

USS MIAMI SUBMARINE FIRE

On May 23, 2012, Portsmouth Naval Yard and numerous local fire crews responded to a fire aboard the USS Miami (SSN 755), a U. S. Navy Los Angeles-class submarine that was undergoing an extensive engineering overhaul at the Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. The fire burned for 12 hours and injured 7 people. Crews battling the blaze had to adhere to time limits for each firefighter working in the sub's constrained spaces to reduce exposure to potentially hazardous fumes and materials. The extensive damage to the submarine—estimated at \$450 million— hindered initial investigative efforts to determine the cause of the fire, including whether the fire was set intentionally.

Two subsequent events ultimately led to the identification of the cause and the person responsible for the devastating fire. On June 16, a fire was found on the dry dock cradle holding the USS Miami.

This fire was quickly extinguished and caused little damage. On June 19, a fire alarm in the vicinity of the USS Miami was activated but no fire was found. The investigation revealed that the alarm was deliberately pulled and not a result of a faulty system.

Several NCIS field offices were involved in the fire investigation, which utilized the full complement of NCIS capabilities, including extensive surveillance, forensics consultants, analytical support, polygraph, and technical services. Several local and federal law enforcement agencies, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, provided support as well.

Originally, it was reported that the fire that destroyed the Miami had started after items inside an industrial vacuum cleaner accidentally ignited. NCIS Special Agents interviewed hundreds of personnel who had been working aboard the USS Miami. Using 3-D models of the vessel to better visualize the fire and smoke damage, agents compared the physical evidence with what workers had reported.

Ultimately, investigators determined the fire had been intentionally set by Casey James Fury, a civilian contract painter and sandblaster who worked on the sub. After several interviews throughout the investigation, Fury confessed to setting the smaller fire on the dry dock cradle and pulling the fire alarm, but he denied any involvement in the first fire. Fury failed a polygraph examination. In a subsequent interview, he confessed to

NCIS Special Agents that he intentionally set the first fire. During the interrogation, Fury explained that he used a cigarette lighter to ignite a pile of rags so that he could leave work early that day. Fury had been in the vicinity at the time of all three events, and the details of his confession were consistent with the physical evidence that had been collected.

On March 15, 2013, Fury was sentenced to 17 years in Federal prison and was ordered to pay \$400 million in restitution after pleading guilty to two charges of arson within the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States. The Navy subsequently determined that the damage exceeded \$450 million and that it was too costly to repair the submarine. In the fall of 2013, the Navy announced the inactivation of the USS Miami and the vessel was formally decommissioned in March of 2014.

In addition to identifying the person responsible for the fire so he could be held accountable, the NCIS investigation was of great value to the Navy in other ways. By putting to rest the possibility that a maintenance program process or procedure caused the first fire, the Navy avoided the expense and interruption of recalling other vessels for safety inspections.

Los Angeles-class submarines are nuclear-powered vessels that serve as both offensive and defensive weapons. They are designed to protect friendly surface combatants and submarines as well as attack and sink enemy submarines or surface ships.



THE LOS ANGELES-CLASS ATTACK SUBMARINE USS MIAMI (SSN 755) ENTERS DRY DOCK TO BEGIN AN ENGINEERED OVERHAUL AT PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD. U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY JIM CLEVELAND/RELEASED

(TOP) THE LOS ANGELES-CLASS ATTACK SUBMARINE USS MIAMI RETURNS HOME TO SUBMARINE BASE NEW LONDON. U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY VIRGINIA SCHAEFER. (LEFT) THE DRY DOCK CRADLE HOLDING THE USS MIAMI AND SCENE OF THE SECOND FIRE.

