

# 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.