abc NEWS

Annual Naval Visit to NYC Under Way

Intrepid Missing From the Scene As New York's Fleet Week 2007 Begins

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The Associated Press

NEW YORK

Accompanied by a flyover of Navy and Marine Corps jet aircraft, a pared-down flotilla of American warships moved up New York Harbor on Wednesday to open the city's 20th annual Fleet Week observance.

The ships deployed to assigned berths to welcome visitors, but one remained empty the historic aircraft carrier USS Intrepid, which had served as mother ship to visitors from around the world, was away for repairs.

USS Hue City, a powerful Aegis-type missile cruiser, and the helicopter carrier USS Wasp bookended the customary "parade of ships." Fleet Week will bring about 3,000 sailors, Marines and Coast Guard members to the city for a week.

The Wasp docked at the cruise ship port on the Hudson River, while five other warships went to the former Stapleton naval base in Staten Island. A seventh vessel was the New York-based Coast Guard Cutter Katherine Walker.

Navy officials say ship assignments to Fleet Week are dependent on their availability, considering other military priorities. Cmdr. Dan Bates, a spokesman for Fleet Week, said he was not certain whether any previous event had as few as seven ships.

"But it probably is one of the smallest," he said.

Last year's event was also low-key, with few ships and only one foreign naval visitor, a British ocean survey vessel. Previous gatherings had included warships from Britain, Canada, France and other nations, and until 2005, an American aircraft carrier.

The only foreign flavor this year's was provided by the missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill, named for Britain's World War II prime minister. His mother was born in Brooklyn. One member of the Royal Navy is always assigned to the Churchill's crew.

This year's Fleet Week was the first in which the USS Intrepid, the World War II aircraft carrier turned military museum, was not present to serve as official host ship. The carrier was towed last December for an 18-month, stem-to-stern overhaul and is now up on blocks in a Bayonne, N.J., drydock.

In addition to public tours of the ships, the event will feature Marine Corps demonstrations of helicopter-supported raids, fast-roping assault techniques, weapons displays, Memorial Day parades in several area cities and towns and a Navy Band concert in Times Square.

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