USS Iwo Jima Becomes First Amphibious Ship Outfitted with USO Afloat Recharge Centers



NORFOLK (July 28, 2025) Sailors assigned to the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and United Service Organization (USO) staff take a group photo during a ribbon cutting ceremony. The event acknowledges the grand opening of the first USO afloat recharge centers on an amphibious assault ship. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1Erickson B. Magno)

From Petty Officer 1st Class Erickson Magno, July 29, 2025

NORFOLK, Va.—The Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and United Service Organizations (USO) held a ribbon cutting ceremony onboard, officially opening the first ship-based USO centers on an amphibious assault ship, July

28.

The afloat centers include many of the same amenities as a land-based center, such as comfortable seating, TVs, video and board games, and snacks. Equipping the ship with these centers creates a home away from home for Sailors and embarked Marines while on deployment.

“Onboard Iwo Jima, we have 2,200 Sailors and Marines—warfighters who are being prepared and are ready to support our nation’s business when we deploy,” said Capt. Kathryn Wijnaldum, executive officer of Iwo Jima. “Our intent for its [centers] use is that they will provide an opportunity to support the warfighter—to help them reset, recharge, and de-stress—so that they can resume their duties that enable us to accomplish our mission and get the job done when our nation calls upon us.”

These new ship-based centers gives the Sailors of Iwo Jima and their embarked Marine teammates from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)—America’s premier warfighters—an alternative way to recharge and build a close-knit community with one another while serving in high-stress operational environments.

“Thank you for the extreme cooperation of the ship and for the patience to deal with us here now on our very first gator,” said Jeff Hill, the USO’s Expeditionary Region Vice President. “To be able to serve Marines and Sailors wherever the world takes you, USO is going to be with you wherever you may go—that’s our objective.”

Iwo Jima is the first amphibious assault ship to have ship-based centers, and the USO has ship-based centers on 10 aircraft carriers and five destroyers.

For more than 80 years, the USO has served the men and women of the U.S. military and their families throughout their time

in uniform—from shore-based assignments and continuing that tradition at sea. With multiple ships now carrying a USO presence, the organization is charting a course toward an extraordinary era of support to service members at sea.

Iwo Jima is moored at Naval Station Norfolk following its return from a 4-week underway for Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX). COMPTUEX was the final certifying event in the pre-deployment workup cycle for the ship's company.

Iwo Jima is the flagship of the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) which is capable of conducting global missions to accomplish U.S. strategic goals, deter adversaries, and ensure unimpeded commerce by keeping the high seas open and free in accordance with international law. Embarked aboard ARG shipping is the 22nd MEU (SOC) and provides a forward-deployed, flexible sea-based Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) capable of conducting amphibious operations—to include enabling the introduction of follow-on forces and designated special operations to meet Combatant Commander's requirements.