

stated that the previous USS *Oregon* “was a battleship best known for its roles in the Spanish American War when it helped destroy Admiral Cervera’s fleet and in the Philippine-American War; it performed blockade duty in Manila Bay and off Lingayen Gulf, served as a station ship, and aided in the capture of Vigan.”⁹³

A Navy News Service article about the Navy’s January 19, 2016, announcement that the Virginia-class attack submarine SSN-801 was being named for Utah stated, “The future USS Utah will be the second naval vessel to bear the name; the first, a battleship designated BB-31, was commissioned in 1911 and had a long, honorable time in service.... While conducting anti-gunnery exercises in Pearl Harbor, BB-31 was struck by a torpedo and capsized during the initial stages of the Japanese attack [on December 7, 1941]. She was struck from the Navy record Nov. 13, 1944 and received a battle star for her service in World War I.”⁹⁴

The Navy’s naming announcements for Virginia-class submarines have reduced the group of states for which several decades had passed since a ship named for the state had been in commissioned service with the Navy as a combat asset, and for which no ship by that name is currently under construction. This group used to include Illinois, Delaware, Vermont, Oregon, Montana, Oklahoma, and Arizona, but Virginia-class attack submarines have now been named for these states. (See the Virginia-class attack submarine naming announcements of April 13, 2012; November 19, 2012; September 18, 2014; October 10, 2014; September 2, 2015, and December 23, 2019, respectively.)

As discussed earlier in the section on rules for naming attack submarines, over the next several years, the Navy can manage the situation of having not more than 50 states for which ships can be named by amending the naming rule for the Virginia class, by maintaining the state naming rule but making additional exceptions to the rule, and/or by giving Virginia-class boats the same state names as the earliest-retiring Ohio-class boats.⁹⁵ (Ohio-class boats, however, are currently scheduled to be retired in FY2026 and subsequent years at a rate of generally one boat per year.)

Ships Named for Living Persons

The Navy historically has only rarely named ships for living persons, meaning (throughout this CRS report) persons who were living at the time the name was announced. As shown in **Table 1**, since the naming of CVN-70 for Carl Vinson in 1974, at least 24 U.S. military ships have been named for living persons. With one exception (LCS-10, which was named for Gabrielle Giffords), the persons in question were at least 73 years old at the time the name was announced. Eight of the 21 naming decisions were announced between January 2012 and March 2016, including 3 announced in 2012 and 4 announced in 2016. In four of the nine most-recent instances, the ships were named for current or former Members of Congress.

⁹³ “Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus Names Virginia-Class Submarine USS Oregon,” Navy News Service, October 10, 2014.

⁹⁴ “Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus Names Virginia-Class Submarine,” *Navy News Service*, January 19, 2016. BB-31 was decommissioned on September 5, 1944, and then struck from the navy record on November 13, 1944.

⁹⁵ 10 U.S.C. 8662(a) states: “Not more than one vessel of the Navy may have the same name.” Interpreting the phrase “vessel of the Navy” to mean a ship that has been delivered to the Navy or commissioned into service with the Navy would permit the Navy to name Virginia-class boats under construction for states whose names are assigned to Ohio-class boats that are to be decommissioned before the Virginia-class boats in question are to be delivered or commissioned into service. Interpreting “vessel of the Navy” to refer additionally to ships that are under construction for the Navy could require the Navy to defer the official act of naming one or more Virginia-class boats that are under construction until Ohio-class boats with the same state names have been decommissioned.

