



NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

June 2023
Volume 7, Issue 6

DOWN THE VOICEPIPE *do you hear there!*

COMING UP

NLWA and HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial
Foundation AGM Saturday 19h. August
2023 time 1000

HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation
Executive meeting Saturday 22nd. July
2023 at 1000 to be confirmed

Facility open each Wednesday morning
0900-1200

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

USS ZUMWALT



Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division News update

Here we are at the end of June, almost half way through the year but for a few days.



We have a few goodbye's this month though these are not forever. The weight of command of HMAS STIRLING has passed from CAPT Gary Lawton to CMDR Ken Burleigh, no doubt soon to be CAPT. Likewise, with the handing over of HMAS PERTH III we say farewell to CMDR Tony Nagle and welcome CMDR Jorge McKee. Gary and Tony have been long supporters of the WA Division and have afforded us every concession humanly possible and we have enjoyed many laughs and many a good conversation with them. Several of us got to meet with Tony and Jorge just prior to the handing over which proved to be a rewarding opportunity for all. We look forward to continuing on in this manner with Ken and Jorge.

Our getaways are about to kick into gear again in the coming month or so, again in search of the wildflowers and Wreath Flower in particular. As per usual, should you wish to come along, you are most welcome, all we ask is that you bring a great sense of adventure and an equally great sense of humour.

As we head rapidly towards August it is time to begin working out the finer details of our AGM. We would encourage you to attend if able to rekindle friendships, have a look at the ever changing upgrades and no doubt with a guest speaker, get an insight into Defence and the industries that support it.

Regrettably, I don't have much to report this month as I spent a good portion of it overseas in Bali and as enjoyable as that was, my heater is just not cutting it as Perth goes into a period of unusually cold weather, some areas are reporting it being the coldest since records began. I shouldn't complain really as our east coast counterparts experience this regularly, how I don't know but life goes on as they say.

Until next month

Brad



HMAS SYDNEY RECENT VISIT TO FREMANTLE

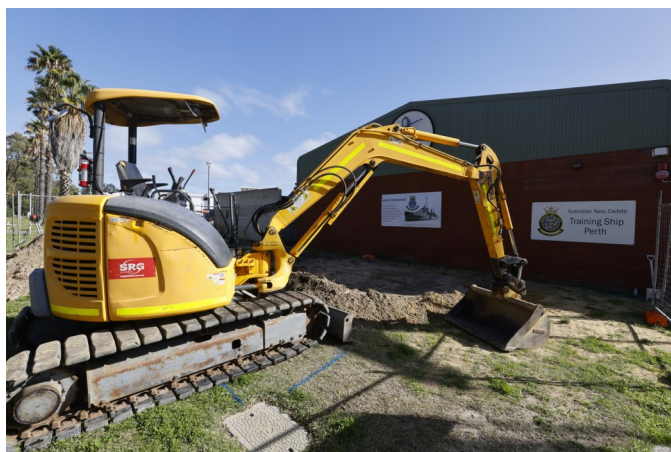




Jim O'Neill
CMDR ANC RTD
Project Manager

We are slowly moving forward the concrete raft has been delayed for a couple of weeks as we hit an old septic tank and leach drain, after considerable discussion an alternative solution was reached and the new tank is due to be installed this week. Alterations and engineering difficulties are being addressed so that the glass will be able to fit the structure. As we are adding to the additional structure we have to determine the water flow and pressure for the fire service which is causing some concern as we require the flow and pressure to be strong enough to provide the service and have the plans by the Building Surveyor certified before we will be granted approval to continue the structure. As they say Rome wasn't built in a day. Probably another Valium will help.

Mike and I attended a ceremony at RSLWA to commemorate the finding of a lost diary which confirmed three AIF members were on HMAS Armidale when she was sunk in the Timor Sea. Previously this was overlooked and not realised that these men were on board all three survived the sinking.



Change of command of HMAS PERTH (III)

CMDR Tony Nagle RAN hands over the weight to CMDR Jorge McKee RAN the new Commanding Officer



CMDR Jorge McKee meets members of the Navy League WA , HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation and HMAS PERTH Association



CMDR McKee and CMDR Nagle meet with members of NLWA Peter Jarvis, Colin Bancroft, Trevor Vincent, Brad Barrett, Bo Cullum, Jim O'Neill





L-R: Angus Callander (President RHAA), Hon Matt Keogh MP (Minister Veterans Affairs), Cheryl Fairley (daughter of Lionel Clarke), Sally Langdon (daughter of John Callander), Maree Budgegan (Secretary RHAA, representing Deb Saber and Pam Williams, daughters of Ivan Telley); Vince Connelly CEO RSLWA, Hon Paul Papalia CSC MLA (WA Minister for Veterans Issues)



Mike Bailey President HMAS PERTH (I) Foundation Inc. front row seat at the presentation for HMAS ARMIDALE



WWII grave robbers on the loose in SE Asian waters

Underwater pillagers have looted Australia's HMAS Perth and wreckage of other WWII battleships despite efforts to protect the grave sites

By [JOHN MCBETH](#) MAY 31, 2023



A diver at the wreck site of the World War II-era HMAS Perth. Picture: Australian National Maritime Museum / Facebook / Screengrab

JAKARTA – The recent death of the sole survivor of the World War II sinking of the Australian light cruiser HMAS Perth in Indonesia's Sunda Strait has brought home renewed attention to hundreds of wartime shipwrecks and the remains of their crewmen lying at the bottom of Southeast Asian seas.

After years of effort, it was only in 2018 that the Australian and Indonesian governments reached agreement on declaring the area around the 7,100-ton Perth and the nearby wreck of the American cruiser USS Houston as a maritime memorial park.

It was nearly too late. Australian Maritime Museum archeologists found that, between 2015 and 2016, about 60% of the Perth's starboard hull plating was removed in an industrial-scale operation that disturbed the graves of the 357 Australian sailors in the process.

Salvage vessels have reportedly looted as many as 40 other wrecks, the last resting place for thousands of American, British, Australian, Dutch and Japanese sailors in the Java and South China seas and around the fringes of the Pacific and Indian oceans.

