



*Another example of a mission ready ship because of a U.S. Navy Port Engineer*

## **USS Essex (LHD 2) Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) Completes Navy's First ARG SWATT**

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By Amphibious Squadron One and Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center Public Affairs

SAN DIEGO (NNS) -- Sailors and Marines from USS Essex (LHD 2) Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) returned to Naval Base San Diego after completing the Navy's first ARG Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training (SWATT) exercise, March 14.

"SWATT allowed the Essex ARG to sharpen the group's tactical acumen required to move into the next phases of deployment certification," said Capt. Gerald Olin, commander of Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 1. "SWATT provides the necessary time and feedback critical to ensure the ships of the Essex ARG practice together to maximize our lethality prior to integration with our Marine counterparts."



Training during SWATT had particular focus on Sea Control, Maritime Warfare, and advanced tactical training before the next training event, the Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Integration (PMINT) exercise.

Units participating in the ARG SWATT were PHIBRON 1, Essex, USS Anchorage (LPD 23), and USS Rushmore (LSD 47). The ARG also operated with embarked elements of the 13th MEU and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, was supported by Tactical Air Command Squadron (TACRON) 11, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 21, and Military Sealift Command Fleet Replenishment Oiler USNS Yukon (T-AO 202).

The exercise was led by Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC) as part of its mission to increase the lethality and tactical proficiency of the Surface Force across all domains.

Training is led by embarked SMWDC Warfare Tactics Instructors (WTI), senior mentors and subject matter experts who provide immediate and hands-on feedback and mentorship after each training scenario. Both in port and at-sea, SWATT training opportunities include real-time feedback for watch teams using replay tools and the Plan, Brief, Execute (PBED), Debrief methodology, Air Defense and Surface Combat Commander training, and live fire exercises.

"The primary objective is multi-ship, multi-platform, and multi-warfare advanced tactical training mentored and assessed by SMWDC WTIs, and other senior mentor's at-sea," said Captain Jason Burns, commanding officer of Essex. "Including SWATT into the training pipeline provides warfare commanders with opportunities to align earlier into the deployment cycle, enables improved communications, and Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) and doctrine validation."

Throughout SWATT an exercise, training occurs at all levels from the most senior Warfare Commander to the most junior watchstanders on the ship.

"During SWATT I realized that every group of ships is going to have a unique set of challenges based on differing capabilities, such as communications," said Ensign Alex Gilbert, a surface warfare coordinator assigned to Essex. "The WTI who instructed me, Lt. Carson Tally, helped me to think outside the box and overcome those communication challenges in creative ways."

Individual and unit growth in tactical proficiency through the implementation of the PBED methodology often yields visible results seen in real time by SMWDC trainers who support the exercises.



"No matter what happened during the basic phase of training, this is the first time these ships are working together as a unit. At first Ensign Gilbert was hesitant to drive solutions," said Tally, "But over the course of SWATT, his confidence in taking action and working through problems across the ARG drastically improved, which will help the Essex ARG in their next phase of deployment workups."

While this was the first full-length SWATT for an ARG, it wasn't the first SWATT exercise ever completed. The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (CSG) conducted a cruiser-destroyer (CRUDES) SWATT in 2016. In between the CRUDES and ARG SWATTs there have been a number of SWATT-like events where SMWDC leveraged existing exercises to deliver advanced tactical training to surface ships. These SWATT-like exercises served not only as an opportunity to provide training to the fleet, but also as a critical part of SMWDC's organizational learning process.

Cmdr. John Ryan, commanding officer of Rushmore, expressed enthusiasm about the training value provided by the SMWDC team and the opportunity to participate in the first full-length ARG SWATT.

"SWATT is the most effective and robust surface warfare training that I have ever seen in my career," said Ryan. "The live-fire events that Rushmore conducted during SWATT forged faith and confidence in our equipment and ourselves which will make us even more lethal on deployment."

Ultimately, Essex ARG SWATT provided advanced training to ships and Warfare Commanders, as well as high-fidelity systems, tactics, and human performance data that is leveraged by the Surface Warfare enterprise to improve warfighting readiness and lethality.

"This provided the ARG an opportunity to get some reps-and-sets working together before they integrate with the force," said Capt. Chris Barnes, deputy commander of SMWDC who embarked aboard Anchorage for the SWATT. "It was impressive to watch Essex ARG team learn and grow through the exercise, and I know that we [SMWDC] took a lot away from this event that will pay dividends across the Surface Fleet in future SWATTs."

Essex ARG is part of Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 3 and U.S. 3rd Fleet. Third Fleet leads naval forces in the Pacific and provides realistic, relevant training necessary for an effective global Navy.

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