Table I. Ships Since 1973 Named for Persons Who Were Living at the Time

Ship type	Hull number	Ship name	Date name announced	Person's age when name was announced	Fiscal year ship was procured	Year ship entered or is to enter service
Aircraft carrier	CVN-70	<i>Carl Vinson</i>	1/18/1974	90	FY1974	1982
Attack submarine	SSN-709	<i>Hyman G. Rickover</i>	5/9/1983	83	FY1974	1984
Destroyer	DDG-51	<i>Arleigh Burke</i>	11/5/1982	81	FY1985	1991
Aircraft carrier	CVN-74	<i>John C. Stennis</i>	6/23/1988 ^a	86	FY1988	1995
Sealift ship	TAKR-300	<i>Bob Hope</i>	1/27/1994	90	FY1993	1998
Aircraft carrier	CVN-76	<i>Ronald Reagan</i>	2/2/1995	83	FY1995	2003
Attack submarine	SSN-23	<i>Jimmy Carter</i>	4/8/1998	73	FY1996 ^b	2005
Destroyer	DDG-94	<i>Nitze</i>	1/10/2001	93	FY1999	2005
Aircraft carrier	CVN-77	<i>George H.W. Bush</i>	12/9/2002	78	FY2001	2009
Destroyer	DDG-108	<i>Wayne E. Meyer</i>	11/29/2006	80	FY2004	2009
Attack submarine	SSN-785	<i>John Warner</i>	1/8/2009	81	FY2010	2015
Expeditionary transport dock	ESD-2	<i>John Glenn</i>	1/4/2012	90	FY2011	2014
Littoral Combat Ship	LCS-10	<i>Gabrielle Giffords</i>	2/10/2012	41	FY2012	2017
Destroyer	DDG-116	<i>Thomas Hudner</i>	5/7/2012	87	FY2012	2017
Destroyer	DDG-117	<i>Paul Ignatius</i>	5/23/2013	92	FY2013	2018
Oiler	TAO-205	<i>John Lewis</i>	1/6/2016	75	FY2016	2021
Expeditionary Sea Base	ESB-4	<i>Hershel "Woody" Williams</i>	1/14/16	92	FY2014	2018
Destroyer	DDG-120	<i>Carl Levin</i>	3/31/16	81	FY2013	2021
Destroyer	DDG-124	<i>Harvey C. Barnum Jr.</i>	7/28/16	75	FY2016	2021
Destroyer	DDG-56	<i>John S. McCain</i>	7/11/2018 ^c	81	FY1989	1994
Destroyer	DDG-133	<i>Sam Nunn</i>	5/6/2019	80	FY2020	2026
Destroyer	DDG-137	<i>John F. Lehman</i>	10/13/2020	78	FY2021	2027
Expeditionary Sea Base	ESB-6	<i>John L. Canley</i>	11/10/2020	82	FY2018	2022
Expeditionary Sea Base	ESB-7	<i>Robert E. Simanek</i>	1/15/2021	90	FY2019	2023

Source: Compiled by CRS. Source for dates when names were announced for CVN-70 through DDG-108: Navy Office of Legislative Affairs email to CRS, May 1, 2012. Sources for dates when names of ships after DDG-108 were announced: Navy announcements and news accounts on the naming of those ships.

- a. This is the date that President Reagan announced that the ship would be named for Stennis. The Navy officially named the ship for Stennis on December 19, 1988.
- b. SSN-23 was originally procured in FY1992. Its procurement was suspended, and then reinstated in FY1996.
- c. On July 11, 2018, the Navy announced that it was expanding the name of the destroyer *John S. McCain* (DDG-56), originally named for Admiral John S. McCain (1884-1945) and Admiral John S. McCain Jr. (1911-1981), to also include Senator John S. McCain III.

The Navy stated in February 2012 that

The Navy named several ships for living people (ex. George Washington, Ben Franklin, etc.) in the early years of our Republic. The Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHHC) believes that the last ship to be named by the Navy in honor of a living person prior to [the aircraft carrier] CARL VINSON (CVN-70) was the brig JEFFERSON (launched in April 1814). Between 1814 and November 18, 1973, when President Nixon announced the naming of CARL VINSON,⁹⁶ NHHHC does not believe that any ships had

⁹⁶ Although President Nixon announced on November 18, 1973, that CVN-70 would be named for Carl Vinson, as shown in **Table I**, the name apparently was officially given to the ship on January 18, 1974.

been named for a living person by the Navy as NHHC does not have records that would indicate such.⁹⁷

The July 2012 Navy report to Congress, noting a case from 1900 that was not included in the above passage, states that

the practice of naming ships in honor of deserving Americans or naval leaders while they are still alive can be traced all the way back to the Revolutionary War. At the time, with little established history or tradition, the young Continental Navy looked to honor those who were fighting so hard to earn America's freedom. Consequently, George Washington had no less than five ships named for him before his death; John Adams and James Madison, three apiece; John Hancock, two; and Benjamin Franklin, one.

The practice of naming ships after living persons was relatively commonplace up through 1814, when a US Navy brig was named in honor of Thomas Jefferson. However, after the War of 1812, with the US Navy older and more established, and with the list of famous Americans and notable naval heroes growing ever longer, the practice of naming ships after living persons fell into disuse. Indeed, the only exception over the next 150 years came in 1900, when the Navy purchased its first submarine from its still living inventor, John Philip Holland, and Secretary of the Navy John D. Long named her USS Holland (SS 1) in his honor....

