

Navy sink list includes Forrestal, DDGs

By Zachary M. Peterson - Staff writer
Posted : Saturday Feb 23, 2008 6:57:44 EST

The Navy plans to sink 15 decommissioned ships and scrap an additional 24 in the next five years, according to the latest shipbuilding plan.

In fiscal 2009, the Navy will sink the Yellowstone-class destroyer Acadia, the Spruance-class destroyer Conolly and the acoustic research ship Hayes. The Hayes is still active and will be decommissioned sometime this year, according to the Navy. The service requested \$5.4 million to sink the three ships in the fiscal 2009 budget presented to Congress in early February.

Two ships in the current plan are slated to sink and become artificial reefs, the plan notes: the Spruance-class destroyer Arthur W. Radford, which rests in Philadelphia, and the auxiliary aircraft landing training ship and former carrier Forrestal, currently berthed in Newport, R.I. Specific sink dates have not been set for these two ships because plans must be coordinated with Congress and other government agencies, the plan states.

The Radford was named after the first Navy admiral to hold the position of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was decommissioned in March 2003 after about 26 years in service. The Forrestal spent 38 years in service. The ship was the first of its class of aircraft carriers, and was known unofficially as the "Forrest fire" due to the number of fires onboard. Innovations on the Forrestal-class carriers included an angled flight deck and a steam catapult. The ship was named after former Navy secretary James Forrestal, who was also the first defense secretary.

The majority of the ships the Navy plans to sink — 11 vessels of the 15 — are auxiliary ships. These ships will be replaced by T-AKE dry cargo and ammunition ships. The Lewis and Clark-class T-AKE ships replace three auxiliary ships: the Kilauea-class ammunition ships, the Mars-class combat stores ships and — when operating with a Henry J. Kaiser-class oiler — the Supply-class fast combat support ships.

The Navy plans to buy 12 T-AKE ships by fiscal 2012. Right now, there are three T-AKEs in service with a fourth, the Richard E. Byrd set to enter service this year. The Navy plans to scrap 24 ships in the next five years, but specific dates are not provided in the fiscal 2009 30-year ship plan. Nearly half of the ships — 10 hulls — are submarines, nine of which are nuclear powered; the Navy does not sink nuclear ships due to environmental concerns.

“For nuclear ships, dismantling through a special recycling process is the only viable option,” the plan states. “Disposal of conventionally powered ships by sinking will usually be conducted as part of an approved training exercise or to support weapons testing requirements.” according to the Navy plan.

The Navy’s fleet of inactive ships has been reduced by more than two-thirds in the last decade, the plan notes. An inventory of 195 ships in 1997 is now down to 62 ships, the document says.

“Over the past seven years, the Navy’s average cost to dismantle conventionally powered Navy inactive ships in the U.S. is \$300 per ton,” said Kathleen Roberts, a Naval Systems Command spokeswoman.

Further, it costs the Navy \$14 million per year to maintain its current inactive ship inventory, Roberts said.

The Navy is asking Congress for \$110 million total in fiscal 2009 to pay for ship deactivations and disposal, according to the budget request.

Plans for how and when the Navy moves forward with its inactive fleet are made at the service’s annual ship disposition review conference. The next conference is slated for November or December this year, said Lt. Clay Doss, a Navy spokesman.

SINKING

These ships will be disposed of by sinking in the listed fiscal years.

* 2009: destroyer tender Acadia, destroyer Conolly, both no longer in service, and research ship Hayes.

* 2010: combat store ships Concord, San Jose, Spica and Niagara Falls.

* 2011: combat store ship Saturn and ammunition ship Kilauea.

* 2012: ammunition ships Flint, Shasta, Mount Baker and Kiska.

The decommissioned auxiliary aircraft landing training ship — and former carrier — Forrestal and destroyer Arthur W. Radford also are expected to be sunk, but no time frame has been determined.

SCRAPPING

These decommissioned ships are scheduled to be dismantled in the next five years: destroyer tender Puget Sound; command ship Coronado; submarine tenders Simon Lake, L.Y. Spear and McKee; cruisers Yorktown, Vincennes and Thomas S. Gates; aircraft carriers Independence and Constellation; amphibious transport dock Austin; helicopter amphibious assault ship New Orleans; dock landing ships Anchorage and Fort Fisher; submarine Trout; and nuclear submarines Drum, Omaha, Cincinnati, New York City, Groton, Birmingham, Phoenix and Baltimore. The fast-attack submarine Los Angeles, still in commission, also is on the list to be dismantled.