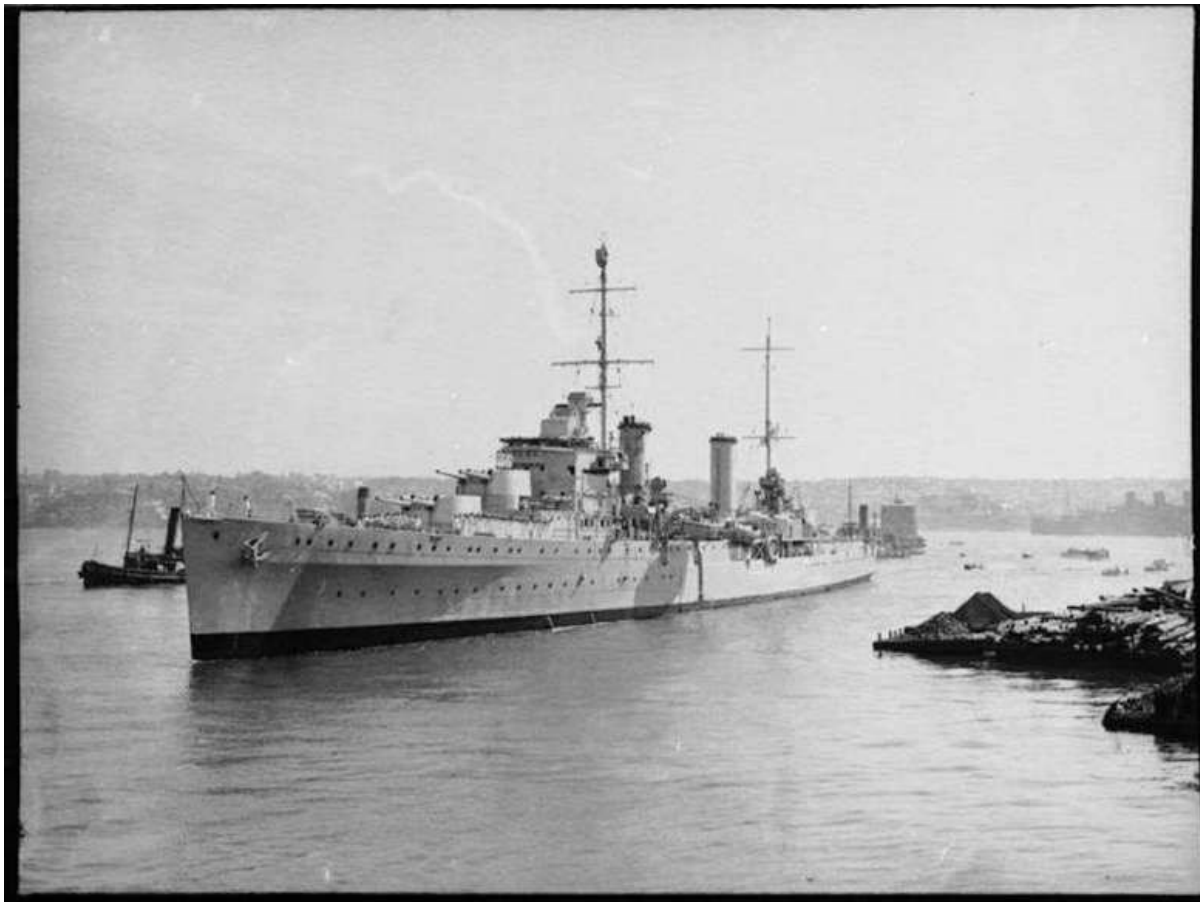
Only last month, the Chinese grab dredger Chuan Hoon 68 was reported picking over the wrecks of the British battleship HMS Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser HMS Repulse, sunk by Japanese bombers off Malaysia's east coast in December 1941 days after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Royal Navy Museum director-general Dominic Tweddle said in a May 24 statement that the illegal salvage operation has thrown into sharp relief how vulnerable 5,000 similar historic underwater naval sites around the world are to wholesale plundering.

"We are distressed and concerned at the apparent vandalism for personal profit (of the two vessels)," he complained. "They are designated war graves. We are upset at the loss of naval heritage and the impact on the understanding of our Royal Navy history."

Tweddle said there is a need for a management strategy for the Royal Navy's underwater heritage to better protect or commemorate the wrecks "including the targeted retrieval of objects."

"A strategy is vital to determine how to assess and manage these wrecks in the most efficient and effective manner," he said. "Above all, we must remember the crews who served on these lost ships, and all too often gave their lives in the service of their country."



The HMAS Perth (I) arrives in Sydney Harbour, April 1940. Photo: Samuel Hood / ANMM Collection [00022409](#) / Australian National Maritime Museum

Retired Royal Navy Captain Roger Turner, who led the recent successful search for the Japanese ship *Montevideo Maru* which carried 1,000 Australian prisoners of war to their deaths in 1942, told the *Asia Times*: “It is quite despicable that the Chinese should be pillaging war graves.”

Reflecting on the value of the scrap, the former nuclear submarine engineer points out that in one application the 200mm thick steel contains a very low level of absorbed radiation suitable for ultra-sensitive nuclear-monitoring devices.

“Post-nuclear-age steel, since about 1940, carries its own radiation signal derived from above-ground nuclear weapons testing, which leads to global fallout being imparted into the steel during the smelting process,” he explains.

As a result, steel from the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales*, launched in 1916 and 1939 respectively, is more valuable than normal scrap, particularly the 400mm-thick, high-quality armor plating covering parts of the 43,700-ton battleship.

Turner notes that although the anthropogenic element of background radiation has now fallen back to what it was before the 1963 nuclear weapons test ban treaty, diminishing the value of pre-nuclear age scrap, it still carries a premium.

“In comparatively shallow water of about 68 meters, even without the nuclear premium, 40,000 tons of steel at \$100 per ton is a fair return,” he says. “Probably getting just half of it would be profitable.”

Malaysian authorities say they are investigating the movements of the 8,300-ton *Chuan Hong 68*, which has been in Malaysian waters since February and is known for earlier salvaging operations in the Java Sea.

The vessel is suspected of also pillaging the wrecks of the Dutch light cruisers *HNLMS de Ruyter* and *HNLMS Java* and the destroyer *HNLMS Kortenaer*, sunk in the Battle of the Java Sea in early 1942, shortly before the *Perth* and *Houston* met the same fate.

In 2017, responding to protests from the Netherlands government, Indonesia declared the area around the three hulks a historic site, using rarely applied 2010 legislation to forbid any anchoring, fishing or diving.

It was too late, however, to prevent the almost total removal of the wrecks of the British heavy cruiser *HMS Exeter*, and the destroyers *HMS Encounter* and *HMS Electra*, which were sunk in the same encounter with the loss of 2,300 lives.

Little is known about the wrecks of other allied warships, including the corvette *HMAS Armidale* and the destroyer *HMAS Voyager*, both sunk off the south coast of Timor Leste, the carrier *USS Langley* (Cilacap) and the destroyers *USS Edsall* (eastern Indian Ocean), *HMS Jupiter* (Java Sea) and the *HNLMS Van Nes* (Bangka).

Among the other hulks are three US submarines and two German U-boats, which had been operating out of Japanese bases in occupied Dutch East Indies and British Malaya and were sunk in the Java Sea in November 1944 and April 1945.

