

US Navy poised to take ownership of its largest warship

May 15 2016, by By David Sharp



In this Thursday, May 12, 2016, photo, early morning sun shines on the Zumwalt at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine. The shipyard will soon hand over the largest missile destroyer to the Navy. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

The U.S. Navy is ready to take ownership of the Zumwalt, its largest and most technologically sophisticated destroyer.

Sailors' uniforms and personal effects, supplies and spare parts are being moved aboard the 610-foot warship in anticipation of crew members

taking on their new charge, said Capt. James Kirk, the destroyer's skipper.

The Zumwalt is the first new class of warship built at Bath Iron Works since the Arleigh Burke slid into the Kennebec River in 1989. The shipyard is expected to turn the destroyer over to the Navy this week.

"We've overcome lots of obstacles to get to this point," said electrician John Upham, of Litchfield. "I think everybody in the shipyard is proud of the work we've done."

The ship features an angular shape that makes it 50 times more difficult to detect on radar; it's powered by electricity produced by turbines similar to those in a Boeing 777; new guns are designed to pummel targets from nearly 100 miles away. Advanced automation will allow the big ship to operate with a much smaller crew than on current generation of destroyers.

The final cost of the Zumwalt is expected to be at least \$4.4 billion.

The original concept for the land-attack destroyer was floated more than 15 years ago then underwent several permutations. The final design called for a destroyer with a stealthy shape and advanced gun system that can fire rocket-propelled projectiles with pinpoint accuracy.

But the growing cost forced the Navy to reduce what was originally envisioned as a 32-ship program to just three ships. The loss of economies of scale drove up the cost of the individual ships.

The slow-going and rising costs were little surprise after the General Accounting Office warned that the Navy was trying to incorporate too many new technologies into the ship.

"Zumwalt was a challenge to assemble because of all the new technologies, but sea trials show it is a world-class warship with unique capabilities," said Loren Thompson, senior defense analyst with the Virginia-based Lexington Institute.

Some of the ship's 143 crew members have been in Bath for more than two years to prepare for the day they take control of it. The sailors will continue training to prepare the ship to be formally commissioned into service as USS Zumwalt at a ceremony in October in Baltimore, Kirk said. From there, the ship will travel to its homeport in San Diego for further tests and trials.

Shipbuilders in Bath are busy on the second ship in the class, the Michael Monsoor, which will be christened next month. Work also is underway on the third and final ship, the Lyndon B. Johnson.

Jay Wadleigh, president of the largest union at the shipyard, said Bath Iron Works was selected for the job because the Navy knew it would be done right.

"I think the way the Zumwalt performed on the three different sea trials was better than anybody expected—us, the Navy and the company," he said.

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Citation: US Navy poised to take ownership of its largest warship (2016, May 15) retrieved 27 January 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-05-navy-poised-ownership-largest-warship.html>

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