



NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

October 2021  
Volume 5, Issue 10

# DOWN THE VOICEPIPE

*do you hear there!*

## COMING UP

Executive meeting Monday 01st. November  
2021 at 1700

HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation INC  
Executive meeting Saturday 20th. November  
2021 at 1000

ALL ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THIS  
NEWSLETTER ARE PRINTED IN GOOD FAITH  
AND DON'T NECESSARY REFLECT THE VIEWS  
OF THE NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA



## **Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division News update**



Heading into November and as such, the penultimate month of the year, we see the weather improving almost daily and many people in and around the country enjoying a level of fun not experienced in some time, perhaps not quite back to normal but a huge improvement from where some have been for the majority of the year.

October saw the 2021 Federal Conference, held again via Zoom. Referencing the above, we still have quarantine periods which makes travel that little bit more difficult. The plan is to actually physically meet up next year but as it is still a way off and anything can happen in the coming year I guess we can only plan for the best. Anyway, the conference was well attended and no doubt, enjoyed by all. The Federal Council have had a couple of minor changes in position holders but apart from that, the usual suspects retained their positions which is good, not only for continuity but with a few ideas put forward, it allows our Federal counterparts the time needed to see their ideas come to fruition.

Renovation works have swung into action again at our facility, the latest being external wall cladding being erected as we speak which will bring the façade of the premise up to a more professional level and more in line with works carried out to other buildings nearby. It also appears we are very close to the initial works being undertaken on the granite wall that forms part of the HMAS PERTH I Memorial on the road side of the building.

The Navy cadets held a very successful camp, hosted by TS PERTH out of our facility. Several TS units including PERTH, MARMION and MANDURAH, supported by the Flotilla Commander enjoyed some great weather, some great time out on the water and have no doubt made or renewed friendships with cadets who attend different units

October also saw me and a few others attend a couple of activities at the Bicton Palmyra RSL Sub Branch and we've all come away very impressed with the direction the Sub Branch is taking. Yesterday's activity was a live band and what a band it was, full of energy and some of the best voices we have heard in a long time. The Bicton Palmyra RSL is the closest RSL to our facility and although not all of us live in the area I would say, if you get the chance, head down to the RSL on a Friday night or over the weekend, you will be welcomed like close friends and will have a great time. Admittedly, this is a Navy League newsletter but I feel it is important to throw whatever support we can towards the RSL, whichever branch you are associated with.

We are now just a matter of weeks away from our next getaway, this time we will be traveling the Pioneer's Pathway. The trek is not huge in distance but is huge on sightseeing opportunities. We will ensure we get plenty of photos to go in the next edition.

Until next month,

Regards

Brad



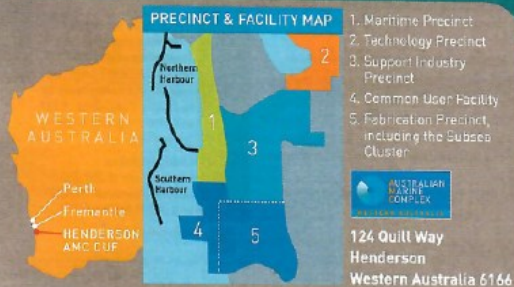
# COMMON USER FACILITY

LOCAL CONTENT & LOCAL JOBS PROVIDE QUALITY OUTCOMES

FREMANTLE

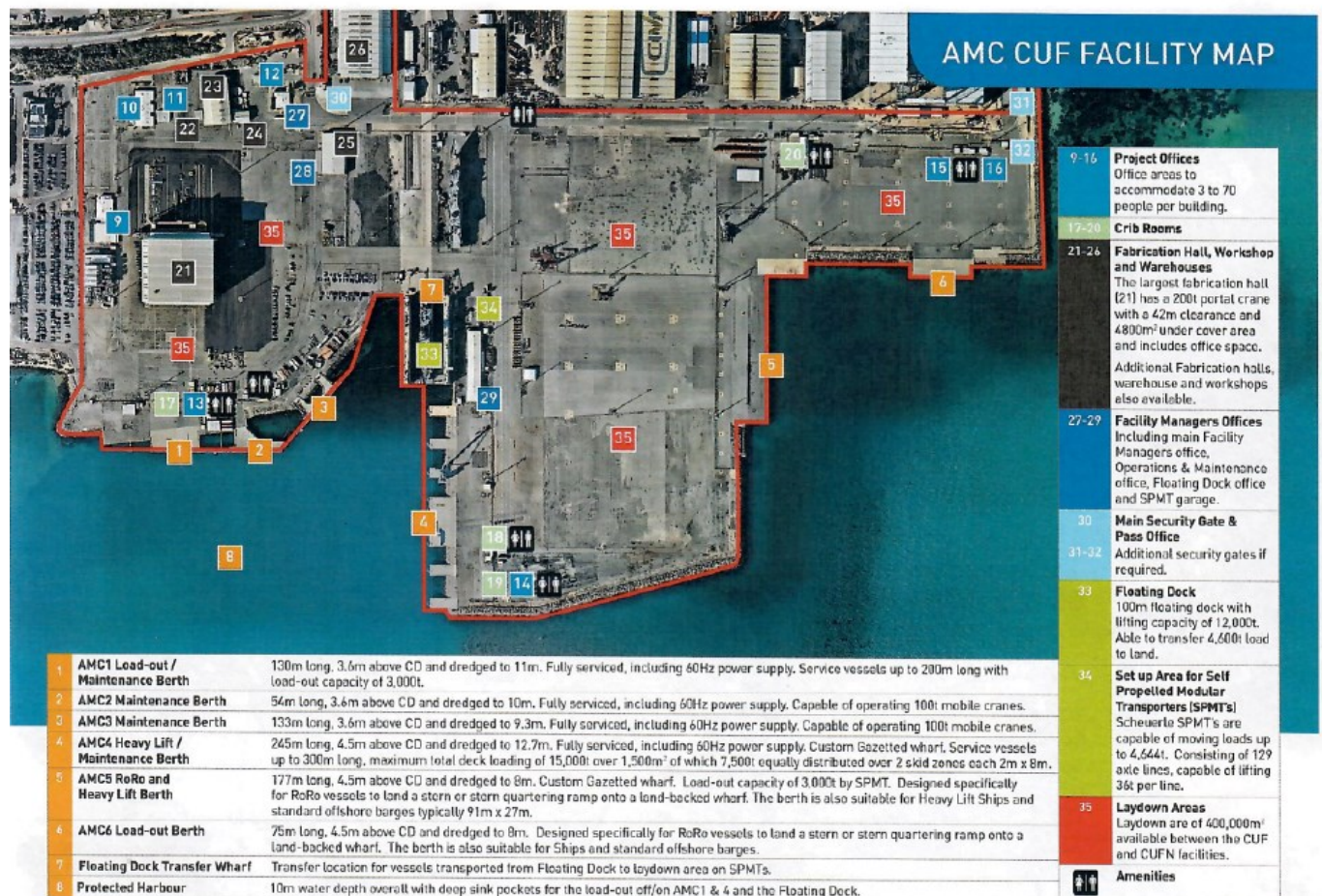
PERTH

AMC CUF



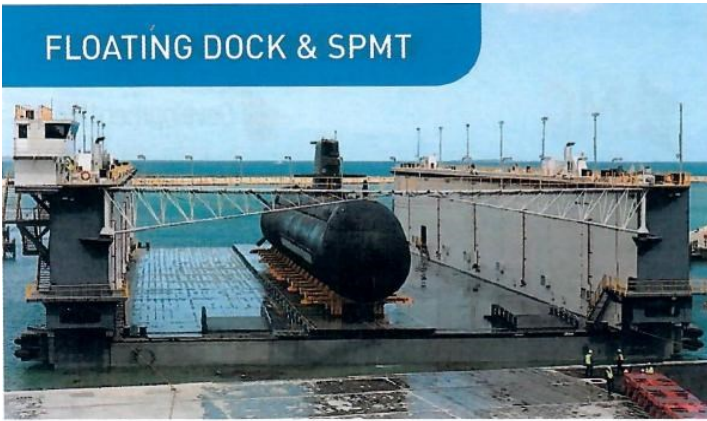
RESOURCE  
OIL & GAS

MARINE  
DEFENCE





## FLOATING DOCK & SPMT



### FLOATING DOCK

Length overall	102.3m	Length of dock	99.0m
Beam Overall	53.0m	Width inside sidewalls	44.0m
Lifting capacity	12,000t	Transfer capacity (at chart datum)	4,600t