Known Japanese wrecks include the heavy cruiser Ashigara, torpedoed off the Bangka-Belitung islands in June 1945, a light cruiser, eight destroyers and three submarines, one of which lies close to the Krakatoa volcano in the Sunda Strait.

British naval historian Geoffrey Till believes the ultimate solution is for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to draft a common protection policy that can be implemented by individual countries.

“But since countries don’t protect such sites of historic importance, and in many cases don’t have the resources to do so even if they cared, it’s hard not to be despairingly pessimistic about this,” he said.

It is not clear how many commercial salvagers may be involved in the grave robbing, but naval experts place part of the blame on complacent Western governments allowing China’s progressive encroachment on international norms and conventions.

The plundering of the Repulse and the Prince of Wales in 50-meter-deep water off Kuantan isn’t new. In 2013, divers noticed one of the Repulse’s bus-sized brass propellers was missing, something that could only have been done using a heavyweight crane.

Reports a year later claimed explosives were being used to break up both wrecks, the grave of 840 sailors. But the Malaysian government has done little to stop the destruction despite the site being well within the country’s economic exclusion zone (EEZ).

Britain’s Protection of Military Remains Act makes it an offense to interfere with a protected place or to disturb or remove anything from the site. Divers are permitted to visit, but the rule is don’t touch and don’t penetrate.

There is no international law forbidding the practice, however, and outside of the United Kingdom, the sanctions can only be enforced in practice against British citizens, British-flagged ships or vessels landing in Britain.



HMAS Perth in the Battle of Sunda Strait. Image: AWM

Sunk by enemy gunfire and torpedoes on March 1, 1942, the Perth and the 9,000-ton Houston were victims of the Japanese invasion force which had completed the conquest of Southeast Asia and was then in the process of occupying the Dutch East Indies.

Able Seaman Frank McGovern, who died last week at 103, was the Perth’s last survivor. But that was only the start of his wartime ordeal, which Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described as “amazing” and McGovern as “an extraordinary Australian.”

In the years following the sinking of the Perth, he endured two years on the notorious Burma Railway, then was aboard a Japanese ship torpedoed by a US submarine in the Philippine Sea while carrying 1,000 prisoners of war to slave factories in Japan.

More than 540 Australians perished, but McGovern and 30 other prisoners escaped and spent three days in a lifeboat before being picked up by another Japanese ship, which delivered them to Japan.

There, McGovern was put to work in a factory, where his spine was fractured during the second of two American air raids in which incendiary bombs devastated large swathes of Tokyo.

Forced to work or face summary execution, the fate that awaited the incapacitated after they were drained of their blood, he managed to survive until the Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945.

McGovern was one of the first Australians repatriated home, but it took years for him to adjust, confronted with many sad memories – including the death of his elder brother aboard the ill-fated *Perth*. The general location of the *Perth* and the *Houston*, which lost 700 crewmen in the sinking and during subsequent Japanese internment, has long been known, lying four kilometers apart close to the mouth of the strait separating Java and Sumatra.

Retired Australian navy diver Clive Carlin and compatriot Jack Hammett spent many weekends searching for the two wrecks in 35-meter-deep water, but say they only discovered their exact location from a local fisherman using his own GPS in 1999.

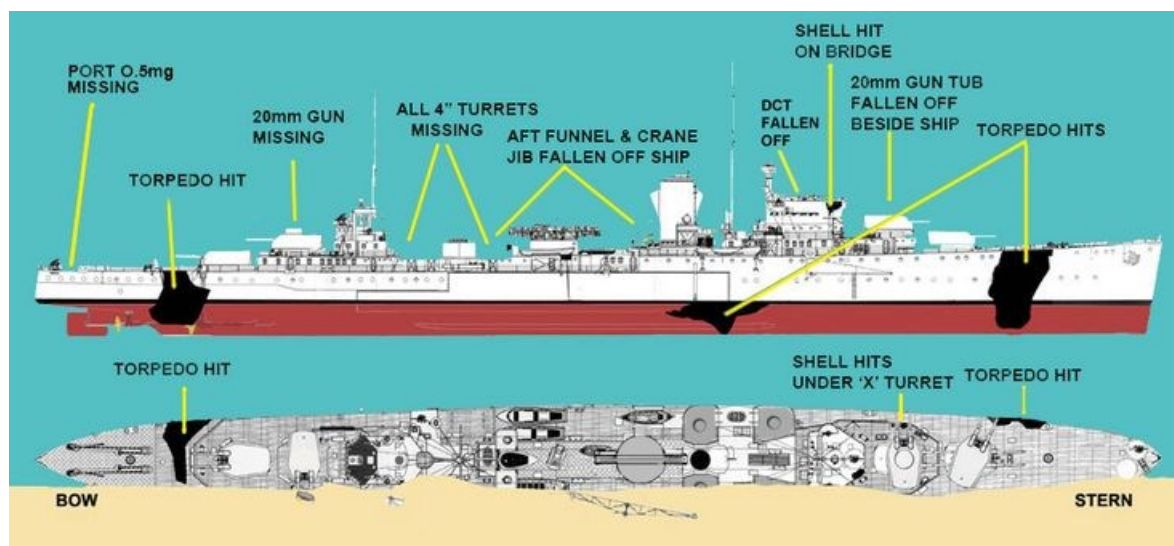
“For me, the *Perth* is as memorial to the men who sailed in her, in defense of Australia and the Australian way of life,” says Carlin, a long-time Indonesia resident who helped lay an ensign on the wreck during an underwater ceremony on the 60th anniversary of the one-sided battle.



The shipwreck of HMAS *Perth* (I) lies in waters between Java and Sumatra, a victim of the Battle of Sunda Strait in 1942. A joint survey project between the museum and Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional (Indonesia) has recorded the devastation caused by extensive illegal salvage. Image: James Hunter, ANMM / Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional.

For the Australians, the issue of protecting the wrecks has surfaced again since the discovery of the *Montevideo Maru*, a converted passenger/cargo ship sunk by the US submarine *Sturgeon* off the northwest Philippines in July 1942.

Nearly 1,000 Japan-bound Australian PoWs who had been captured in fighting around lightly defended Rabaul on the northern tip of New Britain in Papua New Guinea died in what is still Australia’s worst maritime disaster. The wreck lies about 100 kilometers west of Luzon’s Cape Bodjeodor on a direct line to its plotted destination on China’s Hainan island. But at a depth of 4,000 meters – the same as the ill-fated *Titanic* in the North Atlantic – that is unlikely to attract the attention of pillagers.



Congressional report into Chinese Navy reinforces major concerns



18 MAY 2023

By: **Stephen Kuper**

A US congressional report into the modernisation and expansion of China's naval power has revealed major concerns about the future stability of the region and Beijing's ambitions beyond Taiwan.

