

First Royal Australian Navy Sailors Graduate From Basic Enlisted Submarine School



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From Lauren Laughlin

GROTON, Conn. – In a first for the AUKUS trilateral enhanced security partnership, a group of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) enlisted sailors has graduated from the United States Navy’s Basic Enlisted Submarine School (BESS). The sailors all graduated with distinction with one of them being named the Honor Graduate for scoring a 100% in the class. The graduation marks a significant milestone in the development of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) fleet for Australia under the AUKUS Pillar 1 Optimal Pathway.

“It’s another exciting step to see our Royal Australian Navy sailors graduate from this unique and challenging training. I am incredibly proud of their exceptional dedication and effort to reach this significant milestone,” said Chief of the Royal Australian Navy Vice Adm. Mark Hammond. “I’d like to thank our long-standing partners and friends in the U.S. Navy for providing the training to assist the Royal Australian Navy to operate, maintain and support Australia’s future nuclear-powered submarine capability.”

Incorporating Royal Australian Navy enlisted personnel into the U.S. Navy’s submarine training pipeline is essential to developing Australian crews ahead of Australia’s acquisition of sovereign Virginia-class submarines that will be sold to Australia by 2030. Enlisted personnel make up the bulk of a Virginia-class submarine crew, which is typically comprised of

15 officers and 117 enlisted sailors. Royal Australian Navy sailors are also enrolled in the UK Royal Navy's nuclear training pipeline, with the first officers graduating from the UK Royal Navy's Officers Nuclear Operators Course earlier this month. All work by Australian personnel in the U.S. and UK will remain consistent with Australia's domestic and international legal obligations, including its non-proliferation obligations and commitments.

"For the last two months, these sailors have trained diligently alongside their American counterparts to acquire the capability to safely operate SSNs," said Naval Submarine School Commanding Officer Capt. Matthew Fanning. "They will continue to hone their skills in rate-specific training prior to reporting to a Virginia-class submarine as part of the crew to put their training into execution alongside U.S. submariners."

The BESS graduation comes just months after the first three Royal Australian Navy officers completed their training at the U.S. Navy's Submarine Officer Basic Course in April 2024 and reported to Virginia-class submarines based in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Nearly 100 Royal Australian Navy officers and enlisted personnel will enter the submarine and U.S. Naval Nuclear Propulsion training pipelines this year.

"Our sailors are the backbone of our Navy. Their training success demonstrates the exceptional skillset and knowledge of our people," said Warrant Officer of the Royal Australian Navy Andrew Bertocin, the service's senior non-commissioned representative. "I'm proud of what our sailors have achieved and look forward to seeing them continue to master their craft onboard a Virginia-class submarine."

At BESS, the Royal Australian Navy sailors joined their American counterparts for a rigorous eight-week course where they developed the skills and competence needed to operate

nuclear-powered attack submarines. Sailors studied the construction and operation of nuclear-powered submarines and gained hands-on experience through intensive simulations.

“We are extremely proud of what these sailors have accomplished as the first Royal Australian Navy enlisted sailors to graduate from one of the U.S. Navy’s most demanding training courses,” said Vice Adm. Jonathan Mead, Director General of the Australian Submarine Agency. “Their success in this training is another positive step forward as we work with our U.S. and UK partners to progress along the AUKUS Pillar 1 Optimal Pathway and toward our shared goal of a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.”

“These sailors are the foundation of Australia’s future SSN crews,” said the U.S. Navy’s AUKUS Integration and Acquisition Program Manager Rear Adm. Lincoln Reifsteck. “They are trailblazers leading the broader effort to strengthen the interoperability and capabilities of the AUKUS nations. Their graduation is a major step toward realizing the strategic goals of AUKUS as well as deepening the ties among our nations.”

AUKUS is a strategic partnership that will promote a safe, free, and open Indo-Pacific, enhance national security, and uplift the three industrial bases. AUKUS Pillar 1 will deliver a conventionally armed SSN capability to the Royal Australian Navy by the early 2030s. The Department of the Navy’s AUKUS Integration and Acquisition Program Office is the U.S. lead responsible for executing the trilateral partnership to deliver conventionally armed, nuclear-powered attack submarines to the Royal Australian Navy at the earliest possible date while setting the highest nuclear stewardship standards and continuing to maintain the highest standards of non-proliferation.