### SELF PROPELLED MODULAR TRANSPORTERS (SPMT)

Maximum payload capacity	4,644t	Approx. load deadweight per line	36t
Axle lines	129	Admissible Axle load	40,400kg



The AMC CUF delivers benefits for your project to maximise the ability of the Western Australian heavy engineering and fabrication industries to be internationally competitive.

The CUF is available to you on a project by project basis for the duration of your project.

The facility adds to the capabilities and services you are able to offer your clients, providing world-class, safe and secure facilities on prime waterfront with an extensive supply chain on your doorstep.

Achieve higher productivity using a purpose built heavy engineering facility with access to local skilled and high quality workforce and industry.

AMC Management can provide you advice on how to best utilise the assets and achieve the highest levels of productivity for your project.

### LOCAL CONTENT AND LOCAL JOBS PROVIDE QUALITY OUTCOMES

Contact us for more information.

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## AUSTRALIAN MARINE COMPLEX

The Australian Marine Complex IAMCI facilitates and enhances opportunities by grouping together businesses servicing the oil and gas, resources, marine and defence industries.

The AMC extends over 400Ha and is a world-class centre of excellence in manufacturing, fabrication, assembly, maintenance and technology development.

Located in Henderson on the shores of Cockburn Sound, 30km south of Perth, Western Australia, the AMC provides protected deep-water access, common user heavy fabrication infrastructure and is directly connected to the Western Australian over-size, over-mass transport routes. More than 150 businesses are located in the AMC, which comprises four precincts and the Common User Facility (CUF).

### UOM MUNI USER FACILITY

The Western Australian Government owned CUF is a 400,000m<sup>2</sup>, integrated heavy engineering and fabrication facility, providing access for multiple users. It has been operating since 2003 and is part of the Fabrication Precinct at the AMC.

The CUF is a safe and secure location for fabrication, assembly, commissioning, maintenance and repair activities with off-load and toad-out facilities.

The CUF includes:

- 80m x 60m fabrication hall, workshops, warehouses, project offices & amenities
- Floating Dock & Self Propelled Modular Transporters (refer over page)
- 400,000m<sup>2</sup> laydown & assembly area
- 6 wharves, including toad-out, maintenance, heavy lift, RoRo
- 24 hour operations with services including 24 hour manned security and CCTV surveillance, lighting towers and underground reticulated services for power, water, communications & sewer

- Access to the State High Wide Load Corridor to transport loads of 9m x 9m x 50m
- Providing a Port security Plan MTOFSA and Cargo terminal operation areas
- Customs gazetted wharves allowing for the import or export of international freight
- Access to local skilled and high quality workforce and industry

### AMC MANAGEMENT (WA) PTY LTD

AMC Management (WA) Pty Ltd IAMCI have been the Facility Managers of the CUF and Operators of the Floating Dock and Transfer System since 2003. AMCM are responsible for marketing, operating and maintaining the CUF and are the first point of contact for access to the CUF.

AMCM is contracted through DevelopmentWA, the WA Government agency responsible for Government owned land. AMCM works with both State and Federal Government to develop the opportunities the facility brings to local industry

### WHO CAN USE THE CUF

The CUF is a multi-industry common user facility and provides infrastructure and services on a project by project basis. It has an open access policy and is large enough for a number of different companies to undertake their projects at any one time.



# HMAS BALLARAT ON PATROL







# MISSING PERSON

## HAVE YOU SEEN 4-YEAR-OLD CLEO SMITH?

Cleo was last seen at 1.30am Saturday 16 October 2021 in a tent at the Blowholes campsite in Macleod (50km north of Carnarvon).

Cleo was last seen sleeping in a red and black sleeping bag and was wearing a pink/purple one-piece sleep-suit with a blue and yellow pattern (both of which are missing). Cleo has honey blonde coloured hair and hazel eyes.

Grave concerns are held for Cleo's safety. If you have any information regarding the whereabouts of Cleo, her sleeping bag or sleep-suit please call 131 444.

Police are also urging anyone who stayed overnight at the Blowholes Campsite on Friday night (15 October) or who were in the vicinity of the campsite or at the campsite itself and did not stay overnight, to contact them on 131 444.

Vision can be uploaded direct to police via this QR code and link:  
<https://wapf.au.evidence.com/axon/citizen/public/cleosmith>



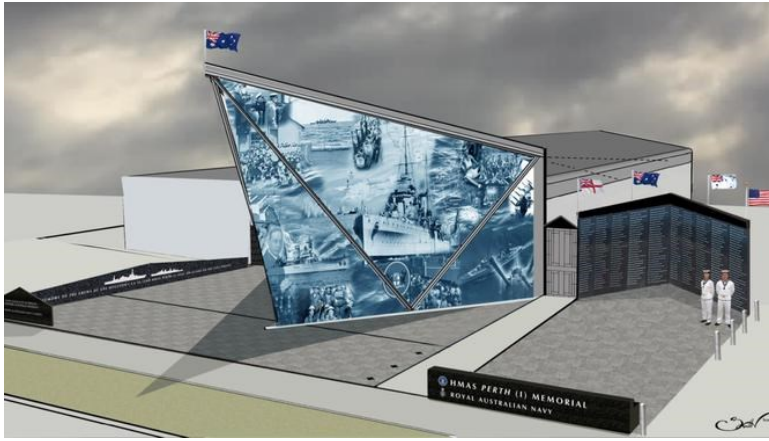
## HMAS PERTH (III)

157



Naval Association of Western Australia presented HMAS Perth (III) a painting of HMAS Perth (III) and inverted HMAS Perth (I)





Artist impression of the HMAS Perth (I) Memorial in East Fremantle. Credit: Smith Sculptors

## East Fremantle Council backs HMAS Perth war memorial extension

**Kristie Lim** PerthNow - Fremantle

October 7, 2021 2:00AM

A stunning new war memorial to HMAS Perth in East Fremantle is one step closer to coming to fruition. Light cruiser HMAS Perth was sunk in 1942 along with the USS Houston and other Allied ships at the Battle of Sunda Strait by the Japanese Imperial Navy during World War II. The battle was one of Australia's worst wartime losses, with 470 men losing their lives in the battle or subsequent imprisonment. The Navy League of Australia WA Division, the Town of East Fremantle and the HMAS Perth (I) Memorial Foundation Inc have been working on the proposed extension of the League's current memorial on Riverside Road since 2019.

The current memorial was dedicated in 1967.