As the global centre of geopolitical and strategic focus and power pivots away from the traditionally land-locked Western and Central European theatre towards the broad-spectrum maritime dominated Indo-Pacific, decades of “wars of choice” rather than “wars of necessity” have left the US-led world order in a state of disarray.

In stark contrast, across the vast expanse of the Pacific, the Middle Kingdom has doubled down on its decades of economic growth and corresponding influence on the global and regional stage, embarking on the world's largest peace time modernisation and build-up of the People's Liberation Army, with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA-N) now the largest navy in the world, shifting the once second rate, “brown water” navy, to become an increasingly capable “blue water”, global navy.

Naval power is fast re-emerging as the centrestage for great power competition in the 21st century as both the United States and its allies seek to regain ground ceded to China over the course of the period between the beginning of the new millennium and today.

Where the United States Navy and its supporting industrial base were once seen as the unassailable leader and security guarantor for much of the world and the global economy, it now stands as is, a shadow of its former glory.

These issues have been further compounded by extensive rounds of sequestration during the Obama years, the US Navy and its global partners, including Australia, face an increasingly uphill battle to field a range of next-generation capabilities ranging from hypersonic weapons, through to advanced surface and submarine capabilities.

Revealing the true state of circumstances, the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) has released a detailed report, titled, [China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress](#), outlining major concerns about the rising superpower's ambitions and capacity to deliver on those designs for regional and global prominence. At the core of this concern is Beijing's development of the largest naval force in the world and the rapid narrowing of the qualitative gap between itself and the US and its partners, with the CRS report detailing: “China's navy is, by far, the largest of any country in East Asia, and sometime between 2015 and 2020 it surpassed the US Navy in numbers of battle force ships (meaning the types of ships that count towards the quoted size of the US Navy).

DOD states that China's navy “is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 340 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, aircraft carriers, and fleet auxiliaries ... This figure does not include approximately 85 patrol combatants and craft that carry anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM).

“The ... overall battle force [of China's navy] is expected to grow to 400 ships by 2025 and 440 ships by 2030.” The US Navy, by comparison, included 294 battle force ships at the end of FY2021, and the Navy's FY2024 budget submission projects that the Navy will include 290 battle force ships by the end of FY2030. US military officials and other observers are expressing concern or alarm regarding the pace of China's naval shipbuilding effort and resulting trend lines regarding the relative sizes and capabilities of China's navy and the US Navy.

No matter what way we cut it, we're on the backfoot

The combination of qualitative and quantitative developments transforming the PLA-N at present represents major challenges to be overcome, something the CRS report highlights: "China's naval modernisation effort encompasses a wide array of platform and weapon acquisition programs, including anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), submarines, surface ships, aircraft, unmanned vehicles (UVs), and supporting C4ISR (command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) systems. China's naval modernisation effort also includes improvements in logistics, doctrine, personnel quality, education and training, and exercises."

Beijing's emphasis on rapid modernisation and a broader, digital transformation of the broader People's Liberation Army is seeing the introduction of a suite of advanced capabilities ranging from power projection-focused aircraft carrier and associated strike groups, advanced attack and ballistic missile submarines, through to advanced cyber, quantum computing and precision, hypersonic weapons seeking to undermine, and in some ways, replicate the success of the US and its allies.

At the core of this force structure is a growing focus on Taiwan, and Beijing's broader ambition to supplant and eventually entirely replace the United States as the premier Indo-Pacific strategic power.

This is highlighted by the CRS, which states, "China's military modernisation effort, including its naval modernisation effort, is assessed as being aimed at developing capabilities for, among other things, addressing the situation with Taiwan militarily, if need be; achieving a greater degree of control or domination over China's near-seas region, particularly the South China Sea; enforcing China's view that it has the right to regulate foreign military activities in its 200-mile maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ); defending China's commercial sea lines of communication (SLOCs), particularly those linking China to the Persian Gulf; displacing US influence in the Western Pacific; and asserting China's status as the leading regional power and a major world power. Additional missions for China's navy include conducting maritime security (including antipiracy) operations, evacuating Chinese nationals from foreign countries when necessary, and conducting humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR) operations."

Unpacking this further, the CRS report highlights the emphasis on undermining and supplanting the US in the Indo-Pacific, stating, "Observers believe China wants its navy to be capable of acting as part of an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) force — a force that can deter US intervention in a conflict in China's near-seas region over Taiwan or some other issue, or failing that, delay the arrival or reduce the effectiveness of intervening US forces."

In contrast, the US Navy and its allies, including Australia, are facing stagnating or declining defence budgets (in real terms) as a result of increasingly costly technology-heavy platforms, coupled with continuing societal atomisation and disconnection from the principles of liberal democracy, placing increasing strain on their capacity to counter growing Chinese naval capabilities.

This is a sentiment echoed by retired US Navy Captain Sam Tangredi in a detailed analysis conducted for the [US Naval Institute](#), where he states, "Using technological advantage as an indicator of quality, historical research on 28 naval wars (or wars with significant and protracted naval combat) indicates that 25 were won by the side with the larger fleet. When fleet size was roughly equal, superior strategy and substantially better trained and motivated crews carried the day. Only three could be said to have been won by a smaller fleet with superior technology."

Tangredi reinforced these points further, stating, "The United States can fund a significant fleet that matches the growth of the PLA Navy — or not. Whether the fleet is 250 or 500 ships is for elected officials and the Navy to decide, but those leaders must identify, acknowledge, and own that risk. There is risk in all choices. But there is particularly higher risk in making choices based on unproven assumptions."

In light of limited US capacity and the fact that Beijing can focus the entirety of its forces in the Indo-Pacific, Australia will face an increasingly competitive region, requiring a rapid departure from the business-as-usual approach that continues to dominate the nation's defence planning and policy.

Final thoughts

The growing realisation that both the United States and allies like Australia will need to get the balance of its military and national capabilities just right, not just to support the US as part of a larger joint task force, but to ensure that the Australian Defence Force can continue to operate independently and complete its core mission reliably and responsibly.

Critically, while there has been a recognition that Navy, like the broader ADF, needs to grow in personnel and firepower, however, it can't be half measures, rather, we need to accept that Navy, in particular, will require a major overhaul and tactical and strategic rethink in its structure and priorities to better deliver impactful projection.

Additionally, while industry expertise and experience is critical and informative, it is important to avoid the pitfalls of being presented with a solution that does 60 per cent of the mission in a timely manner, when in reality, we need an 80 per cent capability.

While compromise is important to delivering the capabilities Australia now requires, we can't compromise too significantly, in this, Defence needs to be far less passive and be far more direct with industry.

