

"Sara" at

USS Saratoga (CV-3) steams along with *USS Enterprise (CV-6)* towards battle against the Japanese Navy in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. Though Saratoga did not suffer damage, the Enterprise was hit by four bombs and needed significant repairs. The Japanese force, however, failed to press home any advantage and withdrew to the north, thus making the battle an American victory.



Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, commander of the task forces built around USS Saratoga (CV-3) for the Guadalcanal battle.

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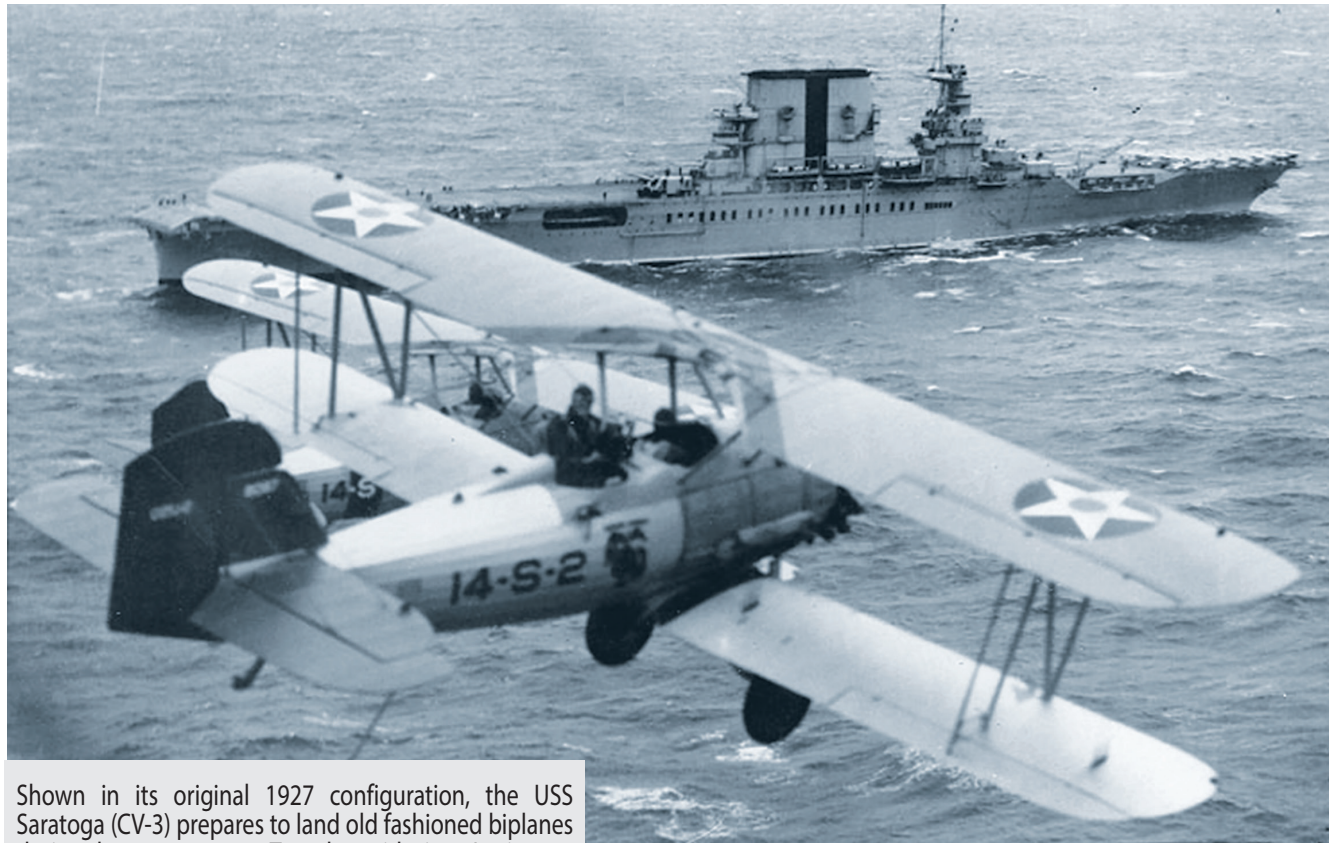
Guadalcanal



This is a year of historic anniversaries – the 240th of the Battle of Saratoga, 200th of Thaddeus Kosciuszko's passing (the architect of the Saratoga victory), 125th of the General Electric Company, 50th of the Chamber of Southern Saratoga County. It's also the 90th anniversary of the commissioning of a famous aircraft carrier, the USS Saratoga (CV-3) which fought in some very pivotal battles 75 years ago as the United States Navy struggled to gain the advantage over their powerful Japanese counterpart in the south Pacific.