Gidgegannup-based designers and sculptor team Smith Sculptors, who designed the HMAS Sydney Memorial in Geraldton, were scouted to design the memorial, which is dedicated to the HMAS Perth ship – the identical sister ship of HMAS Sydney. Smith Sculptors also designed the Anzac Memorial in Joondalup, 100th Anzac Memorial in Ocean Reef, the Memorial to the Migrant Children and the John Curtin Memorial in Fremantle and the Kobe Earthquake Memorial in Kobe, Japan.

The proposed memorial will have a glass walled space shaped like a ship's prow and decorated with photos and newspaper cuttings in shades of grey-blue, black and white, a title wall with the names of the personnel on board the ship and landscaping. It will be used for ceremonial occasions and commemorative events. Town councillors agreed to recommend the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage approve the proposal at their September 21 council meeting.



HMAS Sydney II memorial in Geraldton. Stephen Scourfield The West Australian Credit: Stephen Scourfield/The West Australian

Navy League of Australia WA Division secretary and project manager Jim O'Neill, who has the same name as the Town mayor-elect, told PerthNow the memorial was estimated to cost \$730,000 and funded through donations, grants and in-kind work. "We have been very fortunate that East Fremantle has backed our application unanimously from the start," he said.



Smith Sculptors co-owner Charles Smith told PerthNow the proposed war memorial was an extension of the small memorial museum at the site. “We did the HMAS Sydney memorial in Geraldton, which is the sister ship of the Perth,” he said. “There is a connection and a sister ship aspect to what we are doing. “It was a bit of a challenge to come up with something that fit the property and memorialise the crew on behalf not just the descendants but a nation as a whole.”

Smith said if approved, the entire development would not be completed in time for the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Sunda Strait in March 2022.



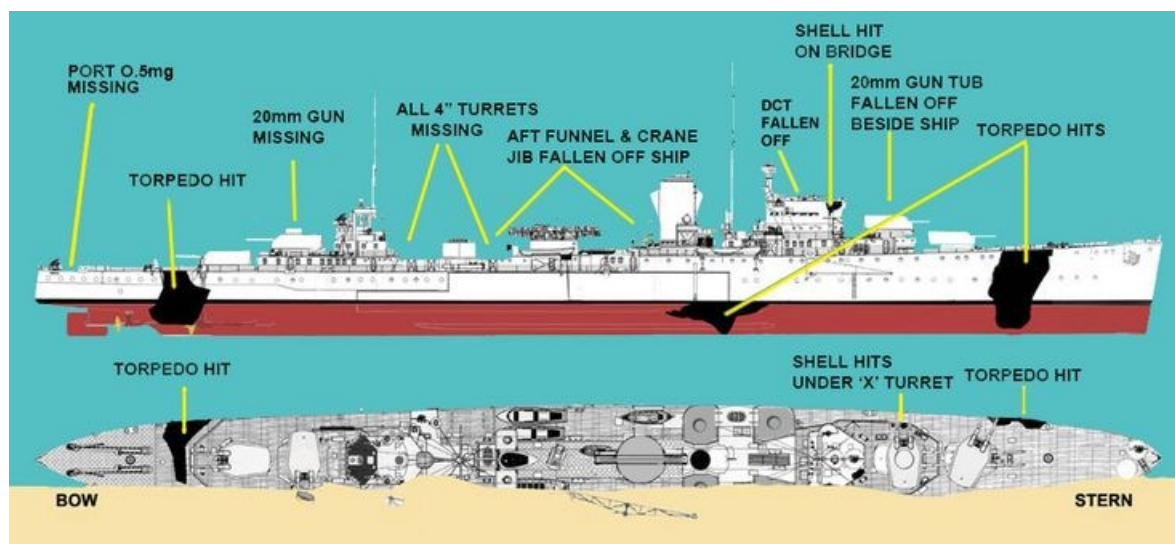
Imagery Scanned from Navy Historic Archive HMAS Perth I, July 1939. Credit: Department of Defence

Mayor Jim O’Neill said a formal application was submitted to the Department of Planning Lands and Heritage in August 2021.

“However, the Town, Department of Planning Lands and Heritage and Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions have been working on processing the application for several months,” he said. “The Town has been working with the Navy League for several years on this project to ensure a collaborative and successful project is achieved.”

He said the Town also had memorial gardens on Preston Point Road, memorial plaques in Leeuwin Barracks and a ‘Roll of Honour’ plaque for the Great War at the town hall. A Department spokesperson said the WA Planning Commission was the decision maker for the development application and was required to make a decision consistent with the advice of the Swan River Trust, in accordance with the Metropolitan Region Scheme.

“The WAPC will make its decision as soon as possible, once advice has been received from referral agencies, including the SRT,” they said.





China is upgrading its nuclear missile-equipped submarines to make them harder for rival powers such as the US to detect, reports suggest. The People's Liberation Army Navy has redesigned its type 094 submarines to make them quieter, [The South China Morning Post](#) reports. Defence experts believe the Chinese 094 submarine can carry and launch the JL-3 ballistic nuclear missile, or 'Big Wave' warhead. It has a range of about 9000km.

Research by French submarine expert Eric Genevieve, and Richard W. Stirn, a former submariner with the US Navy, found that China had made several improvements to the vessels. Modifications have included technical improvements to the submarine's hull to make them quieter. The PLA Navy has also hidden the identification numbers of its 094 subs to confuse observers on how many of the vessels are operating within an area of the ocean. But despite the improvements, Mr Genevieve and Mr Stirn said the type 094 submarine was probably still too loud to approach the US coast undetected.



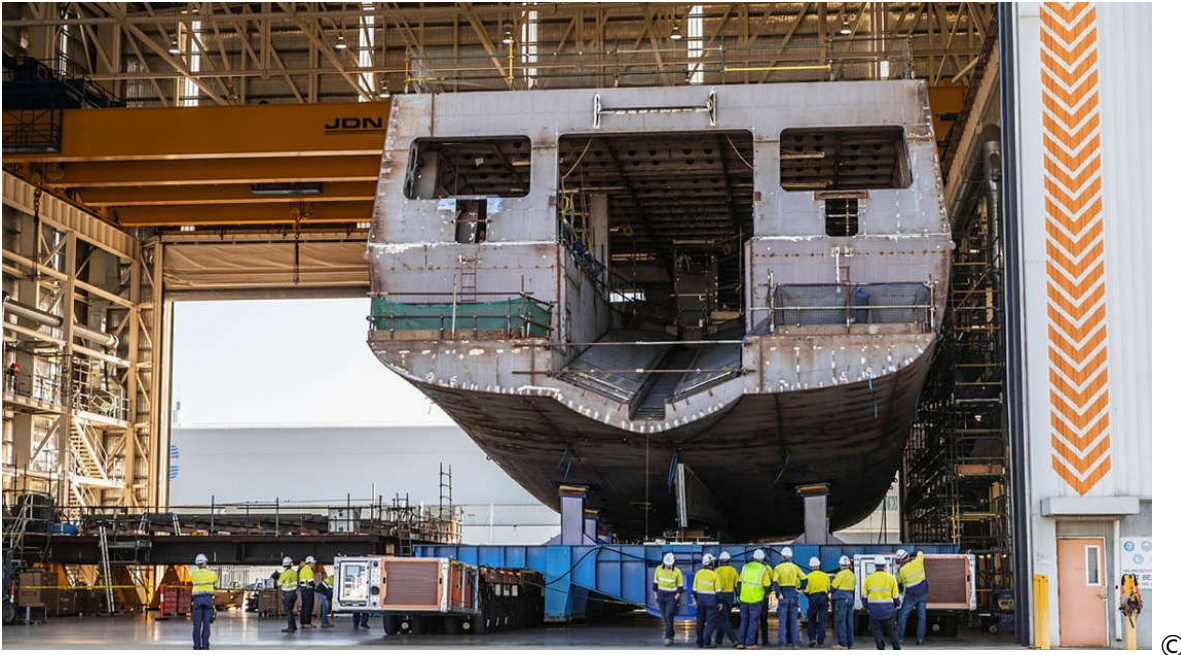
© Getty The type 094 Chinese submarine is capable of launching ballistic nuclear missiles.

