

BOATING

NOV/DEC 2008

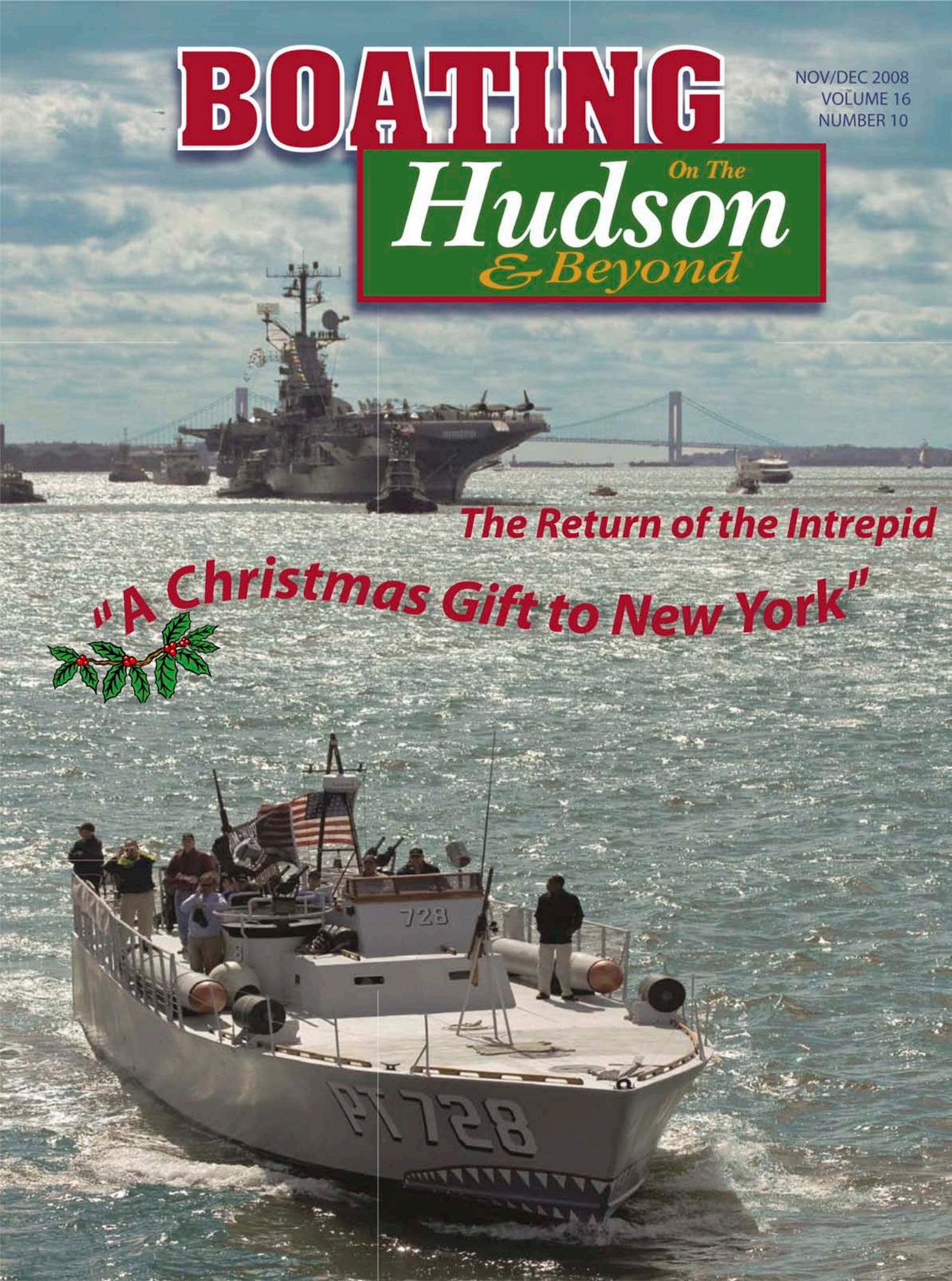
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