

# Navy Puts Renewed Focus on Ship Battle Damage Repair



Salvage contractors from SMIT AMERICAS remove the air traffic control tower aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) in preparation for towing in March 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Cosmo Walrath*  
ARLINGTON, Va. – The loss of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard pier-side to a raging fire last year was a terrible blow to the U.S. Navy, but as the hulk of the ship was being towed from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas, this summer for scrapping, it performed one last service to the Navy and the nation, one that the Navy will try to repeat in the future.

While still under tow in the Gulf of Mexico 300 miles from its destination, the Navy conducted a salvage exercise on the hulk of the Bonhomme Richard to provide valuable training for its personnel.

The Navy brought to the hulk mobile diving and salvage personnel and divers, said Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander, Regional Maintenance Center and director, Surface Ship Maintenance and Modernization for Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), speaking at the American Society of Naval Engineers Fleet Maintenance and Modernization Symposium 2021. “All of the NAVSEA commands [and] fleet commands were involved.

“They were able to cut metal, flood spaces, de-water spaces, patch the holes at sea; it was really, really realistic,” Ver Hage said. “We’re going to do more of that.”

The Navy is focusing on wartime readiness and an important part of that is battle damage repair capability and capacity, the admiral said.

With the Navy focusing more on great power competition and the increasing focus on war at sea, repairing incurring damage on its ships is demanding more attention from Navy leaders.

Ver Hage cited the experiences of the 2000 bombing of the destroyer USS Cole and the fire on the USS Bonhomme Richard as focusing his mind on the need for the Navy to shore up its ability to repair battle damage in wartime or peacetime. He said the Navy's Regional maintenance centers are key to that capability, "along with the operational forces, mobile diving and salvage, [superintendent of salvage], and public shipyards. It's a team effort."

He noted that expertise from the oil and gas industry was brought to bear on the fire-fighting efforts for Bonhomme Richard. Drones were used for up-close inspection of hot spots and helicopters were used as a bucket brigade to help extinguish the fire.

Ver Hage said that in future exercises in which former Navy ships are expended as targets for the fleet, the Navy will take advantage of these opportunities to exercise battle damage repair capabilities.