

New York sails to war

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At the end of this month, USS New York will sail east from her home port in Norfolk, headed for waters in extremely unstable and threatening areas of the world. She'll operate in and around the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

With tons of steel from the Twin Towers forged into her bow, the ship is a unique symbol of America's resistance to the twin evils of tyranny and terrorism. Her motto is "Strength Forged Through Sacrifice. Never Forget."

Commissioned in New York City on Nov. 7, 2009, USS New York's special connection with her namesake town has been particularly meaningful for the city's 9/11 families; many see the ship and the men and women who serve in her as a tangible expression of their deep personal reactions to the unspeakable brutality delivered upon their loved ones on that day.

New York is one of a new class of amphibious ships. Her crew has spent the months since commissioning training in complex operations, as she'll operate as an airport for sophisticated aircraft as well as a seagoing base for a variety of state-of-the-art amphibious landing craft. She has also been training with US Marines to project the kind of power that protects our nation and brings credibility to America's voice in peace and war.

For all or most of her coming deployment, New York will be part of a Navy Amphibious Ready Group — a force that is the modern expression of the ancient military concept of expeditionary warfare. In blunt terms, New York's job is to deliver heavily armed Marines at times and places that are inconvenient to those who would do harm to America.

In this role, she is an extremely powerful and useful piece in the Navy/Marine Corps strategy of forward deployment in unstable areas. The fundamental idea is to deter, if possible, those intent on doing harm to the United States and its citizens — and to answer violence and aggression with appropriate strength *when and where* necessary.

That New York will inevitably also support others who are willing to stand against tyranny and terrorism is particularly relevant to the connections between the ship and the city. She will join other elements of US power that speak firmly of our determination to not only defend ourselves, but to advance human liberty and self-respect.

On the occasion of the ship's commissioning at Pier 86, her first commanding officer, then-Commander Curt Jones, wrote to the friends and family of his crew:

"Sept. 11, 2001 will forever be a day that stands in the minds of those who experienced it. On that day, all the citizens of the United States became New Yorkers. An act that was meant to tear us apart and show our weakness brought us together as a nation and made us stronger.

"With 7.5 tons of steel recovered from the World Trade Center site and forged into the bow of this ship, the crew of USS New York will ensure that the world will never forget that day.

"The spirit of those who have gone before us inspires us each day. We draw strength from their sacrifice and have placed the mantle of their memory upon our shoulders."

With those words in mind, we can face the sea on which New York's crew and embarked Marines will sail, salute and repeat the words of Dotty England as she broke the bottle against the ship's bow: "May God bless this ship and all who sail in her."

Joseph Callo's next book, "The Sea Was Always There," will be published this spring.