

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: ex-USS *Vancouver* (LPD-2)



USS *Vancouver* underway off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii in 1967. U.S. Navy photo by PH3 D.R. Hyder.
<http://www.navsourc.org/archives/10/09/0902.htm>

Vessel History

The amphibious transport dock ship USS *Vancouver* (LPD-2) was laid down on November 19, 1960 at the New York Naval Shipyard in Brooklyn, New York. It was launched on September 15, 1962, and commissioned on May 11, 1963. *Vancouver* was the second of three *Raleigh*-class LPDs; USS *La Salle* (LPD-3) was the third and last of the class. LPDs are named for cities that honor celebrated pioneers and explorers. *Vancouver* was named for the town of Vancouver, Washington. George Vancouver (1757-1798), British naval officer and explorer, commanded a British expedition that explored Puget Sound in 1792.

After completing builder's trials off New York in the summer of 1963, *Vancouver* proceeded to Norfolk, Virginia for shakedown training. On August 14 *Vancouver* steamed from there to its new homeport of San Diego, California via the Panama Canal. Following a brief stop at Acapulco, Mexico after assisting a disabled fishing vessel, *Vancouver* arrived in San Diego on

August 31. That fall *Vancouver* conducted amphibious operations and visited its namesake, Vancouver, Washington. In December, *Vancouver* displayed its capabilities for the new Secretary of the Navy Paul H. Nitze and several high-ranking naval officers. From February to May 1964, *Vancouver* underwent post-shakedown maintenance and repairs in Long Beach, California. In late June it steamed north to Vancouver, Canada for that city's annual maritime festival prior to spending the July 4th holiday in San Francisco. *Vancouver* participated in three amphibious landing exercises between July and October before loading U.S. Marines at Port Hueneme, California for its first voyage to East Asia.

Vietnam War (1964-1966)

U.S. military involvement in Vietnam soon surged following the Tonkin Gulf incidents in early August 1964. In just under four months, *Vancouver* was steaming to Buckner Bay, Okinawa, Japan, carrying hundreds of U.S. Marines. From December through January, *Vancouver* transported marines between Okinawa and Subic Bay in the Philippines.

On March 8, 1965, *Vancouver*, along with USS *Henrico* (APA-45), and USS *Union* (AKA-106), disembarked the first U.S. combat troops in Vietnam when 3,500 U.S. Marines landed at China Beach to protect the American air base at Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) from 6,000 Viet Cong located in the surrounding area. This marked the beginning of large-scale U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.



Clockwise from bottom right: 1) Vancouver with its stern gate open during amphibious operations. Date and location are unknown. U.S. Navy photo from "All Hands" magazine, June 1964. <http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/09/0902.htm> 2) Marines coming ashore on March 8, 1965 northwest of Da Nang. 3) Marines landing at Da Nang, RVN on March 8, 1965 in landing tanks from USS Vancouver. U.S. Marine Corps photos. <http://www.talkingproud.us/Military/BreakerPatrol/BreakerPatrolKheSanh/BreakerPatrolKheSanh.html>

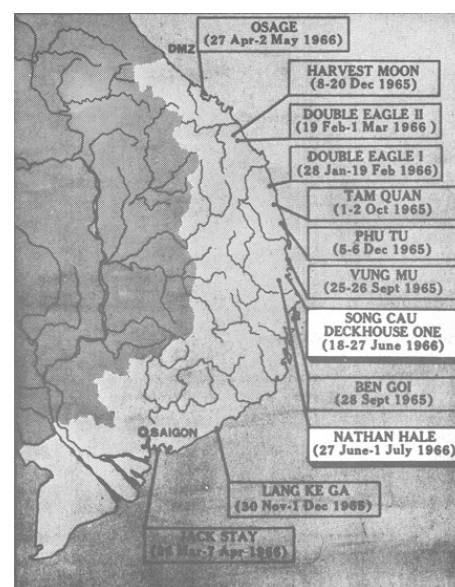




Vancouver conducted several resupply missions to the RVN before returning to San Diego in June 1965. The ship spent less than two months there before steaming back to East Asia with another load of marines. For the next several months, *Vancouver* ferried troops and supplies to the RVN. It returned to San Diego in October. After a long maintenance period and several subsequent training exercises, *Vancouver* left its homeport on July 9, 1966, transporting marines to Subic Bay where it joined the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). The ship participated in amphibious landing exercises in the Philippines before leaving for Vietnam on August 12.