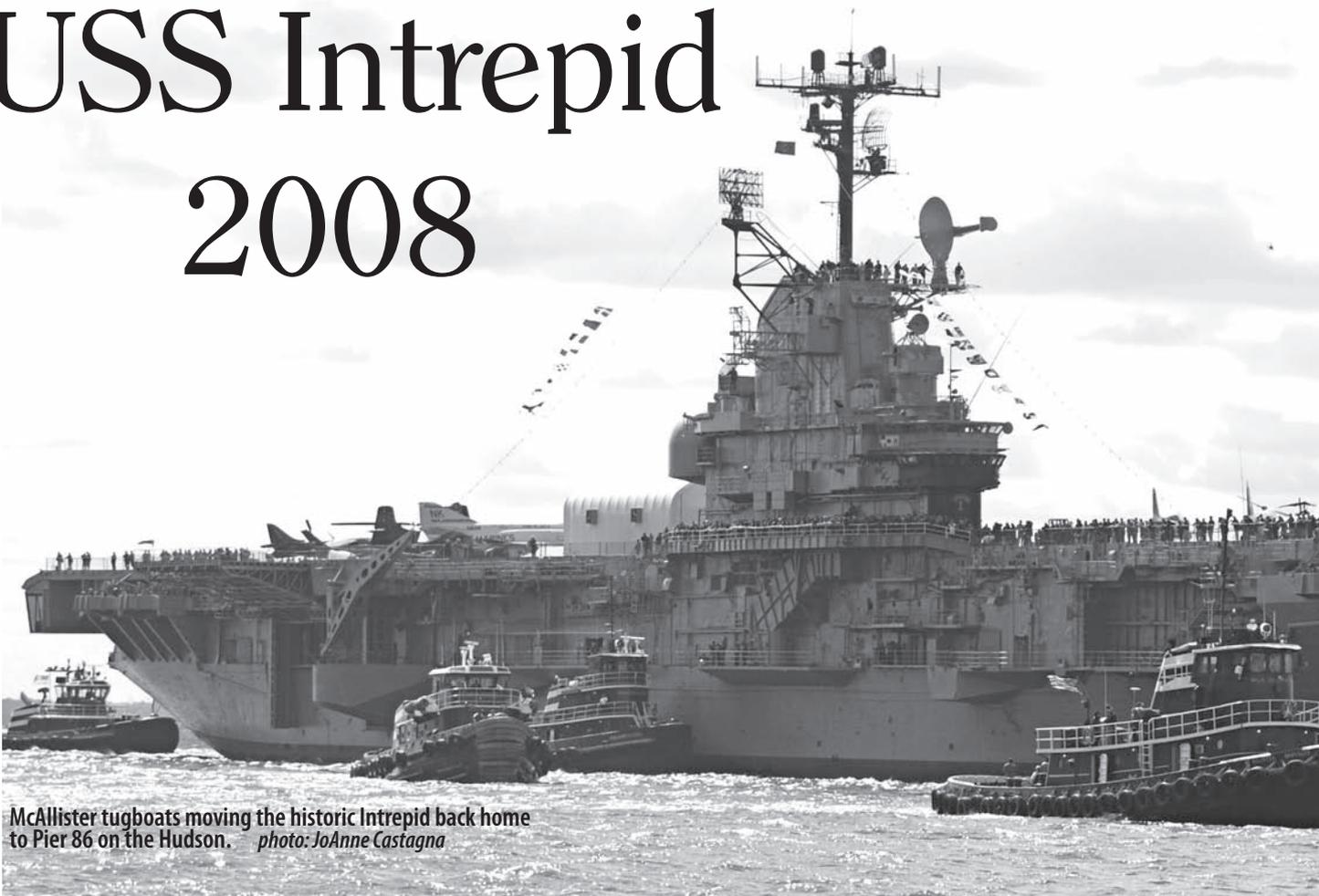
On The *Hudson* & Beyond