A Chinese security expert says the submarine upgrades were not linked to rising tensions with the US and its allies such as Australia.

"Building to commissioning a submarine can take up to eight years, while electronic and many sophisticated components would have advanced by several generations within this period," Zhou Chenming, from Yuan Wang military science and technology institute in Beijing, told the Post. China's President Xi Jinping has made a large and modern navy one of the priorities for the country's military budget. State media earlier this year covered his visit to submarine bases as he inspected several vessels. Last month the Australian Government announced it will acquire nuclear powered submarines as part of the [AUKUS](#) defence pact. Under the agreement, the US and UK will provide Australia with the technology to develop new submarines. They will not carry nuclear weapons, the Federal Government said.



## Long-awaited large-hulled defence vessel scrapped, nuclear submarine fleet details revealed



Provided by ABC NEWS With limited capacity at defence shipyards, a long-awaited Pacific vessel will now be purchased from overseas. (Department of Defence)

The navy is "very unlikely" to select a hybrid nuclear submarine design that combines both British and American technology, as it looks to replace Australia's ageing Collins-class fleet. A Senate estimates hearing today examined the government's recent decision to scrap a French submarine deal in favour of [acquiring nuclear-powered boats with the help of its AU-KUS partners](#), the UK and the US.

The head of the nuclear submarine taskforce, Vice Admiral Jonathan Mead, has told the committee that Australia intended to select a "mature design" for its nuclear submarine, to be built under the AUKUS security partnership.

"It is our intention that when we start the build program, the design will be mature and there will be a production run already in existence," Admiral Mead told the Defence estimates hearing in Canberra.

"All options are on the table, but the plan is that the design is mature at the start of the build." Under questioning from Labor Senator Penny Wong, Defence secretary Greg Moriarty said a unique, hybrid design was "very unlikely".

[Jostling between British and American companies](#) for Australia's future nuclear-powered fleet is well underway, with early debate emerging over whether a US Virginia-class or UK Astute-class submarine is the best base model.

During the hearings, defence officials played down suggestions of a looming "capability gap" as Australia's Collins-class submarines soon begin a series of "life of type extension" (LOTE) upgrades.

The Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral Mike Noonan, said the ageing submarines would have their capabilities enhanced in LOTE upgrades from 2026, which could not be revealed publicly.

### Government ditches local build in favour of overseas purchase

During the Senate estimates hearing, it was also revealed the government had also quietly dumped a longstanding pledge to construct a "large-hulled" vessel in Western Australia to bolster its 'Pacific step-up' program.

Under questioning, defence officials confirmed plans for the local construction of a Pacific support vessel had been ditched in favour of an overseas purchase, but not publicly announced by the government.

Doubts over the project, first announced by former defence minister Christopher Pyne in 2018, began to emerge earlier this year with concerns naval shipyards in Adelaide and Perth would be unable to accommodate the work.

The opposition seized on the admission, accusing the Morrison government of "reneging on its commitments" and prompting a temporary suspension of the committee after a heated exchange between Labor's Penny Wong and Foreign Minister Marise Payne.

Senator Wong demanded Senator Payne explain the changed plan.

"This is another Morrison government announcement not delivered, isn't it?," Senator Wong asked.

Senator Payne defended the offshore purchase, saying it would mean the large-hulled vessel would be delivered to the Pacific earlier.

"The fastest way to do that, given the rate of shipbuilding currently underway at Osborne and at Henderson, which are, after all, finite physical areas for shipbuilding capacity ... is with this purchase, to deliver it to the Pacific next year".





## USS Bonhomme Richard fire spread wildly due to ‘repeated failures,’ investigation finds

By [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#)

Wednesday, Oct 20



Figure 15 shows BONHOMME RICHARD burning in the evening on 12 July 2020.

A command investigation into the 2020 fire aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard, shown in this photo from the report, lays blame at all levels for a botched response. (Navy)

Alleged arson by a junior sailor started the fire aboard the amphibious assault ship [Bonhomme Richard](#) last summer, but a botched response at all levels of the Navy ultimately killed the once-mighty amphib.

That's the main finding of a command investigation into the July 2020 mishap, obtained Tuesday by Navy Times. "Repeated failures" at all levels hindered the firefighting response and led to the \$1.2 billion ship's destruction, according to the investigation, first reported on by [USNI News](#).

Investigators found four main failure areas.

Bonhomme Richard was in the 19th month of a costly upgrade to accommodate the next-generation F-35C fighter jet, and this availability left the ship "significantly degraded" when it came to heat detection, communications and shipboard firefighting systems, while also producing a surfeit of combustible maintenance clutter as well.

RELATED

[Sailor accused of starting USS Bonhomme Richard fire identified in warrant](#)

**Seaman Apprentice Ryan Sawyer Mays told investigators he was "setup," according to an affidavit.**

By [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#) Roughly 87 percent of the ship's fire stations were out of commission at the time of the July 12 blaze, according to the investigation. At the same time, the probe found Bonhomme Richard's crew wasn't ready for such a fire.

The ship's force's training and readiness was plagued by "a pattern of failed drills, minimal crew participation, an absence of basic knowledge on firefighting in an industrial environment and unfamiliarity on how to integrate supporting civilian firefighters," the report states. "The crew had failed to meet the time standard for applying firefighting agent on the seat of the fire on 14 consecutive occasions leading up to July 12, 2020," according to the report.

Ashore, Naval Base San Diego had failed to ensure its civilian firefighters were familiar with ships docked at the installation, nor did they practice how to support the ship's force or integrate civilian resources in the event of such an emergency.

Southwest Regional Maintenance Center also didn't communicate the fire risks to such a ship during maintenance and facilitated "unmitigated deviations from technical directives." Higher-level commanders failed to provide effective oversight, and an absence of delineated codes and responsibilities regarding that oversight also hindered the response. Unifying these four failures "was a lack of familiarity with key policies and requirements," as well as noncompliance at all levels.

“An example of how these focus areas combined to result in unacceptable levels of risk is the status of the ship’s Aqueous Film Forming Foam sprinkling system,” the report states. “At no point in the firefighting effort was it used — in part because maintenance was not properly performed to keep it ready and in part because the crew lacked familiarity with capability and availability.”



Figure 1 depicts an ATF diagram of equipment and material stored in Lower V on 12 July 2020.

A diagram included in the command investigation into the 2020 fire aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard shows all the flammable material in the "Lower V" portion of the ship, where the multiday blaze started. (Navy) The investigation also found that a raft of systemic reforms put in place following a 2012 shipyard [fire that destroyed the submarine Miami](#) were not followed, helping fuel Bonhomme Richard’s demise in the process.

RELATED



[More extensive drills follow USS Miami fire](#)

**Investigation: Federal firefighters didn't train for complex and lengthy fires requiring help from community firefighters.**

The investigation recommends that disciplinary action be considered for 36 Navy leaders, including Bonhomme Richard’s commanding officer, Capt. Gregory Thoroman, its executive officer, Capt. Michael Ray, and Command Master Chief Jose Hernandez. Several flag officers are also recommended for potential discipline, including the head of Naval Surface Force Pacific, Vice Adm. Richard Brown, and the leader of Navy Region Southwest, Rear Adm. Bette Bolivar.