Vancouver participated in its first combat action during Operation DECKHOUSE III,¹ which consisted of two landings in an area about 60 miles east of Saigon. In the first assault, boats and helicopters put marines ashore to destroy a fortified Viet Cong village. *Vancouver* supported a second set of landings in Operation TOLEDO, a mission to locate and destroy enemy stockpiles of arms and supplies. On August 29 at the operation's end, *Vancouver* steamed to Subic Bay for some rest and maintenance.

Vancouver returned to the war zone in mid-September for Operation DECKHOUSE IV. The ARG put marines ashore just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to destroy fortifications and supply caches thereby reducing infiltration from the north. *Vancouver* re-embarked marines on September 25 and transported them to Da Nang before departing the RVN for Okinawa. In Okinawa, *Vancouver* turned around quickly to embark more marines bound for Vietnam. The ship operated off the DMZ during most of October, landing marines and later taking another contingent on board before returning to Subic Bay. On December 31, 1966, *Vancouver* arrived off the mouth of the Saigon River.



Top left: Map of Vietnamese Naval Commands.

Bottom right: Map of Special Landing Force Operations through June 1966.

<http://www.history.navy.mil/docs/vietnam/high66-6.html>

¹ Operation DECKHOUSE involved amphibious assault operations along the coast of the RVN from June 18, 1966-January 15, 1967. Operation DECKHOUSE I was the first of six DECKHOUSE operations.

1967-1968

On January 4, 1967 *Vancouver* embarked more than 500 South Vietnamese troops at Vung Tau to secure the approaches to Saigon's port in Operation DECKHOUSE V, a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese mission involving marines from both countries. On January 6, *Vancouver* landed the bi-national force using both assault craft and helicopters. The ship remained in the area for the next 10 days supporting riverine operations. At the end of the operation, *Vancouver* transported RVN troops back to Vung Tau and steamed from there to the Philippines. After two days in Subic Bay, *Vancouver* headed to Okinawa to disembark U.S. Marines.

In early February the ship visited Keelung, Taiwan and later participated in amphibious exercises in the Philippines. *Vancouver* left there on February 12 to resume operations off Vietnam, beginning with the next amphibious assault Operation DECKHOUSE VI. At the end of the operation it proceeded to Subic Bay and later visited Hong Kong and Okinawa before departing Yokosuka, Japan for San Diego on March 24. Calling at Pearl Harbor for three days, *Vancouver* arrived back in San Diego on April 8.



USS *Vancouver* underway off the Vietnamese coast near the DMZ during amphibious operations in 1969. Photo by William P. Jones M.D., former Medical Officer, USS *Niagara Falls* (AFS-3).
<http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/09/0902.htm>

Vancouver remained on the West Coast for the remainder of 1967. In July, it participated in the warship gathering for the Canadian Centennial celebration in Vancouver, Canada. During this period, much of its time was spent underway conducting amphibious landing exercises. On February 1, 1968, *Vancouver* traveled from San Diego for its next tour in Southeast Asia. The ship stopped at Pearl Harbor to embark part of the First Battalion, 27th Marines for landing exercise training at Okinawa. Instead, *Vancouver* was diverted to Da Nang to land marines in response to the Tet Offensive.² After another troop lift at Subic Bay, *Vancouver* remained off the Vietnamese coast moving troops and supplies and repairing landing craft until April 1968.

Vancouver returned to Subic Bay on April 15 for 10 days and resumed operations off Vietnam near the mouth of the Cua Viet River supporting U.S. defensive positions around Dong Ha. On June 3, *Vancouver* embarked marines for Operation SWIFT SABRE. This assault, involving both landing craft and helicopters, focused on eliminating the enemy in areas within Thua Thien Province, which had been the source of mortar attacks on the air base at Da Nang. *Vancouver* returned to the Philippines in mid-June for a period of maintenance and to participate in the amphibious training exercise HILLTOP XX.