The Return of the Intrepid

"A Christmas Gift to New York"



USS Intrepid 2008



McAllister tugboats moving the historic Intrepid back home to Pier 86 on the Hudson. *photo: JoAnne Castagna*



Felix Novelli aboard his old ship in 2008.



1944

Plane Captain Felix Novelli aboard his ship tending to one of his planes (bottom left hand corner) during an air raid on the Intrepid during World War II.

Vets, Army-Navy Team Guide Intrepid Home

by JoAnne Castagna, Ed.D.

It was World War II and Felix Novelli, a 19 year old plane captain at the time was serving aboard the aircraft carrier, USS Intrepid.

One day while out at sea, Novelli was walking on the fantail of the carrier when he saw a fellow shipmate sobbing and asked him, "What's wrong Mack?"

He responded, "I'm going home."

Novelli replied, "You should be happy."

"What about the guys we're leaving behind," responded the fellow shipmate.

Novelli thought he had a point, but responded, "You know there's phosphorous in the ocean that glows when light shines through it at night. When you see this think of it as their way of lighting up the way home for us."

Since that time the USS Intrepid was decommissioned and converted into a museum and docked in New York City.

The aircraft carrier museum recently completed a two year bow-to-stern renovations in New Jersey and Staten Island, including its pier in Manhattan.

On October 8th, Novelli and other Intrepid crew Veterans kept their lost "brothers" in their hearts as they stood on Intrepid's flight deck while she was towed bow first back to its home at Pier 86 on the Hudson River on Manhattan's west side.

