

Navy Still Plans to Start New Frigate Construction in April 2022



Then-Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite announces USS Constellation (FFG 62) as the name for the first ship in the new guided missile frigate class of ships while aboard the museum ship Constellation in Baltimore Inner Harbor, Baltimore, Md., Oct. 7, 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Levingston Lewis*

ARLINGTON, Va. – As the first new U.S. Navy frigate works its way through detailed and functional design phases, officials still plan an April start for building the lead ship of the Constellation class.

“Right now, as far as construction, we’re targeting that date,” Capt. Kevin Smith, the frigate program manager told a briefing at the Surface Navy Association annual symposium. However, “there could be some risk to that [during the detailed design phase] but we’re looking hard at that,” he said, adding, “the one thing that we want to make sure of is, that we don’t start building a ship where the design is not mature.”

After the design phases are completed, a critical design review and a production readiness review are slated to follow in fiscal 2022. Only “then, when we’re ready” will construction begin on what will become the USS Constellation guided missile frigate (FFG 62), Smith told the Jan. 11 briefing.

The Navy began the acquisition process for a new multi-mission frigate FFG(X) in 2017, awarding a \$795 million detailed design and construction contract in April 2020 to Marinette Marine, a Fincantieri company based in Marinette, Wisconsin.

Marinette based its design on the Fincantieri FREMM frigate, which is in service with the French and Italian navies.

Among the capital improvements Fincantieri is making at Marinette to accommodate the first frigate's construction is a syncrolift platform to move the 496-foot hull from dry land into the water. Unlike the littoral combat ships Marinette is building in Wisconsin, the Constellation will be too big for a side launch down a slipway. Frigate construction will be in Marinette's Building 34, the new hull erection building, which Smith predicted would be a game changer. Big enough to accommodate two full-size frigate hulls and one-third of another, it will allow work to continue indoors during Wisconsin winters. The frigate will be "probably close to near completion before they float it off," and move on to integration of the propulsion plant and combat systems, Smith said.

The frigate will have a combination diesel electric and gas turbine propulsion system, which will be tried and assessed at a Land Based Engineering Test Site being built near the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Philadelphia. Testing on land will feature a full configuration of the frigate's power plant so "we're not learning at the waterfront where it's a little more expensive" to fix problems, Smith said.

The Constellation will also have a beam of 64.6 feet, a draft of 18 feet and a fully loaded displacement of 7,300 tons. "The only thing aluminum on this ship is the mast. Everything else is steel," Smith said.

The layout is very similar to the FREMM frigate, although to meet U.S. Navy standards for reliability, survivability, maintainability, habitability and lethality, Fincantieri designers "had to lengthen the hull a bit" before submitting their proposal, Smith said. The only changes the Navy made after awarding the contract were to include "buy America" provisions mandated by Congress, he said.