As events continue to unfold throughout the region and China continues to throw its economic, political, and strategic weight around, can Australia afford to remain a secondary power, or does it need to embrace a larger, more independent role in an era of increasing great power competition?

In the second part of this series, we will take a closer look at the specific areas of modernisation and force growth the People's Liberation Army Navy is focusing on and how it is impacting tactical and strategic thinking at home and abroad.

VESSEL REVIEW | MEWA & ALBATROS – NEW MINE COUNTERMEASURES VESSELS DELIVERED TO POLISH NAVY

By **Baird Maritime** - May 23, 2023



ORP Mewa (Photo: MarineTraffic.com/Piotr Jaglinski)

The Polish Navy recently commissioned two new locally built mine countermeasures vessels (MCMVs) into service.

Built by a consortium that also includes PGZ Naval Shipyard (formerly Naval Shipyard Gdynia) and technology company Centrum Techniki Morskiej (CTM), ORP *Mewa* ("Seagull") and ORP *Albatros* belong to the Project 258 or Kormoran II-class MCMVs. As with class lead ship ORP *Kormoran*, the newbuilds each have a non-magnetic steel hull, a length of 58.5 metres, a beam of 10.3 metres, a draught of 2.7 metres, and a displacement of 850 tonnes. Non-magnetic steel was selected for the hulls due to its low operating cost and its improved resistance to both corrosion and fire damage. Each MCMV's hull and superstructure are also designed to help minimise radar cross-section. The construction of the vessels themselves complies with the Polish Register of Shipping's L3 ice class notation and ensures crew safety when operating in environments with chemical, biological, and nuclear hazards.



ORP Albatros (Photo: MarineTraffic.com/Peter Saunders)

Two MTU 970kW diesel engines drive Voith-Schneider propellers to deliver a maximum speed of 15 knots and a range of 2,500 nautical miles while a Schottel 200kW bow thruster provides added lateral manoeuvrability. Electrical power on each vessel is supplied by three MTU 323kW generators. Armament meanwhile includes a 35mm autocannon, three 12.7mm machine guns, and Grom surface-to-air missiles. Also fitted on each vessel are a CTM integrated combat system, an inertial navigation system, an aft deck crane, and a boat davit. Space is available for a towed sonar, two inflatable tenders, and Teledyne Marine and Kongsberg Maritime autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) capable of underwater survey as well as mine detection, identification, and disposal. *Mewa* and *Albatros* are each crewed by 45 officers and enlisted sailors, though accommodations are also available for up to seven additional personnel. The Kormoran II-class MCMVs' main area of operations are within Poland's exclusive economic zone, though they may also be deployed in support of naval task forces in the Baltic and North Seas.

USS George Washington concludes maintenance overhaul

By [Diana Stancy Correll](#) and [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#)

Wednesday, May 24



The aircraft carrier George Washington departs Newport

News Shipbuilding in Virginia on Tuesday. The maintenance on the ship kicked off in 2017. (Huntington Ingalls)

The aircraft carrier George Washington [concluded maintenance](#) at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia on Tuesday — [several years behind schedule](#).

The ship, which started its mid-life refueling and complex overhaul known as an RCOH in 2017, is now conducting sea trials. The ship originally was slated to wrap up the RCOH in 2021 under a four-year timeline.

“USS George Washington (CVN 73) got underway from the Huntington Ingalls Industries Shipyard in Newport News for Sea Trials May 22,” Navy spokesperson Cmdr. Jackie Pau said in a statement to Navy Times. “The Navy-Industry team has worked closely together to complete remaining production, test, and certification work on George Washington and is looking forward to redelivery of George Washington back to the Fleet as soon and as safely as possible.”

[Navy vows quality of life reforms for carrier sailors in shipyards](#) An investigation determined that the working environment for sailors assigned to the George Washington was poor.

By [Diana Stancy Correll](#)

Lt. Cmdr. Dawn M. Stankus, a spokesperson for Naval Air Force Atlantic, said the ship will head to nearby Naval Station Norfolk once sea trials conclude.

“Upon redelivery to the U.S. Navy Fleet, and return to Naval Station Norfolk, George Washington will represent the most modern baseline configuration for Nimitz-class carriers, including upgrades to the island, mast & tower, C4ISR systems, weapons systems, radars and upgrades for full F-35 Joint Strike Fighter capability,” Stankus said in an email to Navy Times.

The longer-than-expected RCOH was due to an unplanned growth in work, labor inefficiencies and the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the need to quarantine teams and supply chain delays, [Navy officials previously told Navy Times’ sister publication, Defense News](#).

On its long road back to mission capability, the work on the carrier revealed how [dire shipyard conditions](#) impact sailor welfare and how the brass at times has failed its more junior sailors who have to work and live aboard carriers during maintenance.

Investigations into [a cluster of suicides among junior-enlisted GW sailors](#) revealed systemic shortcomings that Navy brass have since vowed to fix.

GW’s long maintenance also led to allegations of tone-deafness against former Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith, who addressed the crew shortly after multiple crew suicides last spring and told them to “manage expectations” when it comes to working bathrooms, food quality and living in the massive construction zone that GW became during its overhaul.

[Top sailor to USS George Washington crew: at least you're not in a foxhole](#)

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith's visit to Newport News Friday comes in the wake of three sailor suicides among the crew in the past two weeks.

By [Geoff Ziezulewicz](#)

The RCOHs are completed at the 25-year mark in a carrier's service life and are designed to refuel the nuclear power reactor and address other major maintenance issues and upgrades.

Images that Huntington Ingalls posted appear to show rust on the deck of the ship. The spots of rust on the deck, forward of the tower, were due to cargo containers that sat on the deck during the long maintenance, according to Naval Sea Systems Command spokesman Ohene Gyapong.

Other parts of the deck have a fresh coat of paint, but that rust won't be busted until the ship is through trials, he said.

"You're not giving the ship a white glove rundown when you're getting ready to run it in sea trials," Gyapong told Navy Times.

The carrier is poised to return to Yokosuka, Japan, next year after being based there for seven years prior to starting the RCOH. It will replace the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan, which has served as the forward-deployed carrier since 2015.

Name selected for US Navy's first expeditionary medical ship



Photo: Austal USA

The first in a new class of US Navy expeditionary medical ship (EMS) will be named USNS *Bethesda*, US Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro confirmed recently.

The name was chosen in honour of Naval Support Activity Bethesda in Maryland, home to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

The EMS will be a variant of the navy's Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transports and will also be built by Austal USA. It will measure 361 by 103 feet (110 by 31.5 metres) and will have medical facilities including isolation rooms, operating rooms, intensive care compartments, and acute care rooms.