Saratoga had had a rather rough start to the war. As flagship of Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher's Wake Island relief task force in December 1941,

her crew was devastated and demoralized as bureaucratic bunglings in Washington and Pearl Harbor (later blamed on Fletcher) effectively torpedoed the operation and the effort failed. A few weeks later, a real torpedo from the Japanese submarine I-6 put a big hole in her side and she spent the first six months of the war in a West Coast drydock under repair. The Sara's aircrews, left behind in Hawaii, did manage to strike a significant blow against the Japanese at the Battle of Midway, having embarked aboard the carrier USS Yorktown (CV-5) to replace battle damaged squadrons. They factored into the sinking of 3 of the 4 aircraft carriers that day (see my Albany Times Union blog (blog.timesunion.com/bardunias) for more about



Shown in its original 1927 configuration, the USS Saratoga (CV-3) prepares to land old fashioned biplanes during the prewar years. Together with sister Lexington (CV-2) these two ships formed the backbone of US Navy naval aircraft doctrine leading up to the start of World War II. (all photos accompanying this article are US Navy photos)

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Modernized in early 1942 while her torpedo damage was repaired, the Saratoga was sent into the south Pacific during the summer to prepare for offensive action against Japanese installations in the Solomon Islands.

Though undamaged by Japanese aircraft, the Saratoga took a beating in 1942 from enemy submarines. This photo shows the ship undergoing a procedure to repair torpedo damage suffered on August 31, which caused the loss of power to her turbines and required a trip to the States to properly fix. It also effectively ended the sea career of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, who heretofore had won three battles against powerful Japanese forces but was eventually replaced by Admiral Halsey.



the story of the lone torpedo bomber that forced the enemy flagship into a severe turn and jammed her rudder, thus ensuring her loss, plus other tales). The Saratoga herself arrived back into the war zone on June 6, 1942, just a few days late to participate in the decisive victory.

A month later, on July 7, the Saratoga and her escorts departed for the south Pacific and the planned invasion of Guadalcanal, again under the command of Fletcher, now a Vice Admiral. Over the course of the next two months she would support the invasion forces, be involved in a controversy (when the carrier force was pulled back leaving the troops and transports exposed, protected by surface forces which proved inadequate), fight in a pivotal battle (the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on August 24) where her planes sank yet another enemy carrier, and be torpedoed yet again on August 31. This second torpedo attack, by I-26, not only put another hole in her starboard side but caused multiple electrical short circuits in her GE turboelectric drive system. This system, revolutionary in the 1920s, was considered susceptible to damage by water (for obvious reasons) but ironically it was the shock damage of the torpedo hit that caused the most concerns, actually leaving the carrier drifting for

awhile before power could be restored. In any event, the ship was forced to return to the US yet again, finishing Admiral Fletcher's career as a carrier commander and undergoing major repairs for the second time in a year. Saratoga would return to the fight again in November, and acquitted herself well throughout the rest of the conflict, never again suffering damage to her amazing propulsion system but participating in several major strategic battles and fending off kamikazes late in the war as did most US ships.

The Saratoga was expended as a nuclear target at Bikini Atoll after the war, and her legacy was continued by a new supercarrier of the Forrestal Class – the USS Saratoga (CV-60). It is a sign of just how much time has elapsed since these historic days that both ships are now gone from the Navy, and a dwindling band of "Saratoga sailors" continues to get together for annual reunions through the USS Saratoga Association (www.uss-saratoga.com). This year's event will be held in Saratoga Springs, NY from September 27-30, a fitting tribute to the 1777 battle as well as the ships which bore its name, and the pivotal events of 1942 which we look back on today with pride and thanksgiving.