respond to a variety of complex and rapidly changing situations," said Capt. Darren Nelson, commodore of Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 4. "Our success depended on being innovative, thinking strategically, planning operationally, and acting tactically. The training we completed is unique in that only

an ARG-MEU conducts this type of combined training in the military.”

The 24th MEU, based out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is the first East Coast MEU to embark ships with the Department of Defense’s new Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The JLTV is a versatile ground transport vehicle now used by all ground-based elements within the MEU, providing state-of-the-art protection and technology to troops in tow.

Additionally, in response to the commandant of the Marine Corps’ new force design, the MEU embarked with a robust Light-Armored Reconnaissance detachment.

“As the nation’s crisis response force, the ARG-MEU team must remain ready to respond at a moment’s notice when crises arise,” explained Col. Eric D. Cloutier, commanding officer, 24th MEU. “This exercise gave our team the opportunity to train how we fight across a range of military operations, providing a force-in-readiness to the fleet that is prepared to decisively engage when called upon.”

Emphasizing flexibility during the month-long evolution, this Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) conducted a company-sized amphibious live-fire raid event. During this raid, nearly 100 Marines and Sailors converged on targets at Camp Lejeune’s newest range. Finally, the month of ship-to-shore operations culminated with an amphibious assault by a fighting force of nearly 600 Marines and Sailors.

Driving the ARG-MEU’s broad spectrum of expeditionary capabilities is its overall readiness as a fighting force. Most notably, this Navy-Marine Corps team took a deliberate approach to maximizing readiness through pre-deployment training while also joining forces to combat COVID-19, using coordinated mitigation procedures before their final at-sea period. In addition to conducting a restriction-of-movement

(ROM) prior to embarking for the training exercise and adhering to 100% mask-wearing and other health and safety mitigations, the ARG-MEU were among the first units prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccines once they were approved for emergency use across the Department of Defense.

“The entire ARG-MEU is estimated to have over 90% voluntarily immunized once the last few people receive their second dose underway,” said Nelson. “The impressive number was achieved by making the vaccine available to everyone and by doing everything possible to educate our Sailors and Marines about the vaccine.”

The ARG consists of the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), transport dock ship USS San Antonio (LPD 17), and dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50). Embarked detachments for the Iwo Jima ARG include PHIBRON 4, Fleet Surgical Team (FST) 6, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 26, Tactical Air Control Squadron (TACRON) 21, Naval Beach Group (NBG) 2, Beach Master Unit (BMU) 2, Assault Craft Unit (ACU) 2 and 4, and Sailors from Amphibious Construction Battalion (ACB) 2. Also, joining the training were USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) and USS The Sullivans (DDG 68).

The 24th MEU consists of a ground combat element, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/8, a logistics combat element, Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 24, and an aviation combat element, Medium Tilt-Rotor Squadron (VMM) 162 Reinforced.

The Iwo Jima ARG-MEU team is manned, trained and equipped to fulfill amphibious requirements in support of maritime security and stability. Amphibious ready groups and larger amphibious task forces provide military commanders a wide range of flexible capabilities including maritime security operations, expeditionary power projection, strike operations, forward naval presence, crisis response, sea control, deterrence, counter-terrorism, information operations,

security cooperation and counter-proliferation, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.