It left Subic Bay on July 5 and four days later *Vancouver* was landing marines and providing logistical support for the construction of landing zones and defensive positions 10 miles east of Phu Bai in Operation EAGER YANKEE. *Vancouver* embarked marines on July 22 and transported them to Quang Nam Province for a helicopter assault 10 miles southwest of Hoi An in Operation SWIFT PLAY. *Vancouver* remained in the area providing support until August 19, when it sailed for Subic Bay. USS *Ogden* (LPD-5) relieved *Vancouver* and the ship proceeded to Hong Kong for a five-day visit. It sailed from there for Japan but was diverted back to Subic Bay to avoid a typhoon. After the storm passed, it continued on to Okinawa and Yokosuka where it sailed for the U.S. West Coast on September 17.

1968-1969

Vancouver arrived back in San Diego on September 28, 1968. The ship participated in training exercises off the coast until early February 1969 when it went into a San Francisco shipyard for a major overhaul. The ship was subsequently drydocked at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard before returning to San Diego on May 28, 1969. After post-shipyard trials and additional training exercises, the ship embarked military vehicles and supplies at San Diego and sailed on August 1, 1969 for its next tour in Southeast Asia. *Vancouver* visited Pearl Harbor for three days prior to unloading cargo at Buckner Bay, Okinawa. *Vancouver* discharged its remaining cargo at Tau My and Da Nang in late August, then headed to Subic Bay to relieve the USS *Paul Revere* (LPA-248) as part of ARG *Bravo*, (Task Group 76.5³). On September 6 *Vancouver* departed Subic Bay for Da Nang for its first line tour with the ARG.

² The Tet Offensive began during the night of January 29/30, 1968 and spread across all of the RVN the following night. During the first few days of the month-long offensive, more than 80,000 communist troops launched attacks across 100 towns and cities, initially taking U.S. and RVN forces by surprise.

³ Task Force 76.5 is a component of the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet that carries the Marine Special Landing Force.

Operation DEFIANT STAND: September 7-19, 1969

On September 12 as part of ARG *Bravo*, *Vancouver* staged an amphibious landing within 10 miles of Barrier Island⁴ to draw the enemy away from the actual landing zone. Known as Operation DEFIANT STAND, the mission was unique in that it included marines from the Republic of South Korea (ROK) known as the “Blue Dragons.” Their participation marked the first amphibious assault conducted by the ROK Marine Corps. Operation DEFIANT STAND proved to be the last special landing force amphibious landing of the war as President Richard M. Nixon announced the staged withdrawal of U.S. forces. *Vancouver* participated in the withdrawal by embarking marines at Cua Viet and transporting them to Okinawa and Subic Bay. The ship later returned to the Vietnamese coast in both mid-November and December.

Left: Republic of Korea Marines preparing defensive positions near Tuy Hoa, RVN.

<http://www.talkingproud.us/Military/ROKVI/etnam/ROKVIetnamBlueDragons/ROKVIetnamBlueDragons.html>



⁴Barrier Island is 34 miles south of Da Nang.

1970-1973

Vancouver operated between Okinawa and Subic Bay with a four-day visit to Kaohsiung, Taiwan in January and February 1970. The ship visited Da Nang again on March 11, before refueling at Okinawa and steaming for the U.S. West Coast after being relieved by USS *Denver* (LPD-9). *Vancouver* underwent drydocking and repairs in San Diego until early June 1970. On June 10 it sailed from there carrying U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen on their summer cruise. It called at Yokosuka and Hong Kong, and later loaded cargo at Da Nang. The ship stopped at Pearl Harbor on its return and arrived in San Diego on August 1, 1970. The remainder of that year and the first part of 1971 was spent training off the West Coast. It sailed from San Diego on March 30, made a two-day visit to Pearl Harbor, and arrived in Subic Bay on April 19. During the next six months *Vancouver* alternated cargo lifts among the Vietnamese ports of Vung Tau; Danang; Camranh Bay; and Qui Nhon; and Subic Bay and Okinawa; with port visits to Singapore, Kaohsiung, Hong Kong and Sasebo, Japan. In late July and early September the ship participated in amphibious landing exercises at Zambales, Philippines. It departed Subic Bay on its return to the U.S. on October 14. After calling at Okinawa and Pearl Harbor, *Vancouver* arrived back in San Diego on November 5.