Any administrative or disciplinary actions will be decided by the head of U.S. Pacific Fleet, Adm. Samuel Paparo. The Navy has not yet laid out a timeline for those decisions.

“No single failure resulted in the loss of the ship, and thus accountability is not focused on any one individual, but rather shared across various Commanders, Commanding Officers and subordinate personnel,” the report states. The investigation also lays out in grim detail how the fire started and spread, and how missteps at nearly every stage made things worse. The Navy has charged Seaman Apprentice Ryan Sawyer Mays with starting the fire in the ship’s Lower V area on the morning of July 12.

A preliminary Article 32 hearing to determine whether Mays should go to court-martial is scheduled for next month, though Navy officials have refused to release a copy of his charge sheet. Mays’ civilian attorney says his client is innocent. Either way, the ship was particularly vulnerable to fire at that point.

Systems were tagged out for maintenance, scaffolding and other contractor detritus hung throughout the ship, and ship gear and other combustible material was “packed into various spaces,” even as more than 75 percent of the ship’s firefighting equipment “was in an unknown status.”



## A lack of urgency

Just after 8 a.m., a sailor passed the ramp down to the Lower V and later told investigators it looked “foggy.” She bought a snack from the vending machine and noticed a “hazy, white fog” coming from the Lower V. “Because she did not smell smoke, (the sailor) continued to her berthing,” the report states. After the smoke was reported, it took the command duty officer at least 10 minutes to call the fire away. It was his first day in the position, the report states.

“Precious early minutes” to contain the fire were lost for several reasons, including the fact that duty sailors used their personal phones to communicate since they lacked radios, and the officer of the deck, or OOD, ordered further investigation of the smoke before taking any action.



Figure 9 shows Sailors evacuating the BONHOMME RICHARD Hangar.

In this photograph from the command investigation, sailors evacuate the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard on the morning of July 12, 2020. (Navy)

The OOD directed damage control to call the fire away, but the 1 Main Circuit ship intercom wasn’t working in many areas of the ship, including in damage control, “and there was a lack of urgency.” The OOD told investigators he delayed calling away the fire due to the possibility that there was a “benign reason” for the smoke, such as starting the emergency diesel generator.

Other first responders reported they were trained to not call a casualty away until they had put “eyes on” it. When the ship’s first responders headed into the Lower V, no one was on the same page regarding which firefighting assets were online and available, contributing to their failure to try to extinguish the nascent blaze or set fire boundaries. This allowed the blaze to intensify.

As the fire grew and “a small number” of BHR sailors attempted their initial response, rescue and assistance teams from other ships on the waterfront began arriving but weren’t put to use by the Bonhomme Richard’s crew. The ship’s initial firefighting crew struggled to find a usable fire hose, and the nearest fire stations had cut or missing hoses, which would have been spotted earlier if appropriate maintenance checks had been conducted, the report states.

“These teams were unsuccessful in locating a serviceable fire station and hose and they did not adapt their strategy in light of these conditions,” the report states.

## Lack of direction

About half an hour later, at 8:30 a.m., the base’s firefighters arrived on scene and were met by the duty officer, who was overseeing “a small and unorganized group of Bonhomme Richard sailors.” The base firefighters set about doing their own thing and pulled hoses nearly 30 feet up to the port aircraft elevator and into the hangar, even though a nearby side port door would have given them immediate access to the growing blaze.

“The lack of direction and leadership from Ship’s Force over firefighting efforts led (base firefighters) to operate as an independent unit,” the report states. The lack of a hydrant on the pier led those federal firefighters to connect their hoses to a potable water riser that was supplying water to the adjacent warship Fitzgerald, and a team partially accessed the Lower V.



[The Bonhomme Richard fire deals a blow to the Navy's designs in the Indo-Pacific](#)

**The fire aboard an F-35B-capable ship will impact the deployment of the aircraft in the region for years to come, experts said.**

By [David B. Larter](#)

"While this was the first attempt to deploy agent on the fire, nearly an hour after ignition, the hose team only opened their hose nozzle temporarily for cooling purposes," the report states. "Within just a few minutes, the team backed out after one of the firefighters received a 'low air' alarm on his (breathing apparatus) and no relief team replaced them. "

Just more than an hour after the fire was called away, Bonhomme Richard's commanding officer, Thoroman, arrived on scene. By this point, the base firefighters were attacking the fire from the hangar and the San Diego Fire Department was on scene. But a lack of compatible radios hindered the ability of the base and city firefighters to unify their efforts.

"Throughout the first three hours and with rare exception, there were no attempts by the CO, CDO or other Bonhomme Richard leaders to integrate civilian firefighters with Ship's Force," the report states. "Many of the personnel on scene at this time perceived that (base firefighters) had assumed control of firefighting." Base firefighters also reported that their hose fittings aren't compatible with those aboard Navy ships.

The CO ordered an evacuation for those without breathing apparatuses at 9:15 a.m.

But he did this by informing such sailors "individually in the Hangar because he did not have adequate communications gear," the report states. "With a significant number of uniform personnel egressing the ship following this order, by 0930, all Bonhomme Richard personnel began to evacuate." One sailor, who wasn't wearing a breathing apparatus, spent 15 minutes making sure the berthings were cleared and then fainted as she moved toward the hangar. "An unknown sailor picked her up and carried her," the report states.

Bonhomme Richard sailors would later report they assumed the base firefighters were in charge of the effort, and for the remainder of that first morning, "no hose teams comprised of Bonhomme Richard sailors attempted to descend to Lower V once (base firefighters) commenced their descent."



Figure 12 shows a screen capture from SDFD Firefighter (b) (6)'s helmet-mounted camera footage, illustrating smoke conditions at approximately 1035.



A San Diego firefighter's helmet cam shows a crew's attempt to enter the blaze location aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard on the morning of July 12, 2020. (Navy)

#### **Lack of preparation**

Base firefighters later conceded that much time was wasted searching for the fire, and that the department doesn't train personnel to search out a shipboard fire.

Just three months before the fire, Bonhomme Richard had been ordered to get its shipboard firefighting systems up to scratch when it unloaded nearly 1 million gallons of fuel, according to the report, but only "a limited" portion of the sprinkling systems were brought back online.

But even those systems brought online "had numerous undocumented system discrepancies," the report states. At about 9:45 a.m., nearly two hours after the fire was called away, power was cut to the ship, likely by the command duty officer who believed the fire was electrical. But this move also cut power to the ship's onboard firefighting systems.

"From this point on, all firefighting efforts relied on external water sources, which were further hampered by the lack of a fire main on (Naval Base San Diego) piers," the report states.

Sailors later told investigators that efforts to contain the fire were hampered because doors and hatches had maintenance cables running through them, and that the fire spread too fast to set effective boundaries. At about 9:35 a.m., San Diego Fire Department crews tried to enter the ship via a side door that was the closest access point to the seat of the fire.

But without assistance from the ship's crew, they walked right into a pathway partially blocked by ship and contractor equipment. Wires and "fallen temporary services" would prove to be a danger for firefighters throughout the effort, with one firefighter describing the ship as an "entanglement nightmare." By this time, combustible material in the Upper V had caught fire from heat radiating up from the deck below, which sparked more fires.

San Diego crews descended a ramp into the Lower V, "but the heat, lack of visibility and unfamiliarity with the ship's layout led them to back out without engaging the fire," the report states.

