

The New York Times

October 14, 2012

Collision of Navy Ships Prompts Pentagon Inquiry

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — The Pentagon is investigating a collision over the weekend involving a Navy nuclear submarine and an Aegis cruiser off the East Coast.

The United States Fleet Forces Command said in a news release that the submarine Montpelier and the cruiser San Jacinto collided about 3:30 p.m. Saturday during a training exercise. No one was injured and both ships were able to continue to operate under their own power, Navy officials said.

Nevertheless, the extent of any damage to the vessels was not clear, said Lt. Cmdr. Brian Badura of the Fleet Forces Command.

“We have had circumstances where Navy vessels have collided at sea in the past, but they’re fairly rare as to how often they do take place,” Commander Badura said. Navy officials said the collision was under investigation, but declined to offer specifics on where it occurred.

The Montpelier arrived at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in southern Georgia, he said in a statement late Sunday. The San Jacinto arrived at Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville, Fla.

The fleet command’s news release said that “overall damage to both ships is being evaluated,” and that the submarine’s propulsion plant was “unaffected by the collision.” Both ships are based in Norfolk, Va.

A Navy official said on Saturday that the two ships were participating in a “group sail” with the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman. The three ships were participating in an antisubmarine exercise in preparation for a deployment as part of the strike group lead by the Truman.

A Navy official said that about 3:30 p.m. the bridge watch aboard the San Jacinto saw the submarine Montpelier rise to periscope depth about 100 to 200 yards ahead of it. The bridge ordered an “all back,” but still collided with the submarine.

According to the official, the initial assessment of damage was that there was a complete depressurization of the sonar dome aboard the San Jacinto. Lying below the water line of surface warships, sonar domes provide the bulbous shape to the bows of warships.

After the collision the official said the submarine surfaced and communications were established between the ships.

Collisions between Navy submarines and surface warships are rare.

In March, 2009 the submarine Hartford suffered severe damage to its conning tower after colliding with the amphibious transport ship New Orleans in the Strait of Hormuz. A subsequent investigation found fault for the collision lay with the commanders aboard the submarine.