Following a period of additional maintenance and later participating in operations off the Pacific Coast, *Vancouver* embarked U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen again on June 10, 1972 for their annual cruise to East Asia. It visited Yokosuka, Japan; Hong Kong and Subic Bay. *Vancouver* returned to San Diego on August 4 for an overhaul that lasted through the remainder of 1972. It completed post overhaul sea trials in early February 1973 followed by refresher training.

Vancouver sailed for East Asia on March 17, arriving in Sasebo, Japan on April 4. From there it proceeded to Okinawa and Subic Bay. At Subic Bay *Vancouver* relieved USS *Cleveland* (LPD-7) as the support ship for Operation END SWEEP, the clearing of U.S. mines from Vietnamese waters. It operated off the coast of Vietnam until July 18, with liberty breaks in Hong Kong, the Philippines and to several Japanese ports. After two more months in East Asia, it sailed on September for Pearl Harbor and San Diego, arriving at San Diego on October 9.

1974-1976

The following year *Vancouver* participated in training exercises off the Pacific Coast involving helicopter and landing craft assaults and full scale amphibious operations. On October 18, 1974, the ship departed for East Asia. After calling at Pearl Harbor on October 25, it arrived at Buckner Bay, Okinawa on November 9. It relieved USS *Ogden* (LPD-5) in ARG *Alpha* and participated in training exercises until the spring of 1975, when it participated in Operation EAGLE PULL, assisting the evacuation of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. It departed Okinawa for the U.S. on May 20 and arrived in San Diego on June 6. The remainder of 1975 and the first nine months of 1976 were spent training in U.S. waters.

Post-Vietnam

Vancouver sailed for East Asia again on September 25, 1976. It stopped at Pearl Harbor and Kwajalein Atoll. From Kwajalein it proceeded to Broad Sound, Australia to participate in the international amphibious training exercise Operation KANGAROO II. In October, *Vancouver* proceeded to Sydney for a five-day visit. It arrived in Okinawa on November 20 and Subic Bay four days later. The remainder of the East Asian deployment was spent on training operations in the Philippines and a joint U.S. and South Korean exercise in March and April 1977. The ship visited Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore before *Vancouver* steamed from Subic Bay for the U.S. on April 28. It stopped at Okinawa, Eniwetok and Pearl Harbor, arriving back in San Diego on May 21. It spent most of the remainder of 1977 and the beginning of 1978 at the Bethlehem Steel Company shipyard in San Pedro, California for repairs and overhaul.

The overhaul was completed on April 18, 1978. That summer, *Vancouver* participated in training exercises off the U.S. West Coast and sailed from San Diego on its next East Asian cruise on August 31. It visited Eniwetok, the Marshall Islands, Subic Bay, Hong Kong and Pusan, South Korea. *Vancouver* spent the remainder of 1978 with the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet in the Western Pacific. After a return to the U.S. West Coast, *Vancouver* sailed to Southeast Asia on May 24, 1980. This time the ship also operated in the Indian Ocean, including a visit to the western Australian port of Fremantle from September 27 to October 3.

In the fall of 1982 *Vancouver* attended the October "Fleet Week" event in San Francisco. The ship revisited the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean in 1983, calling at Fremantle again on April 26. During this cruise the ship grounded on a shoal off the northeast coast of Australia damaging both screws. In September 1989 the ship was off the coast of Thailand participating in joint U.S.-Thai amphibious exercises.