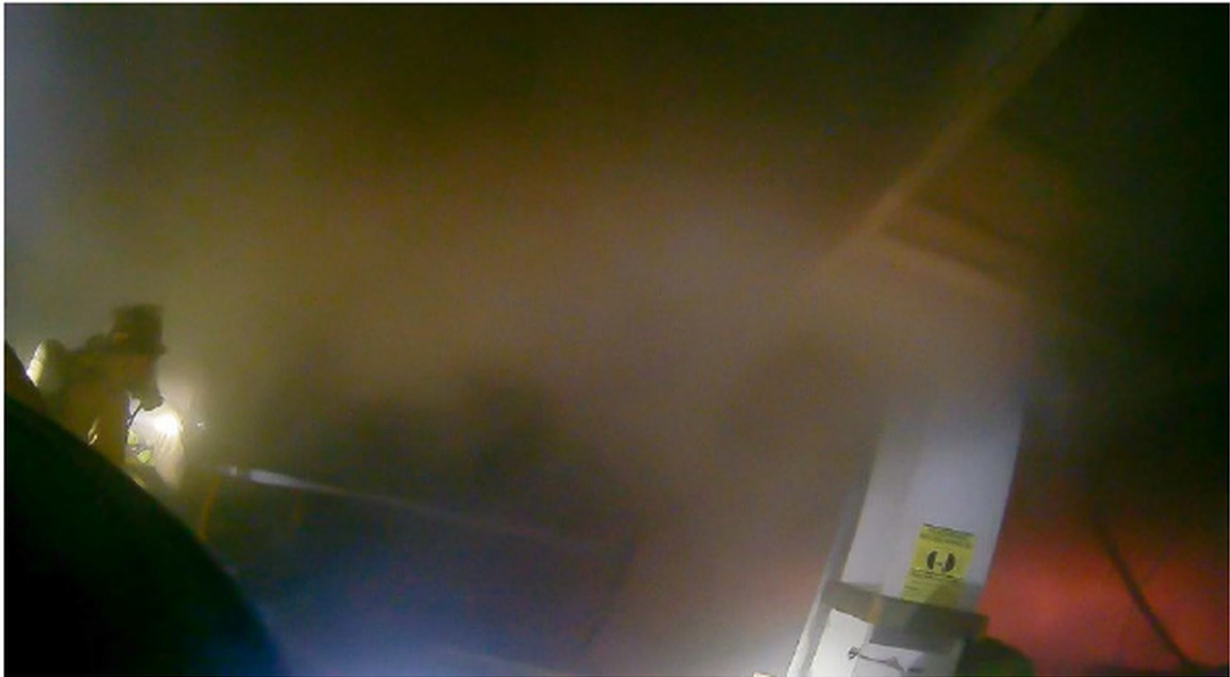


Figure 11 shows a screen capture from SDFD Firefighter (b) (6)'s helmet-mounted camera footage. This image captures the first time agent was applied to fire on 12 July 2020, as SDFD teams applied firefighting water to the radiant fire in Upper V at approximately 0951.

A San Diego firefighter's helmet camera shows crews attempting to fight the fire inside the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard on the morning of July 12, 2020. (Navy)

### **A series of explosions**

Just after 10:30 a.m., San Diego and base firefighting leaders saw that conditions were getting bad and ordered their teams off the ship, “a decision likely preventing any loss of life or serious injuries to numerous personnel.”

Twenty minutes later, less than five minutes after the last firefighter got off the ship, a massive explosion caused by accumulated smoke rocked the ship, sending debris across the pier and knocking down firefighters and sailors.

“This explosion occurred after more than two hours of efforts where none of the ship’s installed firefighting systems were employed and no effective action was taken by any organization involved to limit the spread of the smoke and fires,” the report states. “After the explosion, all personnel completely evacuated the pier.”

The explosion caused the mess decks above to collapse into the Upper V.

With no firefighters on board, without electrical power or shipboard firefighting systems, the Bonhomme Richard blaze grew into a massive conflagration.

Crews relied “on ad hoc strategies” as they attempted to regain a foothold on the ship, and too little firefighting agent was laid down to combat the fire’s spread, according to the report.

Once the fire spread beyond the Lower V, any chance to douse the seat of the fire was lost.

“At some point during the afternoon, the fire reached 55-gallon drums of oil stored in Upper V and oxygen tank cylinders laid on the deck in the medical compartments,” the report states. “As these items ignited, they caused minor explosions and accelerated the spread of the fire.”

Around noon, a San Diego assistant fire chief told Navy and base firefighting officials that his crews would not go back aboard Bonhomme Richard due to the risk and the fact there was nobody trapped onboard.

This angered the Navy and base officials, who told the San Diego team they could leave if they weren’t willing to get back onboard and fight the fire.

The San Diego Fire Department soon left the scene.

Early that evening, crews were trying to ascend the Upper V ramp when a jet fuel pipe exploded and created a “large fireball.” The resultant explosion hit the crew and caused minor concussions “and blast-type injuries,” prompting another evacuation and halting of the firefighting effort.

That night, crews with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 began dropping water buckets on the burning ship, a mission made doubly dangerous by the need for them to get close to the fire while avoiding the deteriorating superstructure and antennas.



**Figure 17 shows a helicopter conducting a water drop on BONHOMME RICHARD.**

A Navy helicopter drops water on the burning amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard in July 2020. (Navy)



### **'A command-and-control vacuum'**

The world watched as the fire expanded and burned for the next four days, fouling the air and adding another black eye to the Navy's surface fleet following the fatal ship collisions of 2017.

Some compartments reached temperatures of more than 1,200 degrees, and the ship's aluminum superstructure interior liquified into molten metal that dripped into lower spaces.

"It was into this environment Sailors and firefighters made repeated entries in an attempt to save Bonhomme Richard," the report states. "Though their efforts were unsuccessful and occurred beyond the point where the ship could have been saved, the courage displayed in subsequent firefighting efforts warrant acknowledgement."

While the command and control for the firefight was "initially chaotic," it improved over time, although the ship's leadership failed to take command of the situation or integrate the firefighting efforts.

Instead, the head of Expeditionary Strike Group 3, Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, the ship's operational commander, stepped in to fill "a command-and-control vacuum," an initiative the report credits for the fire eventually being put out on the fifth day.



Figure 13 shows firefighting monitors spraying water from the pier on 12 July 2020.

Firefighters battle the fire aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard on July 12, 2020. (Navy)

Firefighting efforts were eventually helped along by the fact that the inferno didn't have any more shipboard combustibles to consume. "The fire left the ship damaged beyond economical repair, leading to the decision to decommission Bonhomme Richard," the report states. The ship was sold for less than \$4 million earlier this year and sent to a Texas shipbreaker for dismantling, USNI News reported this spring.

### **'Multiple execution failures'**

The report notes that the risk of shipboard fire is much greater when in the yards for maintenance, due to industrial hazards. And while the buck stops with the ship's CO and crew, the report notes that other organizations failed to offer Bonhomme Richard support. The Southwest Regional Maintenance Center oversees such maintenance periods, and Naval Base San Diego was responsible for ensuring the ship had readily available firefighting capabilities if needed.

Higher-level commanders were supposed to ensure compliance and provide oversight. "Instead, there were multiple execution failures throughout the maintenance period, which are shared by Ship's Force and the supporting organizations," the report states. The framework for how to conduct safe and fire-free maintenance availabilities was most recently reformed less than a decade ago, after the fire aboard the submarine Miami destroyed the boat in May 2012.

A main takeaway from the Miami probe was that prior to that blaze, a lower level of fire safety during maintenance periods had been deemed acceptable. That fire led to reforms aimed at preventing an outcome like the Bonhomme Richard.

But many of the requirements developed after the Miami mishap weren't followed during Bonhomme Richard's availability, including drills that would allow a coordinated response to such a fire.