Royal Navy says 'no decisions' made over fate of frigate HMS Westminster 30th May 2023



HMS Westminster is a Type 23 Duke class anti-submarine vessel (Picture: MOD). The Royal Navy says "no decisions have been made" about HMS Westminster, following reports her repairs are proving too expensive to justify and her planned refit has been suspended.

The Type 23 frigate has been in Devonport since October for work aimed at keeping her in service until at least 2028. Launched in 1992, HMS Westminster is the oldest vessel in the class still in use by the Royal Navy. A Royal Navy spokesperson said: "Refit programmes are constantly reviewed to balance availability against value for money. No decisions have been made about any particular unit." HMS Westminster is known throughout the Royal Navy as 'the capital ship'. The vessel underwent an extensive refit in 2014, receiving a new principal weapon - the Sea Ceptor surface-to-air missile system.

A WALRUS SEAPLANE SIMILAR TO THE TYPE EMBARKED ON HMAS PERTH (i)



US is central to Australia's strategic security, but what if they're not available?



31 MAY 2023

By: **Stephen Kuper**

Since the Battle of the Coral Sea, the US has been the foundation of Australia's defence posture, providing, as former defence minister Kim Beazley states, the "top cover", but what if the US isn't available?

It is an undisputable fact that much of the peace, prosperity, and stability of the post-Second World War paradigm came as a direct result of the US-led global order.

In putting an end to the often-ancient rivalries between varying imperial powers, the United States, through its post-war economic, political and most importantly, strategic might, guaranteed the freedom of the seas and promoted an explosion of free trade across the globe paving the way for the modern, interconnected global economy, and period of innovation we enjoy today.

Through this might, both conventional in its strategic arsenal, the United States established what has become known as a "strategic umbrella" where for greater input into their ally's security policy and easier access to their markets, the United States would do the heavy lifting on the global geostrategic stage.

Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Western Europe have served as the beneficiaries of this new globalised world and radically new approach, ironed out at the Bretton Woods Conference, and then more drastically implemented through policies like the Marshall Plan to reconstruct Europe following the devastation of the Second World War — this golden era of the Pax Americana is now coming to an end.

This epochal end was reinforced by comments made by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 22 December 2022, when he stated: "When it comes to Russia's war against Ukraine, if we were still in Afghanistan, it would have, I think, made much more complicated the support that we've been able to give and that others have been able to give Ukraine to resist and push back against the Russian aggression."

Ready or not, this new paradigm presents new challenges for Australia's geostrategic policy community and the planning surrounding the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) as for the first time in lived memory, both we, and our great and powerful friend, the United States, face an increasingly contested and competitive world.

Despite the challenges presented to both Australia and the United States, the DSR still highlights the centrality of the United States to our national defence planning, with former defence minister Kim Beazley, in an ASPI piece titled [*US the critical 'top cover' for the defence of Australia*](#), articulates reinvigorated role imagined for the United States in our national defence planning.

However, this position not only fails to account for the growing limitations of the United States relative to the number of challenges emerging not only in the Indo-Pacific, but more broadly, across the globe which require the attention of the US, as the world's only truly "indispensable nation", it also flies in the face of a particularly important line, articulated in the government's DSR:

"Australia does not have effective defence capabilities relative to higher threat levels. In the present strategic circumstances, this can only be achieved by Australia working with the United States and other key partners in the maintenance of a favourable regional environment. Australia also needs to develop the capability to unilaterally deter any state from offensive military action against Australian forces or territory," the DSR states.

So my question becomes, which is it? Are we depending on the United States for the strategic freedom they impart? Are we developing our own "unilateral" capacity to deter "any state" and using them as a fall back in the event our "strategic" capabilities fail?

Don't underestimate the importance the alliance

Beazley reinforces the first part of the DSR's aforementioned most interesting quote, while also highlighting the flexibility the United States has afforded Australia, stating, "The US alliance has provided us with excellent intelligence, training, and access to essential weapons. Also, ANZUS hovering in the background was a further deterrent to any local power contemplating interference with Australia."

Unpacking this further and detailing the true impact of the US acting as Australia's "big brother" on the school yard, particularly following the 1987 Defence White Paper which saw the nation's transition from "Forward Defence" towards the continental strategy of the "Defence of Australia", which continues to shape the nation's defence and national security posture to this day, Beazley adds, "In our case, the advantage lay with the US, and we wanted the US to comprehend that. The US provided useful diplomatic and military cover for our involvement in the East Timor crisis without Washington paying a heavy price."

However, things have changed. The relative rise of the People's Republic of China comparative to the apparent decline of the United States, coupled with the rise of other regional powers like Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, India and the resurgence of Japan among others, all serve to reinforce the growing multipolarity of the world.

Beazley highlights the importance of this, stating, "All that is changed now. Australia no longer in a strategic backwater. China's emergence as a military power and the South China Sea being contested paint a very different picture. Our redefined area of military interest incorporates that zone. We see it as vital."

"China's rise has completely changed the concept of warning time and it's of no value in calculating the emergence of a major threat to our interests and approaches. That can be mounted now from capabilities within the region," he states.

However, Beazley cautions Australia's strategic policy community from falling into the trap of viewing the economic, political, and strategic facing the United States through the prism of its domestic challenges, saying, "Our view of the capacity of the US is constantly caught up in the cacophony of its domestic politics and foreign policy errors, leading some of our commentators to constantly question American ability. That misses the underlying capacity of the US military, the inventiveness of its research community and its massive resources. We are deeply embedded in the US military, national security agencies and weapons acquisition programs. They have a resilience that the day-to-day politics might not reflect."

In spite of this, this author would highlight the importance of preparing for the worst, and here we return to this portion of the DSR, "Australia also needs to develop the capability to unilaterally deter any state from offensive military action against Australian forces or territory," because we return to that all important question, what does that look like?

If the US declines, prepare for massively expanded defence spending

Whether Australia's political and strategic leaders want to admit it or not, the post-war era of economic prosperity and political and strategic stability is dependent upon a transactional relationship between the United States and smaller powers, whether they be traditional "great powers" like the United Kingdom, or middle powers like Australia, with this new era spelling trouble for the future. This is perhaps best explained by US geostrategic analyst and author Peter Zeihan, who explains, "Most people think of the Bretton Woods system as a sort of Pax Americana. The American Century, if you will. But that's simply not the case. The entire concept of the order is that the United States disadvantages itself economically in order to purchase the loyalty of a global alliance. That is what globalisation is. The past several decades haven't been an American Century. They've been an American sacrifice."

This is particularly troubling for the US-led world, as an increasing number of countries begin to shift away from the dollar-backed trading system, driven by growing uptake by the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) economic, quasi-security bloc that continues to expand its influence across the Middle East, Africa, South America and to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia, effectively undermining the economic balance of power much of the world has become dependent upon.