In 1990, after nearly a decade of peacetime operations, *Vancouver* prepared for Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, the U.S. response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It was assigned to ARG 3 and embarked marines of the Fifth Expeditionary Brigade. The 13 ships of ARG 3 departed the U.S. on December 1, 1990. *Vancouver* arrived in the North Arabian Sea on January 12, 1991. U.S. forces conducted amphibious landing drills in the Persian Gulf area and *Vancouver* was stationed off the coast of Kuwait during the liberation of that country and the later advance into Iraq. Due to the short duration of the war the marines on board *Vancouver* were only held in reserve and did not participate in combat operations. In May, the ship assisted relief operations in Bangladesh following that year's catastrophic cyclone. It returned to the West Coast by way of Pearl Harbor, leaving there for San Diego on June 1, 1991.

Maritime Administration

After nearly 30 years of service, the Navy decommissioned *Vancouver* in San Diego on March 27, 1992 and moved the ship to the Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility at Pearl Harbor. The Navy struck *Vancouver* from the Naval Vessel Register on April 8, 1997 and moved the ship to

the Maritime Administration's (MARAD) Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet (SBRF) in Benicia, California in September 2001. The Navy transferred the ship to MARAD on November 29, 2001. Since that time, *Vancouver* has been at the SBRF. Over the years, several museum/memorial ships have removed parts and equipment to maintain their vessels.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Ship: ex-USS *Vancouver*
Type: Amphibious Transport Dock Ship
Class: *Raleigh*
Hull Number: LPD-2
Builder: New York Naval Shipyard in Brooklyn, New York.
Length: 522'
Beam: 100'
Draft: 20'
Displacement: 13,600 full load
Speed: 21 knots
Armament: Four 3-inch (76 mm)/50 caliber guns
Complement: 436

Amphibious transport dock ships are warships that embark, transport, and land elements of a landing force for a variety of expeditionary warfare missions. The first vessel capable of docking landing craft in a flooded "well deck" was the *Ashland*-class Landing Ship Dock (LSD). USS *Ashland* (shown below on left) was 458-feet long and could carry three LCTs (landing craft tank) or 14 LCMs (landing craft mechanized) and 24 tanks. The U.S. Navy built 21 LSDs between 1942 and 1945 with a second series (Thomaston-class) built in the 1950s. USS *Thomaston* was 510-feet long with a speed of 22.5 knots and it could carry 21 LCMs. Eight *Thomaston*-class vessels were built between 1954 and 1956. By this time it became obvious that the helicopter would play as important a role in future assault operations as the landing craft. To that end, work began on the design of two new vessel types, the Amphibious Assault Ship Helicopter (LPH) and the amphibious transport dock (LPD).



USS *Ashland* (LSD-1) underway off Cape Henry, Virginia, May 20, 1953. *Ashland* has been virtually unmodified since its commissioning 10 years earlier. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy, Naval History and Heritage Command.



USS *Thomaston* (LSD-28) departing San Diego, date unknown. U.S. Navy photo. <http://www.navy.mil/photos/infocenter/10/12/1228.htm>.

Photo # USN 1104168 USS Valley Forge (LPH-8), May 1964



Photo # NH 96945 USS Valley Forge (LPH-8) transporting aircraft



USS Valley Forge (LPH-8) underway circa 1960s. The ship resembles a small aircraft carrier. Photos courtesy of the U.S. Navy, Naval History and Heritage Command.

The marines visualized a ship that could not only carry helicopters, but one that could also transport heavy landing craft. Ultimately the cost for this design proved prohibitive so the Navy modified the existing LSD design. Like the LSD, *Vancouver* had a floodable well deck for landing craft entering through a stern gate. Its well deck was shorter than the LSD so that it could accommodate more troops and cargo. The ship's overall length was 522 feet with a beam of 100 feet. *Vancouver* was designed to transport 980 marines and approximately 2,500 tons of cargo. The well deck could accommodate either nine LCMs or one LCU (landing craft utility) and three LCMs. There was an overhead gantry system for transferring palletized cargo to landing craft and a crane on deck just forward of the helicopter deck with a 30-ton capacity. The ship had twin screws. The machinery spaces contained a boiler room and twin steam turbines located below the well deck. The turbines produced 24,000 shaft horsepower for an operating speed of 21 knots. The ship was armed with four 3-inch 50-caliber guns and carried a complement of 436. It only had a flight deck aft large enough for two helicopter pads with no provisions for storing or servicing helicopters, which were used only to land, embark or disembark troops or cargo or to refuel.