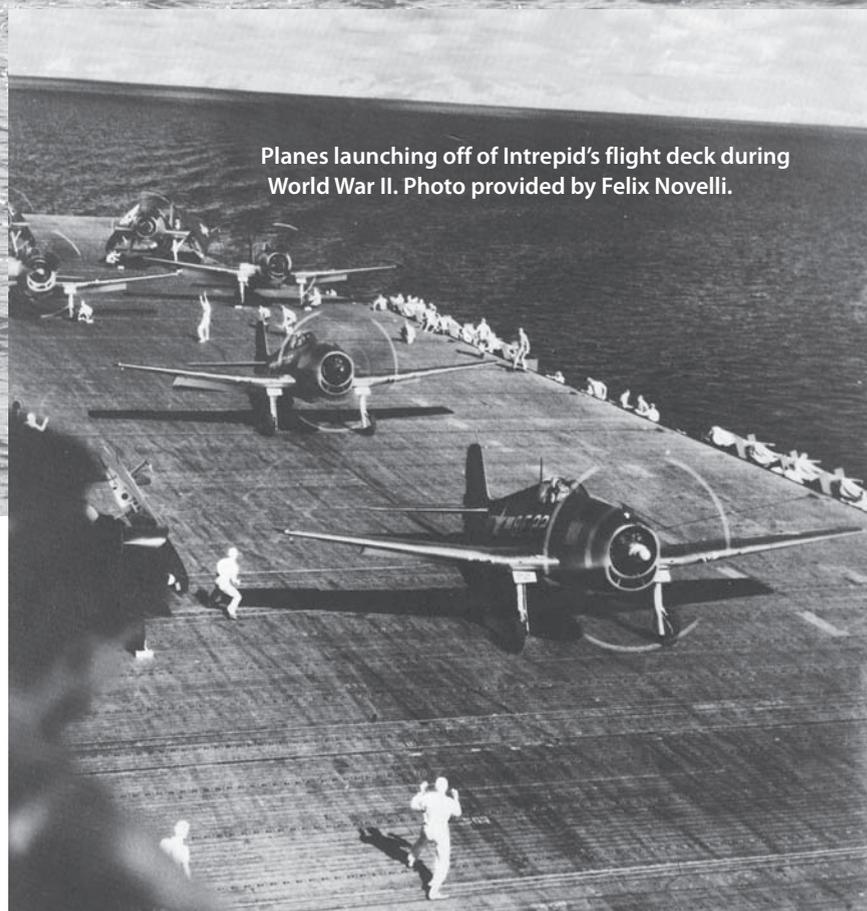
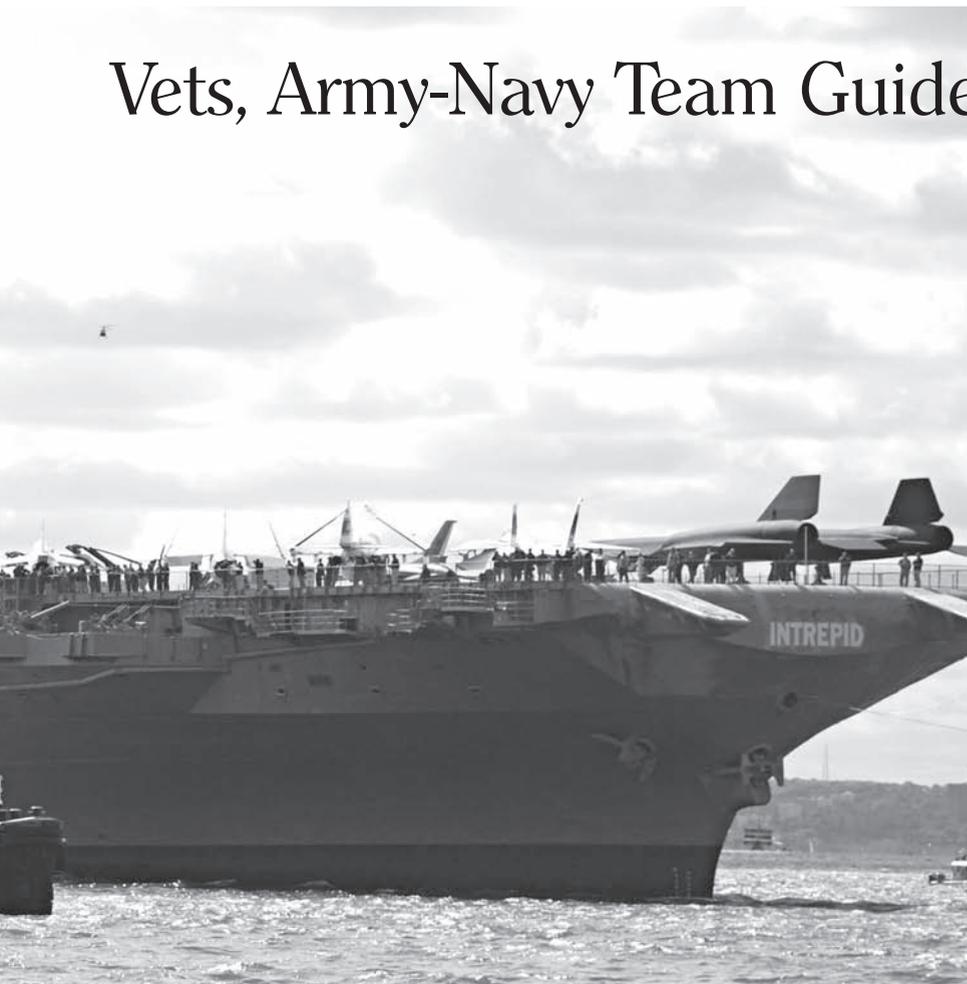
The aircraft carrier was berthed at Pier 86 since 1982 after it was decommissioned and since then has served as the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum.

The museum receives over 750,000 visitors each year and is managed by the Intrepid Foundation, a charitable organization started by the New York City based Fisher construction and real estate family.

Today, Novelli is 83 and lives in Southampton, N.Y. and believes the ship's restoration was extremely important for future generations. "Kids need to know what happened. Ninety-nine percent don't know what went on," said Novelli.

The refurbishment of Intrepid holds great personal memories for him. Portions of the ship that were renovated were areas never seen before by the public include the ship's lower decks where he spent time with his shipmates.

