

USS Somerset Returns Home After Indo-Pacific Deployment



Sailors assigned to the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Somerset (LPD 25) man the rails as the ship transits through San Diego Bay, Aug. 13, 2024. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Class Evan Diaz)

From Lt. Zachary Anderson, 13 August 2024

SAN DIEGO – Sailors assigned to San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS Somerset (LPD 25) returned home Aug. 13 to San Diego after a seven-month deployment with embarked Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) in the U.S. 7th and 3rd Fleet areas of operations.

More than 1,400 Sailors and Marines participated in a wide range of joint and combined exercises, showcasing the ready

and responsive combined-arms team of the Navy and Marine Corps, capable of responding quickly and decisively to a wide array of military operations.

“Somerset’s motto is ‘courage through adversity,’ and I can think of no crew that better exemplifies that ethos than the combined Navy-Marine Corps team that have called this ship home for the past seven months,” said Capt. Andrew Koy, commanding officer of Somerset. “I have no doubt that the numerous multilateral exercises in which Somerset participated played a key role in strengthening international partnerships and alliances throughout the Western Pacific.”

Exercises such as Cobra Gold, Tiger Triumph, Balikatan, Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Indonesia, Tiger Strike, and Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024, reinforced America’s commitment to allies and partners throughout the Indo-Pacific region and increased force interoperability.

After setting sail in January, Somerset participated in Exercise Cobra Gold 2024, the 43rd iteration of the largest joint exercise in mainland Asia. Taking place in Thailand, U.S. Marines from the 15th MEU were able to conduct two community relations events, demonstrating their commitment to the region, as well as a unit-level training rotation alongside Republic of Korea and Royal Thai Marines, enhancing interoperability.

“The hard work demonstrated at CALFEX (combined arms live fire exercise) is a tangible demonstration of the collective strength and focus we have when working with our allies and partners,” said U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Lindsay Mathwick, commanding officer of Combat Logistics Battalion 15, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, and commander of troops aboard Somerset. “Seeing the synchronization and communication with our combined and joint forces at work throughout these two weeks of training shows how important exercises like Cobra

Gold are to our development as a force.”

From Thailand to India, Somerset followed up Cobra Gold by participating in Tiger Triumph 2024, marking the third time U.S. and India came together for the exercise. Forces operated near Visakhapatnam and Kakinada, India, and focused on advancing large-scale joint and combined interoperability for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, as well as work through standard operating procedures between the combined and joint forces.

The exercise included a harbor phase followed by a sea phase where U.S. and Indian forces practiced combined operational maneuvers, command and control, and joint sustainment operations. Somerset was joined by a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft from Patrol Squadron (VP) 4, the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Halsey (DDG 97), along with U.S. Army and Air Force assets.

Exercise Balikatan 2024, a combined exercise featuring French, Australian, U.S., and Filipino service members, reinforced America’s longstanding, strategic partnership with the Philippines and partner nations. Over a three-week span, partner nations’ forces trained shoulder-to-shoulder at locations throughout the Republic of the Philippines to increase proficiency in maritime security, amphibious operations, combined arms, aviation operations, and information and cyberspace operations.

Emphasizing quality over the quantity, this year’s exercise focused on the planning and execution of complex, combined military operations. Balikatan, which means “sharing the load together” in Tagalog, built upon previous iterations, coalescing partner nation capabilities into the unified force necessary to deter aggression and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to the field exercises, forces injected nearly \$50 million into the local community, via humanitarian engineering projects, such as building schools and medical centers, and training medical personnel.

Following Balikpapan's concluding ceremony, May 10, Somerset participated in CARAT Indonesia 2024. The bilateral maritime exercise concluded in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia, May 20, following eight days of both ashore and at-sea engagements that enhanced collaboration between the Indonesian and U.S. militaries. This year's exercise marked the 30th iteration of CARAT, and 75 years of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the U.S.

"We have come to recognize our similarities after a week of training and living side by side," said Col. Sean Dynan, commanding officer, 15th MEU. "Words like honor, courage and commitment describe a common ethos that is so obviously shared between our two navies and Marine Corps. We have learned that a language barrier is not as strong as the bond by those who serve in the field, or on a ship. We've learned that we have different capabilities, but we are both equally capable."

Somerset's penultimate stop was Kuantan, Malaysia, for Exercise Tiger Strike 24. The bilateral exercise, taking place in Kuantan and Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, occurred between May 29 and June 6. It increased the combined, joint force readiness and amphibious capabilities that can be applied across the range of military operations at sea and shore.

"Strategic engagement with countries, such as Malaysia, reflect the importance of our relationships with Indo-Pacific allies and partners," said Capt. Tate Robinson, commodore of Amphibious Squadron 5.

"Training opportunities, such as Tiger Strike, allow us to work side-by-side with our Malaysian counterparts to refine

our common defense requirements and meet national security objectives.”

With its mission complete in U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, Somerset and embarked elements of the 15th MEU, sailed to Hawaii for RIMPAC 2024, the world’s largest international maritime exercise, with 29 participating nations.

Aboard Somerset, a team of engineers from the Consortium for Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education demonstrated the benefits of 3D printing by constructing a critical component of a reverse osmosis pump. The advanced manufacturing project was part of Trident Warrior, the experimentation sector of RIMPAC, dedicated to operational testing new military technology for the warfighter. Notably, the 3D printer used was a hybrid metal printer, the first of its kind to combine subtractive and additive manufacturing.

Also aboard were a team of Army surgeons from the 105th Surgical Augmentation Detachment. The detachment’s embarkation marked the first time an Army unit was used in place of a fleet surgical team, testing the interoperability of the U.S. military’s medical assets.

Somerset is part of the Boxer Amphibious Ready Group and 15th MEU team, which is a flexible, self-sustained crisis response force, capable of conducting operations from combat missions to humanitarian aid and disaster relief. This team is the premier crisis-response force in the Indo-Pacific region.