



MARK OF WARRIORS

By Rear Adm. Joseph F. Callo, USNR (Ret.)

It was a warm, crystal clear morning on March 1, 2008, as guests gathered at Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding in Avondale, La. They were at the shipyard for the christening of USS *New York* (LPD 21). There was a special anticipation in the air that you could feel. The speeches and the music - punctuated regularly by heartfelt applause - moved briskly. As the ship rode comfortably at her mooring lines, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead distilled her mission into a few words: "to be globally positioned and to take the fight forward."

Then came the climax. *New York's* sponsor Dotty Hennlein England gave a determined swing, shattering the Champagne bottle on the ship's bow. Then she followed quickly with an historic declaration and an ancient blessing: "I christen thee *New York*. God-speed to all who sail in her."

A Special Mark

The bow of the ship towered up and over the official party during the christening ceremony, and there were two things that were very special about that bow. The first was that it contains seven and a half tons of steel reclaimed from the World Trade Center after 9/11. The second was a small reproduction of *New York's* coat of arms - generally referred to as the ship's crest - that had been fixed to the ship's bow for the ceremony.

It's hard to imagine anyone focusing on the small crest in the excitement of the moment. Few - perhaps

nobody - actually thought about its importance to the men and women who would take *New York* to sea. But the details of that crest are very significant. Those who will bring *New York* to life at the moment of commissioning in the United States Navy and those who follow them in her crew will surely shape a true character for their ship day by day. But the crest is the beginning of that process. And it will also be an ongoing reminder of how and why this special ship came to be.

The tradition of the coat of arms goes back thousands of years, appearing first in Egypt, before the recorded dynasties of the pharaohs. In those dim early times, the predecessor to the coat of arms was called a "serekh," and it was used to identify military allegiances as well as the products of different groups. The use of coats of arms for towns, families, military units, and kings and queens burgeoned during medieval times, and that usage continues today as a distinctive mark for ships of the U.S. Navy.



With thousands observing, Dotty H. England (right), ship's sponsor, triumphantly raises the Champagne bottle she used to christen LPD 21, *New York*. The fifth Northrop Grumman-built amphibious transport dock ship of the San Antonio class contains 7.5 tons of World Trade Center steel in her bow. Joining England in celebration are (left to right) U.S. Navy Cmdr. F. Curtis Jones, LPD 21's prospective commanding officer; her husband, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England; and Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding President Mike Petters.

Today, and among other things, a ship's crest reminds us of the individuality of each Navy vessel. Those ships may be manufactured in colossal shipyard "assembly lines," they may be part of a class of similar ships, and they may frequently be ordered about in squadrons or fleets, but any sailor will tell you that each ship takes on a distinct personality all its own.

Connections

Toward the top of USS *New York's* crest there is a cluster of elements that connect the ship with New York State and New York City. First, there are seven golden rays of light, representing the seven rays of light projecting from the crown of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. And there is a coincidence in the number of light rays and the seven seas that will be *New York's* domain. Then there is a depiction of the hills and lakes of New York State, along with curved rows of maple leaves, all adapted from the official seal of New York State.

Beneath the cluster of items representative of New York State and New

York City, there is a shield. Within the shield there is a gray chevron pointed upward, representing *New York's* bow, which contains the steel from the Twin Towers. There also are two gray bars representing the Twin Towers. A phoenix is depicted rising from the flames of the 9/11 attack. On the phoenix's breast there is a small shield with two drops of blood that represent the sacrifice of life of the first responders, as well as blue, red, and light blue stripes representing the New York Police Department, the Fire Department of New York, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey respectively. Three stars symbolize the three battle stars earned by the battleship *New York* (BB 34) during the Atlantic and Pacific actions of World War II.

Behind the shield there are crossed swords; one is a ceremonial sword for a U.S. Marine enlisted person and the other is a ceremonial sword for a U.S. Navy enlisted person. The crossed swords focus on the historic importance of the enlisted men and women of the Navy and the Marine Corps. They also re-

mind us of the important links between the Navy and Marine Corps. Finally, the traditional Navy colors of blue and gold are prominent in the crest, with blue representing the sea and gold symbolizing excellence.

Food for Thought

The words "Never Forget" are emblazoned at the bottom of the crest. Those words are the second half of *New York's* motto: "Strength Forged through Sacrifice. Never Forget." Those six words carry a double message.

There is appropriate emphasis on the importance of remembering the attack on innocent civilians on 9/11 as well as those who responded with great courage on that day, running toward danger and their duty when everyone else was running away from peril.

Of equal importance, the statement is also forward looking. It reminds us of the special strength of the men and women who will take USS *New York* to sea - now and in the future - in defense of their country and their fellow citizens.