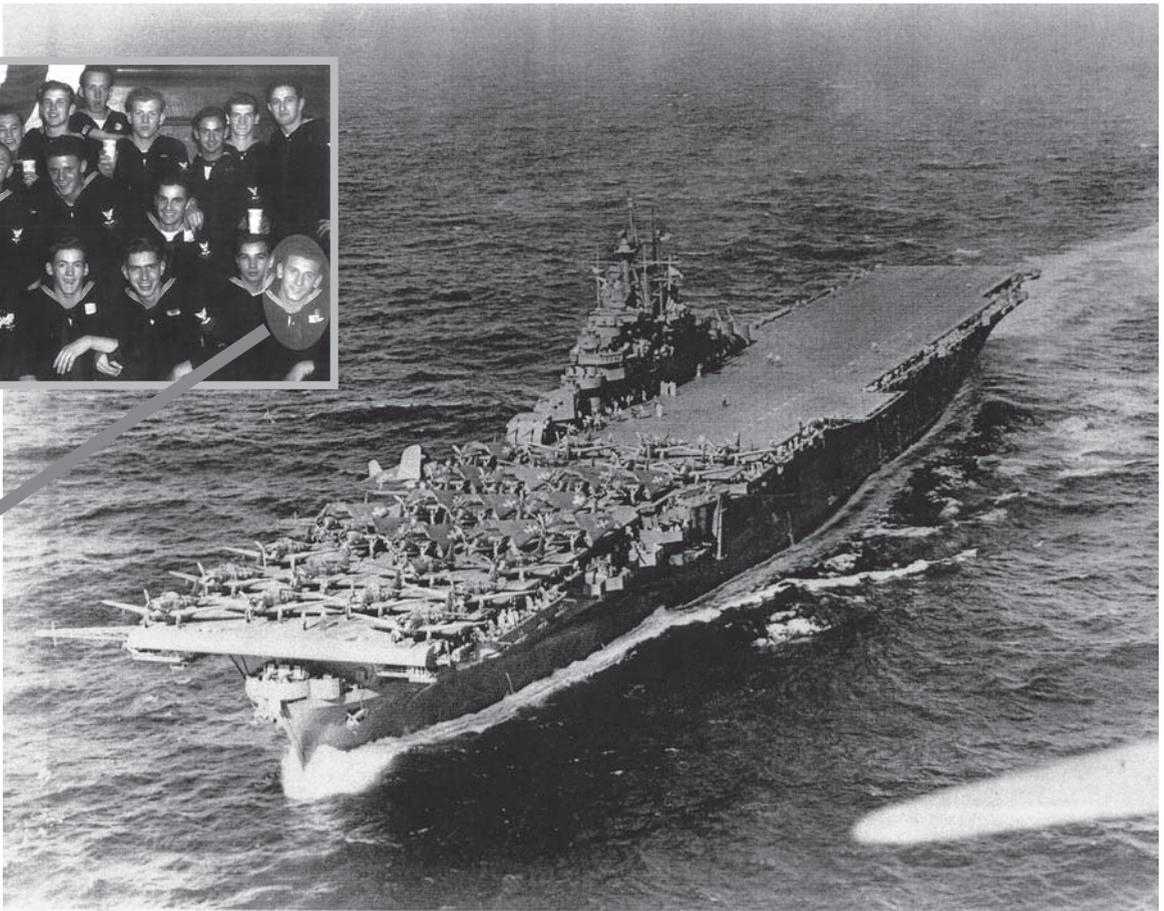
In addition, renovations were performed on the anchor chain room, living quarters, machine shop, and the museum's collection



Planes launching off of Intrepid's flight deck during World War II. Photo provided by Felix Novelli.



World War II Victory Party. Felix Novelli shown in highlighted circle. Photo provided by Felix Novelli.



Intrepid at sea during World War II. Photo provided by Felix Novelli.

of aircraft, as well as the pier where the ship is berthed.

The USS Intrepid is one of the most distinguished war ships in naval history. It began service during World War II.

At that time Novelli witnessed numerous attacks, "The sky blackened with Kamikaze. They wanted to sink a carrier and they kept on coming left and right, 200-300 each day. She was hit five times by Kamikaze and a suicide bomb," said Novelli.

In addition, the 925-foot-long ship saw action in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

Just prior to the pre-Vietnam War days, presidential candidate John McCain served on the Intrepid.

