

Navy Holds Decommissioning Ceremony for Fire-Damaged USS Bonhomme Richard



Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group Three, and Capt. G. S. Thoroman, commanding officer, amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6), salute the ensign for colors during a decommissioning ceremony for Bonhomme Richard at Naval Base San Diego April 14. The ceremony highlighted the history of the ship, its crew, and their legacy. Due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, the event was closed to the public. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alex Millar*

SAN DIEGO – The U.S. Navy held a decommissioning ceremony for amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) at Naval Base San Diego April 14, the Naval Surface Force Public Affairs said in a release.

The Bonhomme Richard had been severely damaged in a fire that

began on July 12 while in port going through an extensive maintenance availability. The Navy determined the funds required to repair the 22-year-old ship or convert it to an alternate use would be better spent on other priorities.

The ceremony highlighted the history of the ship, its crew, and their legacy. Bonhomme Richard was the third ship to bear the name. It was named in honor of John Paul Jones' famous frigate, named the French equivalent for "Good man Richard." This was in honor of Benjamin Franklin, the U.S. Ambassador to France at the time. The name Bonhomme Richard is derived from Franklin's pen name.

"[The original Bonhomme Richard] Sailors gave their all to prevail against seemingly impossible odds, and they won." said Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 3. "They taught us that you don't always save the ship, but you never stop fighting. The reputation of that fighting spirit began to proceed our Navy wherever we sailed and that same spirit persists today."

Like the previous five Wasp-class ships, Bonhomme Richard was designed to embark, deploy, and land elements of a Marine landing force in amphibious assault operations by helicopter, landing craft, or amphibious vehicles.

Throughout its history, Bonhomme Richard projected power and maintained presence by serving as the cornerstone of Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG) or Expeditionary Strike Groups (ESG). It transported and landed elements of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) or Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) with a combination of aircraft and landing craft.

Not long after commissioning, the ship was called to action for Operation Stabilize in February 2000, providing peacekeeping and humanitarian operations of the coast of East Timor. This made Bonhomme Richard the first U.S. Navy ship to

make a Western Pacific deployment in the 2000s.

Bonhomme Richard's following deployment put it in the spotlight of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The ship offloaded more than a thousand Marines and their equipment from the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines into Kuwait. After delivering attack and transport helicopters, as well as troops and vehicles, Bonhomme Richard took position just miles off the coast of Kuwait to launch AV-8B Harrier aircraft into Iraq. From the deck of Bonhomme Richard, Marine Attack Squadrons (VMA) 211 and 311 flew missions into Iraq and expended more than 175,000 pounds of ordnance and provided close air support to Marines on the ground. In total, the ship launched more than 800 sorties in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. More than 500 of those were combat launches.