Such policy changes were "inconsistently implemented" across Navy maintenance in the past five years, according to the report, and organizations including Naval Sea Systems Command, Navy Installations Command and Naval Surface Force Pacific failed to comply or provide oversight.

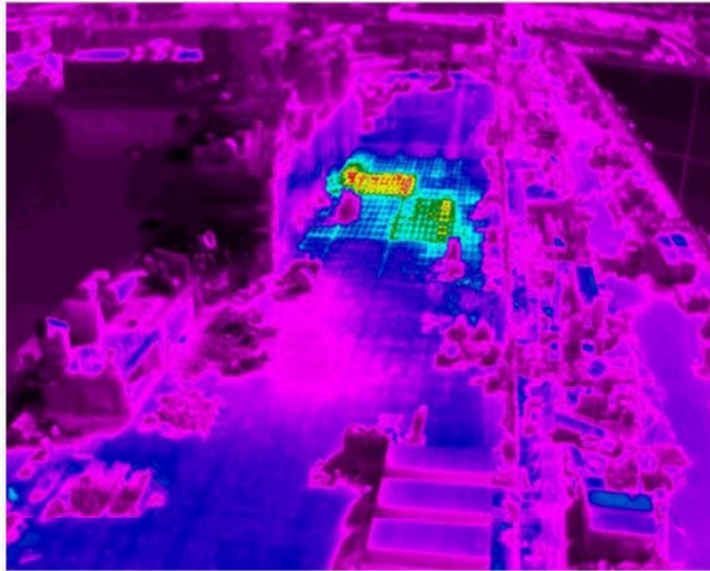


Figure 19 show US Fire Pump forward-looking infrared (FLIR) imagery of BONHOMME RICHARD, compared to a standard photograph taken simultaneously by the same drone.

At one point in the multiday battle to put out a fire aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard last summer, a Navy drone used thermal imaging to help firefighters find hot spots. (Navy)

“This placed the non-nuclear Surface Fleet on a trajectory of an unacceptable fire prevention and response posture with a high level of accumulated risk before the fire started on 12 July 2020,” the report states. “Once the fire started, the response effort was placed in the hands of inadequately trained and drilled personnel from a disparate set of uncoordinated organizations that had not fully exercised together and were unfamiliar with basic issues.”

While noting that Navy leaders operate “in a pressurized environment, with aggressive timelines,” the report slams involved leaders for shorting safety and standards in order to meet such timelines.

“Exacerbating this, leaders failed to communicate these choices up the chain of command,” the report states. “Commanders at all levels are entrusted with extraordinary responsibility with full regard for its consequences — as command is the foundation upon which our Navy rests.”

About [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#)



## Geraldton confirmed as homeport for NUSHIP *Stalwart*

26 OCTOBER 2021

### **NUSHIP *Stalwart* is expected to call the City of Greater Geraldton home following the supply ship's commissioning into the Royal Australian Navy next month.**

The Royal Australian Navy's new supply ship, NUSHIP *Stalwart*, is expected to call Geraldton home after its commissioning ceremony next month, with Minister for Defence Industry and member for Durack Melissa Price noting that the partnership will strengthen the city's ties with the RAN.

"Navy and Geraldton have a long, shared history," Minister Price said.

"Geraldton is home to a memorial acknowledging that HMAS *Sydney II* was sunk off the coast in 1941, and two ships have previously been named after the city.

"Today's announcement strengthens ties between the Royal Australian Navy and Geraldton, and will foster meaningful engagement opportunities."

Commander Steve McCracken, Commanding Officer of the NUSHIP *Stalwart* acknowledged that the crew is excited to work with the local community.

"The crew is proud to be associated with the City of Geraldton and we look forward to building local connections and sharing our ship with the community," CMDR McCracken said.

"We hope to bring *Stalwart* to Geraldton in the near future and will look for an opportunity to host an open day and support local events."

The NUSHIP *Stalwart* is one of two Supply Class auxiliary oiler replenishment (AORs) procured by the RAN this year.

Defence hopes that the capability improvements will enable Task Groups to spend yet longer at sea, enabling a greater array of deployment opportunities.



## USS Carl Vinson operates in South China Sea with Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force

By [Diana Stancy Correll](#)

Oct 28, 05:09 AM



U.S. Navy aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Izumo-class helicopter destroyer JS Kaga Maritime Partnership Exercise 2021 on Oct. 17, 2021. (MC3 Erin C. Zorich/U.S. Navy) The [aircraft carrier Carl Vinson](#) and a Japanese helicopter destroyer have teamed up to operate in the South China Sea — the first time the Vinson and Japanese forces have done so during the Vinson's 2021 deployment.

The Vinson and units from Carrier Strike Group 1 are conducting flight operations, coordinated tactical training between surface and air units, refueling-at-sea evolutions, and maritime strike exercises with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's JS Kaga helicopter destroyer as of Oct. 25 in the South China Sea, according to the U.S. Navy.







**Carl Vinson strike group using first deployment with F-35C, beefed-up air wing to hone advanced operations**

The air wing the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group is hauling around includes the F-35C Joint Strike Fighter and a beefed-up complement of EA-18G Growlers and E-2D Advanced Hawkeyes for an “air wing of the future” that leaders think can defeat high-end adversaries before they even spot the U.S. Navy coming.

By [Megan Eckstein](#)

Those [operating with the Vinson](#) in the South China Sea are guided-missile cruisers Lake Champlain and Shiloh, and guided-missile destroyer Stockdale, along with nine squadrons of Carrier Air Wing 2.

The Vinson and its carrier strike group departed San Diego to start its 2021 deployment in August — the first deployment including the F-35C Lightning II fighter jet and the CMV-22 Osprey, and the second time a carrier strike group with such capabilities has operated in the South China Sea, the Navy said.

The carrier, which was last in the South China Sea in September, underwent a 17-month docking planned incremental availability in 2019 at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington to update the ship for the F-35C before returning to San Diego in 2020.

**Navy Times**





Click to Enlarge. The new dry dock on Hainan in the South China Sea is only just large enough for the Type-003 aircraft carrier. This suggests that future carriers will be the same size.

## CHINA'S MASSIVE NEW AIRCRAFT CARRIER IS AS BIG AS IT CAN BE

Aircraft carriers are at the vanguard of China's incredible naval expansion A new, larger super-carrier is being built near Shanghai. Analysis of radar satellite imagery shows that it is as large as China's new bases allow.

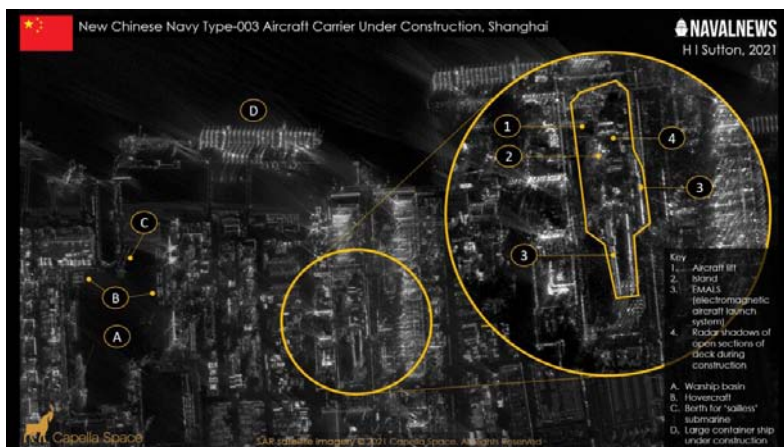
H I SUTTON 27 OCT 2021

The growth of the Chinese Navy has been incredible. The PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) is barely recognizable from itself twenty years ago. Among the most important developments have been aircraft carriers. Defense analysts have been trawling open source intelligence (OSINT) to keep up with developments. But like much of China, the shipyard building the latest carrier is protected from traditional satellite observation by impenetrable cloud. A new commercial satellite has provided Naval News with a way to see through this cloud.