The true impact of this fragility, is highlighted by Beazley, who states, "Moving away from the US as uncertainties mount in our region accrue would be extraordinarily risky. If other powers in the region decide that access to our resources or land would solve their problems, we wouldn't have the means to handle it. If a gutted US does emerge, prepare for a defence outlay massively north of 2 per cent of GDP."

Alleged warship graverobbers detained in Malaysia



31 MAY 2023

By: **Robert Dougherty**

The Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency has detained a Chinese cargo ship believed to have stolen ammunition and steel from World War II warship wrecks.

The Malaysian maritime agency announced they had found approximately 100 active rounds of World War II ammunition after detaining a cargo ship registered from Fuzhou, China, around 20.1 nautical miles east of Tanjung Siang on 28 May.

The operation was conducted in cooperation with the Royal Malaysian Police, the Department of National Heritage, and the Marine Department Malaysia.

State maritime director of Johor, First Admiral Nurul Hizam bin Zakaria said the operation involved Malaysian maritime assets, Malaysian maritime officers, the Johor IPK Bomb Disposal unit, members of the Heritage Department and Malaysian Marine Department.

All the bullets of various sizes that were found were taken and brought by the PDRM Bomb Disposal Unit to be destroyed. A further report related to this discovery will be issued by the PDRM, he said.

The Malaysian maritime agency did not rule out the possibility that the ship is the same one involved in the theft of British warship wrecks in Pahang waters. The People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said the Chinese government is aware of the detention.

"The Chinese Embassy in Malaysia is in close communication with Malaysia to learn relevant information and ask the Malaysian side to handle the case justly in accordance with the law, earnestly protect the security and lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and report the progress of the investigation in a timely manner," she said in a regular press conference on 30 May.

Morally questionable salvage allegations surfaced earlier this year when the Fujian Ya Rui Marine-registered salvage ship, *Chuan 68*, was reportedly found dredging over the shipwrecks of battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battle cruiser HMS *Repulse* off the coast of Malaysia.

The HMS *Repulse* and HMAS *Prince of Wales* were sunk by Japanese bombers in 1941, losing 842 crew members and are both officially designated as war graves.

The Chinese salvage ship has also previously been accused of similar operations over three Japanese World War II shipwrecks near Uskan, Malaysia, in 2017 and of targeting other warship wrecks in Singaporean, Cambodian, and Vietnamese waters.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy released a statement regarding the HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* on 24 May.

National Museum of the Royal Navy director general Professor Dominic Tweddle said the museum is upset at the loss of naval heritage and the impact this has on the understanding of Royal Navy history.

"We are distressed and concerned at the apparent vandalism for personal profit of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*. They are designated war graves," he said.

"What we need is a management strategy for the underwater naval heritage so that we can better protect or commemorate these ships. That may include targeted retrieval of objects.

"We want the Royal Navy to develop a policy we can help deliver. If resourced correctly, the existing Royal Navy loss list can be enhanced to be a vital tool to begin to understand, research and manage over 5,000 wrecks before they are lost forever.

"A strategy is vital to determine how to assess and manage these wrecks in the most efficient and effective manner. Above all, we must remember the crews who served on these lost ships, and all too often gave their lives in the service of their country."

World War II shipwrecks are targeted because of their "pre-war steel", which has low radiation and can be smelted down into medical and scientific equipment.

Quarter of Royal Navy's frigates spent zero days at sea in 2022

Xenia Zubova

1st June 2023



HMS St Albans spent 0 days at sea in 2022 (Picture: MOD)

A quarter of the Royal Navy's frigates spent zero days at sea in 2022, it has been revealed.

The information was made public after Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans James Heapey responded to a written question by shadow defence secretary John Healey.

Mr Heapey also revealed that a third of the Royal Navy's 18 frigates and destroyers spent less than a month at sea last year.

[Royal Navy's Type 45s: Only one of six Destroyers operationally available](#)

[Royal Navy says 'no decisions' made over fate of frigate HMS Westminster](#)

[Union warns Royal Navy's Type 31 frigates could be 'significantly delayed'](#)

Out of the Royal Navy's 12 Type 23 Frigates, three – HMS Iron Duke, HMS St Albans and HMS Sutherland – did not spend any time at sea last year.

All three ships have been undergoing refits, with [HMS Iron Duke returning to sea for the first time last month](#).

Mr Heapey's response also showed that out of the six Types 45 destroyers, one – HMS Daring – spent zero days at sea. The ship has been undergoing a refit.

"The normal operating cycle of every ship involves them entering different readiness levels depending on their programmes, periods of refit and Departmental planning requirements," Mr Heapey said in the written response.

He added: "In addition, these figures represent days at sea, and it should be noted that, while deployed away from the UK, ships will spend both days at sea and alongside in ports around the world."



HMS Diamond is the third ship of the Type 45, Daring Class air defence destroyers build for the Royal Navy (Picture: MOD).

HMS Diamond was the Type 45 destroyer that spent the most days at sea in 2022 (114 days), while HMS Defender was not far behind (106 days),

HMS Defender has also had a full schedule this year, having conducted weapons trials in the Outer Hebrides, escorted several Russian units near UK waters, as well as sailing to Norway twice.

The Type 23 frigate that spent the most time at sea in 2022 was HMS Montrose, totalling 212 days.

After nearly 30 years of service, [HMS Montrose was decommissioned in April](#).



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Saturday 19 August 2023

Prize-winners announced in the January-March 2024 Issue of *The NAVY*.



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COLUMN | WHEN THE NUMBERS BECOME DANGEROUS [GREY POWER]

By **Michael Grey** - June 26, 2023



The Ro-Pax ferry Euroferry Olympia ablaze in international waters off the Greek island of Corfu, February 18, 2022. The incident, which left 11 people dead, was believed to have occurred after one of the vessel's embarked lorries caught fire. (Photo: MarineTraffic.com/Redouane Boulouard)

Probability, it has been said, can lull you into a false sense of security. We have been reminded of the ill-fated ocean liner *Titanic* just recently and it is worth recalling the reasons why this beautiful new ship departed on her maiden voyage with lifeboats unable to carry her full complement. Even disregarding the supposed “unsinkability” of the design, it was honestly believed that the risks of a fatal collision with an iceberg and the lack of any helpful assistance in a busy shipping route were perfectly acceptable. After all, why clutter the promenade decks with a lot of pointless boats?

“It wouldn’t happen to us” has been a reason for endless inadequacies throughout history and it is the same today. Statistics can be very comforting as a reason for proceeding “as usual”, or avoiding expenditure in safety equipment, which hopefully will never be used.

“There are still plenty of people who will assert that 99.999 per cent of containers don’t catch fire, so we maybe don’t need to do anything too drastic.”

