

US Navy ship set to be lifted from Philippine reef

March 28 2013



A January 23, 2013 US Navy handout shows a salvage assessment team working aboard USS Guardian. The final sections of the US Navy ship that has been stuck on a UN World Heritage-listed coral reef in the Philippines for more than 10 weeks are set to be removed within days, an official said Thursday.

The final sections of a US Navy ship that has been stuck on a UN World Heritage-listed coral reef in the Philippines for more than 10 weeks are set to be removed within days, an official said Thursday.

The USS Guardian's bow was cut and lifted onto a salvage vessel this week, and [good weather](#) should lead to the removal of the rest of the ship by Monday, Tubbataha Reef marine park superintendent Angelique Songco said.

"They continue to work, hopefully all done by April 1," Songco told AFP by text message.

The 68-metre (223-foot) minesweeper ran aground on Tubbataha in a remote part of the Sulu Sea on January 17, damaging a section of reef, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#) known for its rich marine life.

It sparked widespread condemnation across the Philippines, a former US colony.

The US government has apologised for the accident, which it initially blamed on faulty maps. The Philippines said it would impose fines.

Due to fears that towing it to deeper waters would inflict more damage on the reef, the US government agreed to scrap and dismantle the Guardian, which was worth about \$277 million.

A series of photographs released by the US Navy on Wednesday showed its front section hanging by crane cables above the water, part of its wooden hull and its metal innards facing the camera.

Salvors began dismantling the ship on February 26, but [bad weather](#) caused them to miss their March 23 target to complete their work.

Songco said a joint team of US and Filipino divers would assess the extent of the reef damage after the vessel was removed.

Under a 2010 law that made Tubbataha a protected area, the US Navy

could face a multi-million-dollar fine for damaging coral, said Gregg Yan, spokesman for the [World Wildlife Fund](#) Philippines.

The WWF helps the government manage Tubbataha.

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