

For First Time, Australian Submariner Earns US Dolphins



YOKOSUKA, Japan (Dec. 12, 2024) – Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander, Submarine Group 7, and Royal Australian Navy Lt. Cmdr. James pose for a photo during pier-side quarters for the Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Vermont (SSN 792) at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Dec. 12. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Daniel G. Providakes) (This photo has been altered and last name withheld per Royal Australian Navy protocols)

From Lt. Cmdr. Samuel Boyle, Submarine Group 7 Public Affairs, Dec. 17, 2024

YOKOSUKA, Japan– The U.S. Navy qualified the first Royal Australian Navy officer on a nuclear-powered Virginia-class submarine at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Dec. 12. In a pier-side ceremony, Rear Adm. Chris Cavanaugh, commander, Submarine Group 7 awarded Royal Australian Navy Lt. Cmdr. James* the first U.S. Navy Submarine Warfare Device earned by a Royal Australian Navy submariner.

James earned the warfare device, or “dolphins”, while embarked aboard the Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Vermont (SSN 792) during a deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, demonstrating another significant milestone for the Australia, United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership.

“It is always an honor to pin dolphins on a Sailor’s uniform and welcome them into an elite community of undersea warfighters,” said Cavanaugh. “Today’s pinning represents the strength of the alliance and our continued progress under the AUKUS agreement. This was an historic pinning, but it is only the first of many to come.”

In order to qualify, a Sailor must exhibit a strong understanding of all submarines systems, compartments, and equipment. James had already qualified on a diesel electric Collins-class submarine but was the first Royal Australian Navy submariner to qualify on a nuclear-powered Virginia-class submarine.

“All of the extra sensors that the boat has, and the fact that we can remain deployed for so long at such high speeds will be game changing for Australia,” said James. “[Qualifying] is a culmination of a lot of hard work and a lot of support from the crew. I’m incredibly thankful to everybody that has supported me through this adventure. And it makes me incredibly proud to serve both my navy and your navy.”

There are currently more than 100 Royal Australian Navy officers in the U.S. Navy submarine training pipeline or assigned to U.S. Virginia-class SSNs. Military training efforts under the AUKUS Pillar 1 effort are designed to enable Australia to operate, maintain, and support a sovereign fleet of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines to deter aggression and enhance stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Vermont, part of Submarine Squadron 1, has been on deployment since it departed its homeport of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Aug. 8, and arrived in Yokosuka, Japan, Dec. 9, for a port visit.

Submarine Group 7 directs forward-deployed, combat capable forces across the full spectrum of undersea warfare throughout the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea.

U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy’s largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

*Per Royal Australian Navy protocols, submariners’ last names are not publicly released.