In recent years there have been real scandals, like the number of seafarers killed in lifeboat drills using equipment that really needs to be re-thought, or those lost in enclosed spaces. However, they don’t happen that often and individually involve only a few lost souls, so the reasons for urgent reform are reserved for more dramatic events. It takes patient aggregation of accident statistics, like those provided by InterManager or the individual efforts of Dr Neil Baird on ferry safety to show us that the reliance on a sort of “percentage game” is both hazardous and immoral.

Yet it takes quite a lot to change attitudes and persuade regulators and industry of the need for change. Take the issue of container fires, which regularly destroy ships and goods as well as cost lives. It has been talked about for long enough, it has become an escalating concern with the sheer number of boxes on individual ships, but there are still plenty of people who will assert that 99.999 per cent of containers don't catch fire, so we maybe don't need to do anything too drastic.

The latest concern is that of electric vehicles and the very real risks of fires involving lithium-ion batteries, with more of these vehicles emerging every month to require carriage on Ro-Ro ferries. They have been around a fair time now and more of these older cars are rocking up at the ferry terminals, with possibly deteriorating batteries that might just possibly have been damaged in use. It was notable that after the loss of at least two big car carriers, the lines have been persuaded that damaged vehicles, which are often shipped abroad for parts, will not be permitted on their ships, and you couldn't blame them for this precautionary policy.

But the general industry awareness of battery fires, it has been suggested, remains low and a useful meeting involving Stream Marine Technical and some industry experts has set out some of the issues that the batteries and EVs are throwing up. And in particular, as the numbers of EVs increase, there is a pressing need for specific training of crews on Ro-Ro and Ro-Pax ferries who may be confronted with car deck fires involving these difficult customers.

"We maybe ought to consider the risks of something really awful happening, more urgently, rather than waiting for the STCW convention to be suitably updated."

At the present, mandatory training in tackling fire aboard ship is specified by the STCW requirements, which effectively deal with the subject as it was regarded in a "pre-EV" age and now needs updating to cope with the new hazard.

The meeting outlined just some of the things that can go wrong to make the batteries dangerous: an incorrect charging regime, incorrect installation, or malfunction, all of which can damage a battery and make it combustible. Then there is the risk of thermal runaway, which makes the fire virtually impossible to extinguish. Everyone has heard of the "fire triangle" that, by removing one of its sides, provides a pathway to a successful extinguishing of the conflagration. The EVs' "fire tetrahedron" with a chemical chain reaction, the meeting was assured, is another matter entirely.

It was pointed out that there had been 387 battery fires since 2012, and that there are now 16-metre EVs motoring around, but the lack of training to deal with them rather dulls the significance of this ratio. It is just worth considering all the cars, some of which may be in a potentially hazardous state, boarding Ro-Ro and Ro-Pax ferries all around the world, the numbers immeasurably swelled at holiday times when the priority is sailing on time. Statistics aside, we maybe ought to consider the risks of something really awful happening, more urgently, rather than waiting for the STCW convention to be suitably updated. Of course there are responsible ferry operators that already have proper training and plans in place, but there are inevitably others that have concluded the statistics are on the side of inactivity. And we maybe ought to be thinking about car shuttle trains in tunnels or indeed multi-storey car parks.

Think about practice, not just relying on numbers.



Austal delivers fifth evolved Cape-class patrol boat to RAN

June 22, 2023, by Fatima Bahtić

Austal Australia has delivered the fifth evolved Cape-class patrol boat (ECCPB) to the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).



Austal

The 58-metre aluminium monohull patrol boat is the fifth of eight to be delivered to the Royal Australian Navy since the project commenced in May 2020.

The vessel was launched in February this year

The first four evolved Cape-class Patrol Boats, Cape Otway, Cape Peron, Cape Naturaliste, and Cape Capricorn were delivered within a twelve-month period, from March 2022.

The sixth Evolved Cape-class patrol Boat ADV Cape Pillar was launched at the company's Henderson, Western Australia shipyard earlier this month.

Austal splashes 6th evolved Cape-class patrol boat for RAN

"This latest vessel, the ADV Cape Woolamai, is the fifth we have delivered in just 15 months. We're launching and delivering a new patrol boat every three months, following approximately 12 months construction," Austal Limited Chief Executive Officer, Paddy Gregg, commented.

"We remain on track to deliver all eight Evolved Cape-class Patrol Boats on schedule, in mid 2024."

In May 2020, Austal Australia was awarded a contract to design and construct six 'Evolved' Cape-class Patrol Boats for the Royal Australian Navy. Less than 2 years later, the company has delivered the first of the Evolved Capes, the ADV Cape Otway (314), and continues to construct the remaining five vessels due for delivery over 2022 and 2023.

In April 2022 Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that a further two evolved Cape-class patrol boats would be ordered by the Australian Department of Defence in FY2023, bringing the total number of vessels ordered for the Royal Australian Navy to eight.

Austal Australia is also contracted to deliver 22 steel Guardian-class Patrol Boats to the Commonwealth of Australia under the Pacific Patrol Boat Replacement Project (SEA3036-1) and has delivered 15 vessels since 2018.

Royal Navy's new Type 26 frigate emerges for first time in Glasgow

Alex Candlin

22nd June 2023



HMS Cardiff emerging from BAE Systems' building hall (Picture: BAE Systems).

A section of HMS Cardiff – the second Type 26 City Class frigate – has emerged from the ship build hall at BAE Systems in Govan, Glasgow.

The forward end of the ship has been completed at the hall and has been brought out of the facility for the first time. When complete, she will provide the Royal Navy with the most advanced anti-submarine warfare capability in the world.

HMS Cardiff will undergo further structural work on the hardstand before being floated off and transported along the Clyde to BAE Systems' Scotstoun facility in 2024. Construction of all eight Type 26 frigates is expected to be completed by the mid-2030s.

With preparation work under way for the construction of a new £100m-plus ship build hall at the Govan site, HMS Cardiff will be the last of the frigates to have its hull sections integrated on the hardstand in the open air.



HMS Cardiff is one of the Type 26 ships being built by BAE Systems (Picture: BAE Systems).

Simon Lister, managing director of BAE Systems Naval Ships business, described the emergence of HMS Cardiff's front section as "a very proud moment for everyone involved in her construction".

"We have now completed all major units of the ship and, in the coming weeks, our skilled teams will consolidate the ship in preparation for next year's float-off," he said.

"The rollout is further evidence of our solid progress on delivering the Type 26 programme and presents an opportunity for us to celebrate the achievement being made with our colleagues, suppliers, customer and the cities of Cardiff and Glasgow."

**The former Type 82 Destroyer
HMS BRISTOL (D23)rusting away on
her berth at Whale Island
Portsmouth Harbour June 2023**



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Bandjoneill.1@bigpond.com

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