The idea of the LPD was formulated as a way to distinguish it from the LPH. The LPH had the general appearance of a small aircraft carrier; however it was designed to handle only vertical takeoff aircraft. It had a full length flight deck and an offset island superstructure. Helicopters could be moved on elevators between the flight deck and a hangar deck for storage and maintenance.

The *Austin* class followed the *Raleigh* class, which embodied a number of modifications including greater length. *San Antonio* is the newest class. The Navy commissioned USS *New*

York (LPD-21), in 2009. Northrop Grumman Ships Systems used steel from the World Trade Center in the construction of *New York's* frame.

Statement of Significance

Vancouver was the second of three *Raleigh*-class amphibious transport dock ships built for the U.S. Navy in the early 1960s. It had a very active career and was awarded 11 battle stars for its service during the Vietnam War. *Vancouver* was one of three U.S. Navy vessels that disembarked the first U.S. combat troops in Vietnam when 3,500 marines landed at China Beach to protect the American air base at Da Nang, RVN, thus marking the start of large-scale U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. *Vancouver* also participated in Operation DEFIANT STAND, which was the last special landing force amphibious landings of the war. *Vancouver* also participated in Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM in 1990-1991.

Integrity of Characteristics/Features

The vessel was originally constructed in 1962 and did not undergo any substantial modifications during its service life. Certain pieces of equipment have been stripped from the ship since its layup at the SBRF to support memorial ships. Otherwise, the vessel retains its historical integrity, being substantially unchanged from original construction. The vessel is in fair condition and has been in the fleet for 10 years. Prior to the ship's decommissioning, the U.S. Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command removed a number of artifacts from *Vancouver* as part of its curation policy. Artifacts include the ship's builder's plate; bell; commissioning pennant, among others. *Vancouver's* chaff launchers are currently installed aboard the museum/memorial ship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) located in Honolulu, Hawaii as replacement parts for their display.

National Register Eligibility Statement

The Department of the Navy's Program Comment for the Disposition of Historic Vessels states:

Recognizing that vessels have a limited useful life of typically less than fifty years, the Navy has determined that, for Section 106 and Section 110 purposes, vessels possessing any of the following characteristics at any time, including during active service, are of exceptional importance and meet the listing eligibility criteria established by the NPS and codified at 36 C.F.R. § 60.4:

- i. The vessel was awarded an individual Presidential Unit Citation. (A Presidential Unit Citation is awarded to military units that have performed an extremely meritorious or heroic act, usually in the face of an armed enemy.);
- ii. An individual act of heroism took place aboard the vessel such that an individual was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor or the Navy Cross. (The Medal of Honor is awarded for valor in action against an enemy force. The Navy Cross is

- awarded for extraordinary heroism in action not justifying an award of the Medal of Honor.);
- iii. A President of the United States was assigned to the vessel during his or her naval service;
 - iv. The vessel was the first to incorporate engineering, weapons systems, or other upgrades that represent a revolutionary change in naval design or warfighting capabilities, or other special and unique considerations;
 - v. Some other historic or socially significant event occurred on the vessel.

Vancouver is not yet 50-years-old; however, the ship participated in operations that marked the start of large-scale military involvement in Vietnam, when it was just one of three ships that landed the first U.S. combat troops in Vietnam on March 8, 1965. This pivotal moment in history signaled the start of America's long involvement in Vietnam. Moreover, *Vancouver* participated in Operation DEFIANT STAND, which marked the last special landing force amphibious landings of the war. These events are "associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history."⁵ Therefore, MARAD has determined that *Vancouver* is eligible under National Register Criteria A and Consideration G and Criteria v of the U.S. Navy's Program Comment.

Determination: ELIGIBLE

Date: 07 March 2012

⁵ U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation.

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