### Seeing In The Dark Or Through Cloud

Using SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar) satellites owned by Capella Space we have checked progress on the carrier. This radar imagery can see through the clouds, and at night. Starting from 10 years ago with imported Russian technology, the latest design is starting to match the U.S. Navy's super carriers. The PLAN now has two of the Russian-based carriers in service. And the third, the Type-003, is under construction near Shanghai. It is roughly **comparable to the U.S. Navy's Ford Class**. The SAR imagery picks out the three deck catapults, a major change from the Russian based carriers. Those rely on a ski-jump bow to launch aircraft. That works for the J-15 Flanker fighters but does not permit the KJ-600 AWE&C (airborne early warning and control) aircraft to operate. This new twin-prop plane closely resembles the E-2 Hawkeye and is seen as generally comparable to the latest models. The new carrier as EMALS (electro-magnetic aircraft launch system), like catapults. This is the same technology that the U.S. Navy is introducing with the Ford Class. It means that the KJ-600 can be operated. And it should improve the endurance of carrier borne fighters. In particular, a new stealthier carrier fighter is expected.





The Type-003 aircraft carrier is visible in

this recent radar satellite (SAR) image from Capella Space.

Progress appears steady at the Shanghai yard. Another ship which was recently in the same dry dock, but nearer the river, has been moved. This was blocking the entrance of the dry dock so is a necessary step before the carrier is launched.

We do not believe that launch of the carrier is imminent however. This is because sections of a container ship have been moved into the dock behind the carrier. Two massive holes providing access to the inner workings. This is normal for aircraft carrier construction and the same can be seen on U.S. ships.

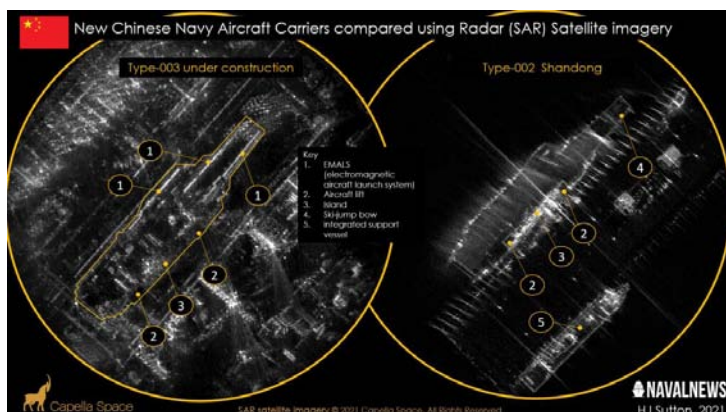
Analysis of the imagery also reveals insights on other warship programs. A number of the large hovercraft intended for amphibious ships are still present in the basin, along with other naval vessels.

Of particular interest however, the **unique 'Sailless' submarine** does not appear to be present. Analysts will be watching this submarine closely for signs of it entering operational service, or being moved to a research unit.

## Size Matters

1,900 km (1,200 miles) further south, at Sanya on Hainan, work is continuing on a gigantic dry dock for the carriers. The facility is strategically located for access to the South China Sea. One carrier, the Type-002 Shandong, is already based there, together with most of China's nuclear submarine fleet.

A large cofferdam was built in 2016-17 to keep the sea out while construction took place. The docks are now clearly visible in the SAR imagery. Measurements confirm that the new Type-003 aircraft carrier will be able to fit it. However it's tight beam suggests that China does not have plans for substantially larger carriers.



The Type-003 carrier (left) is wider and longer

than the first two carriers, such as the Type-002 (left). Catapults replace the ski-jump allowing more types of aircraft to be operated.

Importantly, the largest new dock is only about 80 meters (268 feet) wide, which is the same as the dock where the Type-003 is being built. The Type-003 itself is also approximately 80m wide (our earlier estimates were slightly narrow as it turned out). This suggests that a) the Type-003 will fit inside the new dock, b) any new carrier cannot be any wider if it too is to fit.

Therefore it seems likely that the Type-003 represents the 'full size' Chinese aircraft carrier for the foreseeable future. The next ones may be longer, or greater displacement, but not wider. If they are, yet more infrastructure may need to be built.

The new aircraft carriers represent a significant increase in capabilities for the Chinese Navy. And also part of their emergence as a true blue-water force.

## Navy Not Sure What USS Connecticut Struck in the South China Sea, Beijing Accuses U.S. of Cover-Up

By: **Sam LaGrone**

October 27, 2021 4:43 PM



*USS Connecticut (SSN-22) arrives at Fleet Activities Yokosuka for a scheduled port visit, July 31, 2021. US Navy Photo*

The U.S. Navy still isn't positive what one of its most powerful attack submarines hit in the South China Sea, as repair assessments continue in Guam, four sources familiar with the results of the preliminary investigations told USNI News this week.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the undersea object that damaged the forward section of USS *Connecticut* (SSN-22) had not been definitively determined as part of several investigations into the Oct. 2 incident, the sources said.

Early indications were *Connecticut* hit a seamount in the South China Sea, two defense officials familiar with the Navy's examination of the submarines told USNI News, but that has not been confirmed by investigators. *Politico* first reported earlier this month that the boat may have hit an undersea feature.

Cmdr. Cindy Fields, a spokesperson with Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, told USNI News the command had nothing to add to its initial statement on what the submarine hit. She said two investigations – a safety investigation board convened by COMSUBPAC and a command investigation overseen by the Japan-based U.S. 7th Fleet – are currently looking into the incident.

"*Connecticut* struck an object while submerged on the afternoon of Oct. 2, while operating in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region," PACFLEET said on Oct. 7.

The impact to the forward part of the attack submarine damaged the submarine's forward ballast tanks and forced the boat to make a week-long trip on the surface to Guam, two defense officials told USNI News this week.



The four sources confirmed the Navy's public statement that the reactor compartment of the submarine was undamaged from when the boat hit the object.

Since returning to Guam, the boat is still under evaluation for the scope of repairs by Naval Sea Systems Command, personnel from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and submarine tender USS *Emory S. Land* (AS-39), Fields told USNI News on Tuesday.

The teams will first determine what repairs *Connecticut* needs to leave Guam safely and then follow-on repairs, Fields said. The closest dry dock for major submarine maintenance is in Hawaii. The Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, which is near the attack boat's homeport in Bremerton, Wash., is the second closest dry dock.

While repairs and several investigations continue, Chinese officials have accused the U.S. of concealing details of the incident from Beijing.

"The Chinese side has repeatedly expressed grave concerns over the matter and asked the U.S. side to make clarifications,"

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on Tuesday.

"We have seen nothing but a brief and vague statement issued by the U.S. military with procrastination, and a confirmation by a so-called informant that the incident did happen in the South China Sea. Such an irresponsible, cagey practice gives regional countries and the international community every reason to question the truth of the incident and the intention of the U.S."

*Connecticut* is one of three Seawolf-class attack submarines. The boat left in May for a deployment to the Western Pacific and has made at least two port calls to Japan.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby [earlier this month dismissed](#) China's accusation that the U.S. was engaging in a coverup of the incident.

"It's an odd way of covering something up when you put out a press release about it," Kirby told reporters when asked about China's allegation.





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