

Navy to Decommission, Scrap Fire-Damaged USS Bonhomme Richard



The U.S. Navy has decided to decommission and scrap the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) after this July 12 fire while it was moored at Naval Base San Diego. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Austin Haist

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy has decided to decommission and scrap the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6), which was severely damaged by a shipboard fire in San Diego in July.

In a Nov. 30 teleconference with reporters, Rear Adm. Eric H. Ver Hage, commander, Navy Regional Maintenance Centers and director of Surface Ship Maintenance and Modernization at Naval Sea Systems Command, said that Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite and Chief of Naval Operations Michael Gilday made the decision after the Navy completed a “comprehensive material assessment” and considered three possible outcomes.

Rebuilding and repairing the Bonhomme Richard would have taken five to seven years and cost an estimated \$2.5 billion to \$3.2 billion, Ver Hage said.

Alternatively, rebuilding the ship as another type of ship, such as a hospital ship, a tender, or a command-and-control ship, would have taken five to seven years and cost more than \$1 billion, more than a new alternative ship would be estimated to cost.

Decommissioning and scrapping the ship would take nine to 12 months and cost an estimated \$30 million, he said.

Replacing the Bonhomme Richard with a new America-class (LHA

6) amphibious assault ship would take five to six years and cost an estimated \$4.1 billion.

The Bonhomme Richard was built for \$750 million in 1998 dollars, equivalent to \$1.2 billion today. Ver Hage said the Navy had invested \$250 million in the ship during its modernization that was in progress when the fire broke out.

The admiral said usable parts and material would be harvested from the ship before it was scrapped. The crew would be involved in the inactivation process. Their eventual reassignment from the ship to other assignments would be governed by the type commander, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The ship will be towed to a scrap yard, possibly to Brownsville, Texas, where some of the Navy's retired aircraft carriers have been scrapped.

Congress was notified of the Navy's decision on Nov. 30, the day the crew also was notified.

"We did not come to this decision lightly," Braithwaite said in a Nov. 30 release. "Following an extensive material assessment in which various courses of action were considered and evaluated, we came to the conclusion that it is not fiscally responsible to restore her.

"Although it saddens me that it is not cost effective to bring her back, I know this ship's legacy will continue to live on through the brave men and women who fought so hard to save her, as well as the Sailors and Marines who served aboard her during her 22-year history," Braithwaite said.

All investigations associated with the fire onboard LHD 6 remain ongoing, the Navy said.