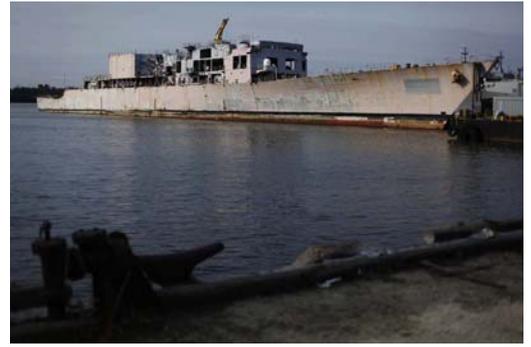


Navy destroyer to be sunk off Ocean City for fish reef Arthur W. Radford scuttling set for November

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Maryland fishermen and scuba divers may soon have a new destination just 30 miles off Ocean City as the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife prepares to turn a 563-foot Navy destroyer into a fish reef.

The decommissioned warship, the former USS Arthur W. Radford, is now at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where it is being cleaned and prepared for scuttling this fall. The \$800,000 cost of preparation, towing and sinking is being shared by New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland, according to the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife.



"We're shooting for deployment in the mid-October to mid-November range," said Lawrence Hajna, spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

"The ship is still being prepped," he said. That includes the removal of its superstructure, wiring, asbestos, and "anything that floats ... leaving just the shell of the ship."

Its final destination is the Del-Jerseyland Inshore Reef. It's about 30 miles southeast of Cape May, and about the same distance from Indian River, Del., and Ocean City, Md.

Plans call for the Radford to be sunk in 135 feet of water. If all goes well, it will rest upright, with the top of the vessel about 60 feet from the surface. It would be the longest vessel ever converted for use as an offshore reef on the East Coast.

Hajna said experience with such artificial reefs suggests that "the crustaceans and the sport fish [will be] moving in very quickly. ... If you're a diver or if you're a [fisherman], I'm sure this will be a wonderful place to recreate."

Artificial reefs are nothing new to the waters off Ocean City. Among the objects sunk to attract fish and tourism in recent decades were about 400,000 tires, slashed, chained, weighted and dumped in the 1960s and 1970s. Corrosion and storms later conspired to set thousands of them free, periodically turning up in fishing trawlers' nets and littering the Assateague Island shoreline.

Since then, a variety of ships, Army tanks, an old submarine, dozens of old New York City subway cars and an unknown number of Eternal Reefs — giant concrete balls containing human ashes — have been consigned to the deep.

There are numerous artificial reefs in the Chesapeake Bay, too, including demolition debris from the old Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

The Arthur W. Radford was named for the first naval officer to become the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Spruance Class destroyer was built by the Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton Industries in Pascagoula, Miss. It was launched in 1975 and commissioned in 1977.

The Radford served in the Persian Gulf War. It made news in February 1999, when it was involved in a collision with a Baltimore-bound Saudi container ship off the Virginia Capes. Thirteen sailors were injured, and the Radford sustained \$32.7 million in damage. Its commander was later relieved of duty.

The ship was decommissioned in 2003.

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