

NATIONAL OFFICERS

NATIONAL PRESIDENT

CAPT G. Mark Hardy III, USN
E-mail: g.mark.hardy@ausn.org

NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

CAPT Douglas H. McDonald, SC, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: doug.mcdonald@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-OFFICER AFFAIRS

LCDR Steven L. Rogers, USN
E-mail: steven.rogers@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-ENLISTED AFFAIRS

NC1 Merna P. Jones, USN
E-mail: merna.jones@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-RESERVE AFFAIRS

CDR Pamela S. Boyd, USN
E-mail: pamelaboyd@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

CAPT Paul A. Denham, USN
E-mail: paul.denham@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-MEMBERSHIP

CAPT Lockwood R. Eddy, SC, USN
E-mail: lockwood.eddy@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-BUDGET & FINANCE

DKCM Charles E. Bradley, USN (Ret)
E-mail: charles.bradley@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-RETIRED AFFAIRS

LCDR David M. Bradley, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.bradley@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-COMMUNICATIONS

CDR Aaron G. Bresnahan, USN
E-mail: aaron.bresnahan@ausn.org

NATIONAL TREASURER

CAPT John E. Lindell, USN (Ret)
E-mail: john.lindell@ausn.org

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

CDR Richmond E. Stoglin, CHC, USN
E-mail: rich.stoglin@ausn.org

NATIONAL HISTORIAN

CAPT David L. Woods, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.woods@ausn.org

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN

CDR Leo Hill, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: leo.hill@ausn.org

NATIONAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

LCDR Joyce Zongrone, USN
E-mail: joyce.zongrone@ausn.org

IMMEDIATE PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT

CAPT Walter K. Steiner, USN (Ret)

PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS (LIVING)

CDR Joseph Quaglino, Jr, USN (Ret)

CAPT John E. Lindell, USN (Ret)

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I love New York



On Saturday, 7th November, I had the privilege to attend the commissioning of *USS New York* (LPD 41) in Manhattan. Having served on a precommissioning crew years ago, my memories of that type of event were that it attracts a few dignitaries, has a modest crowd of friends and family, and then it's on to business as usual. This was anything but.



USS New York arrives in its namesake city.

It turns out I was holding one of the hottest tickets in New York that day. Attended by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Governor David Patterson, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and numerous other "brass," this was a media event for the Navy.

For some of us, it represented much more.

Eight years ago, I accepted a position with Ernst & Young to work as a senior manager in their information security practice. As I had a prior speaking engagement in Washington that Monday, my boss said I could start midweek. And so at 0800 on Tuesday, 11 September 2001, I showed up for work in Manhattan. Forty-six minutes later, the world as we know it changed forever.

When I reached the edge of the debris field, I found a number of National Guardsmen assembled in the foyer of a nearby building. I asked one, "who's in charge?" He replied in a voice that trailed off, "We don't have any officers." I said, "I'm a naval officer; I'll take command." Just like that, my life became forever connected with the World Trade Center.

I spent four days with 175 military volunteers conducting search and recovery operations before turning over my provisional "command" to the New York Army National Guard. I kept a list of the participants, and made a promise that we would somehow say "thank you" to each of them.

On 31 October 2007, Hon. Pete Geren, the Secretary of the Army, awarded medals to the Army and National Guard members who participated in those actions, including Specialist Bryan Stern. Fast forward two more years; newly commissioned ENS Bryan Stern (AUSN member) stands next to me at the ship's commissioning ceremony, between ENS Kristine Volk (left) and ENS Kristen Hagedorn (right).

On the flight deck of *USS New York*, I spoke with a gentleman who told me he lost his wife when Tower 1 collapsed. I told him that for me, this ship represented closure from the events of that day. He paused, looked at me, and said that was what he was feeling too; he just didn't know how to say it. He said he felt like giving me a hug; which I returned. So on that sunny Saturday in New York, surrounded by hundreds of visitors and spectators, two men shared something that usually only combat veterans know. It's going to be okay now. America's going to be okay.

G. Mark Hardy