

9/11: USS Cole mans the rails for 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony

By David Todd|
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NORFOLK-- To mark the 10th Anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, Shanksville, Penn. and at the Pentagon, and to offer a time for reflection, the City of Norfolk hosted an all-day Remembrance Ceremony, Sept. 11, in Town Point Park in Downtown Norfolk honoring those who died, the heroes who responded and the military service members who continue the fight.

In the early morning hours, Town Point Park became a flag-filled procession of honor, as law enforcement officers, military veterans, Hampton Roads community members and military honor guards began moving toward the waterfront, lined with first responder and maritime vessels and vehicles as well as a special display of the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Cole (DDG 67), whose crew members manned the rails in honor.

"It's a tremendous honor to be a part of this ceremony," said Cmdr. Andrew C. Ehlers, USS Cole Commanding Officer. "This day means a tremendous amount for my crew as well because we are a part of the (global) war on terrorism. Our history is the history of the (global) war on terrorism. So, to be a part of this ceremony and to remember the events of Sept. 11th as members of the Cole, as a ship that has been touched directly by the horror of terror, it is a tremendous honor and also a solemn moment in our history of the ship."

"Being a part of the ceremony, we wouldn't want to be anywhere else." Ehlers continued. "This is our legacy, this is our history and for us being here, remembering Sept. 11th and the exact times that each of the attacks happened is important for us, and so for us it will be a special day for us and a special moment. Each Sailor, much as they remember where they were on 9/11, I think, will remember this moment as well and where they are here in Cole at the time of the attacks 10 years ago."

Four moments of silence were interlaced with the names of the nearly three thousand people who died on Sept. 11, 2001 and Norfolk residents affected by the tragedy volunteered their voices for the readings, which also include the names of the 17 Sailors who perished on the USS Cole on Oct. 12, 2000, when the ship was the target of an attack carried out in the Yemeni port of Aden. As a result, the ship was severely damaged.

Several Cole crew members reflected on the day and spoke candidly about where they were 10 years ago.

"It's pretty special," said Chief Fire Controlman (sel.) Chris Brennan from Wheaton, Ill. "I was in school in Great Lakes 10 years ago today. It was an unbelievable shock. Our instructor came back 15 minutes late from a break, which he never did, and told us what was going on and school just kinda stopped at that point. To be on this ship 10 years later today, is kind of an unreal sort of experience. The ship is very special and this crew is very special. I'm honored to be where those Sailors were (on the same ship) in 2000 that died in Yemen. It's an honor to be here today to be the backdrop of this ceremony."

For Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW/AW) Jimmy A. Omolade, from Brooklyn, New York, the day hits closer to home than some. He was in New York during the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

"It was a sight – ash. My sister was actually there during that time and she had to walk across from the Brooklyn Bridge to my mother's job in Downtown Brooklyn," Omolade said as he recalled that day in 2001.

His family survived the attacks that day, but he remembers feeling anger on that day and felt that afterward he wanted to do something, so in 2003 he decided to join the Navy.

"I feel it's the best choice I've ever made and it's been eight years last month," he said.

After spending time on the USS. Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) and time in recruiting, Omolade was given the opportunity to be a part of the USS Cole crew.

"I actually had a choice to which command I would like to go. And being the emotional attachment to 9/11 and the experience I had, the experience my family had, I saw the Cole and it was a no-brainer," Omolade explained. "I knew it was going to be a tough billet because of the small community that we have here."

In reflecting on the day 10 years later as a crew member of the Cole, he said, "It tugs the heart. It makes you feel like you need to do more. I know that's how it makes me feel – I don't know about anyone else – I want to do more!"

The Cole operates differently today than it did in 2001.

"You will see, although they will be in their white uniforms, my Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection Team very visibly on the decks today as we celebrate this ceremony," said Ehlers. "That force protection posture is the same posture we use when we enter and leave port every time. It's the same as we enter port in a foreign port. Very much heightened, exponentially so, over the type of security we had Oct. 12, 2000 when the attack on Cole happened ... the Cole is still a living, breathing, fighting warship and we're still operating. It is a symbol, I think, of our resolve against those who had tried to do us harm."

Local choirs and the Tidewater Pipes and Drums filled the park with music throughout the ceremony and members of the public received a flower to place at the circle of flags following the ceremony.

The "Fighting Swordsmen" of Strike Fighter Squadron 32 (VFA-32) provided a fly over for ceremony. The squadron presently flies the F/A-18F Super Hornet and is based at Naval Air Station Oceana.

Following the formal ceremony, the public was invited to visit the Norfolk Police and Fire Museum located at 401 East Freemason St.

The museum exhibit featured Norfolk Police and Fire-Rescue personnel with first hand accounts of their work experiences at the site of the World Trade Center in the aftermath of 9/11.

The public was invited throughout the day until sunset for personal reflection and to enjoy the free Virginia Symphony Sunset Concert "America the Beautiful."



110911-N-NL541-469-- MC3 Stuart Phillips- A girl places a flower beneath a row of flags during a 9/11 ceremony in Norfolk, Sept. 11. The City of Norfolk hosted an all-day healing and remembrance ceremony at Town Point Park to mark the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.



110901-N-NY-820-119-- MC2 Eric C. Tretter- Family members of Cheron Gunn, a Sailor killed during the attack on USS Cole (DDG 67), read the names of the 17 Sailors who lost their lives in that attack during a 9/11 ceremony in Norfolk.