[In the early 1970s], however, Department of the Navy leaders were considering the name for CVN 70. Secretary of the Navy John Warner knew the 93rd Congress had introduced no less than three bills or amendments (none enacted) urging that CVN 70 be named for in honor of Carl Vinson, who served in the House for 50 years and was known as the "Father of the Two-Ocean Navy." Although Secretary Warner felt Congressman Vinson was more than worthy of a ship name, the former Congressman was still alive. Naming a ship for this giant of naval affairs would therefore violate a 160-year old tradition. After considering the pros and cons of doing so, Secretary Warner asked President Richard Nixon's approval to name CVN 70 for the 90-year old statesman. President Nixon readily agreed. Indeed, he personally announced the decision on January 18, 1974....

In hindsight, rather than this decision being a rare exception, it signaled a return to the Continental Navy tradition of occasionally honoring famous living persons with a ship name. Since then, and before the appointment of current Secretary [now then-Secretary] of the Navy Ray Mabus, Secretaries of the Navy have occasionally chosen to follow this new, "old tradition," naming ships in honor of still living former Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Gerald R. Ford; Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze; Navy Admirals Hyman G. Rickover, Arleigh Burke, and Wayne E. Meyer; Senators John C. Stennis and John Warner; and famous entertainer Bob Hope. Moreover, it is important to note that three of these well-known Americans—Gerald R. Ford, John C. Stennis, and Bob Hope—were so honored after Congress enacted provisions in Public Laws urging the Navy to do so. By its own actions, then, Congress has acknowledged the practice of occasionally naming ships for living persons, if not outright approved of it.

In other words, while naming ships after living persons remains a relatively rare occurrence—about three per decade since 1970—it is now an accepted but sparingly used practice for Pragmatic Secretaries [of the Navy] of both parties. For them, occasionally honoring an especially deserving member of Congress, US naval leader, or famous American with a ship name so that they might end their days on earth knowing that their life's work is both recognized and honored by America's Navy-Marine Corps Team, and

⁹⁷ Navy information paper dated February 28, 2012, provided to CRS by Navy Office of Legislative Affairs, March 1, 2012.

that their spirit will accompany and inspire the Team in battle, is sometimes exactly the right thing to do.⁹⁸

Ships Named for the Confederacy or Confederate Officers

Section 1749 of FY2020 NDAA

Section 1749 of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (S. 1790/P.L. 116-92 of December 20, 2019) prohibits the Secretary of Defense, in naming a new ship (or other asset) or renaming an existing ship (or other asset), from giving the asset a name that refers to, or includes a term referring to, the Confederate States of America, including any name referring to a person who served or held leadership within the Confederacy, or a Confederate battlefield victory. The provision also states that “Nothing in this section may be construed as requiring a Secretary concerned to initiate a review of previously named assets.”

Section 370 of FY2021 NDAA, Creating Naming Commission

Section 370 of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 6395/P.L. 116-283 of January 1, 2021) directs the Secretary of Defense to “establish a commission relating to assigning, modifying, or removing of names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia to assets of the Department of Defense that commemorate the Confederate States of America or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America.” The provision also states that “not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall implement the plan submitted by the commission” and “remove all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia that honor or commemorate the Confederate States of America (commonly referred to as the ‘Confederacy’) or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America from all assets of the Department of Defense.” The provision states (emphasis added) that the term *assets* “includes any base, installation, street, building, facility, aircraft, **ship**, plane, weapon, equipment, or any other property owned or controlled by the Department of Defense.”

The commission created by Section 370 is referred to informally as the Naming Commission and formally as the Commission on the Naming of Items of the Department of Defense that Commemorate the Confederate States of America or Any Person Who Served Voluntarily with the Confederate States of America.

Naming Commission to Decide Whether to Visit USNS Maury (TAGS-66) and USS Chancellorsville (CG-62)

A September 30, 2021, press report states:

A commission tasked with identifying military assets with names tied to the Confederacy has not yet visited two ships that could be renamed.

The Commission on the Naming of Items of the Department of Defense that Commemorate the Confederate States of America or Any Person Who Served Voluntarily with the Confederate States of America, which goes by the shorthand “The Naming Commission,” spent the past summer visiting military bases, mostly Army installations, which are named after members of the Confederacy.

⁹⁸ Department of the Navy, *A Report on Policies and Practices of the U.S. Navy for Naming the Vessels of the Navy*, undated but transmitted to Congress with cover letters dated July 13, 2012, pp. 7-9.