"The Ghost Ship," as she was known by the enemy, also tracked Soviet submarines during the Cold War, and served as NASA's prime recovery vessel for Mercury and Gemini capsules in the 1960's.

In 2006, the Intrepid Foundation decided to have the ship renovated and to rebuild Pier 86 where the ship is berthed. In the summer of 2006, the museum received a federal permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New York District to dredge an access channel from the berthing area out to the main federal channel of the Hudson River, a "driveway," to facilitate the moving of the vessel away from the pier to where it would begin its renovation.

That fall the dredging was completed, removing river mud that had accumulated around the ship.

Soon after, an "Intrepid on Leave" celebration was performed to give the ship an elaborate send-off to its temporary home.

Several public service agencies' vessels were invited to escort the ship down river, including four Army Corps workboats that lead the flotilla.

While moving the engineless ship, seven tugboats began to

pull and the Intrepid literally got stuck in the mud.

The 27,100-ton ship moved stern first, backward, about 15 feet before its four giant propellers, each measuring 16 feet in diameter, dug into the river sediment and prevented any more movement.

The effect of this move attempt was a compacted "speed bump" of river mud under the ship's fantail.

Museum officials immediately called numerous government agencies for help and a multi-agency team quickly formed including the Intrepid Foundation, state and city agencies, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District and The U.S. Navy's Naval Sea Systems Command because of their unique knowledge and experience freeing large ships.

The team quickly executed a unique and highly visible dredging operation to remove compacted sediment from around the propellers and shafts.

They worked around the clock, seven days a week until it was done. They only had 29 days to perform the work because at this time the next high tide was to occur and would provide an extra few feet of water to get her out.

The team devised a three-phase execution plan. First, dig the existing driveway deeper and wider, and add an access trench on the south side of the vessel from the Intrepid's stern to beyond its trapped propellers and shafts. Second, utilize a drag bar to drag from under the stern and rake the sediment out, and third, remove the remaining mud from under the ship's fantail.

After almost three weeks of work and the removal of approximately 39,000 cubic yards of river mud, the ship was ready to be moved.

In December 2006, after fighting with high winds and swift currents, the 63-year-old ship was extracted with great force and

finesse by McAllister tugboats and escorted gracefully down river by Army Corps harbor workboats, New York City police boats and fireboats.

Now, two years later, it made its grand return back home.

To get her back, the multi-agency team joined forces once again.

Prior to moving it back, the Army Corps surveyed the ten-mile route for any obstructions and cleared the pier's berth area. Col. Nello Tortora, commander of the New York District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the Corps had the Navy's contractors clear a space measuring about 110 feet wide and 30 feet deep alongside the pier. The ship needs 30 feet of water to float, and the depth was 35 feet at high tide when the carrier was docked at its rebuilt pier.

In addition, U.S. Army divers currently training at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Caven Point Marine Terminal in New Jersey assisted in surveying the ship's path for any obstructions that would block her way home.

This October 8th, on a gusty cool day, the aircraft carrier made its way back home, led by the U.S. Coast Guard and Army Corps harbor workboats, PT Boat 748 and the same McAllister tugboats that freed it two years ago.

After leaving Staten Island, the carrier made a leisurely ten-mile voyage across New York Harbor and up the Hudson to the rebuilt pier.

The historic ship passed the Statue of Liberty as city fireboats sprayed streams of water; some of it dyed red and blue.

The carrier then paused at Ground Zero, where vets unfurled a 60-by-30-foot American Flag in salute of those lost on 9/11.

While this was occurring, New York Police Department buglers played "Taps" and the NYPD band played the Navy Hymn.

Novelli, along with 230 other veterans, stood on the same deck he did 60 years ago and helped 'light' the Intrepids' way back home as his lost "brothers" did for him years ago.

The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum will officially be open to the public on November 8th. To learn more, please visit www.intrepidmuseum.org

Dr. JoAnne Castagna is a technical writer-editor for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District.

*She can be reached at:
joanne.castagna@usace.army.mil*



As the Intrepid passes the Statue of Liberty, city fireboats spray streams of water.
photo: JoAnne Castagna