



## Double Cross at International Date Line

*Personal Account Written by Jess W. Carr, USN (Ret.)*

Emotions were running high in the Squadrons concerning the upcoming Thanksgiving leave parties. Lt. Wallace C. Short, Commanding Officer Scouting Squadron 3, and LCDR Maxwell F. Leslie, Commanding Officer, Bombing Squadron 3 were heartened to announce that all Bluejackets in uniform were eligible to travel on Thanksgiving leave by train for 1 ¼ cents a mile. All tickets had to be round trip, with \$1.00 minimum purchase. Prior to the Thanksgiving leave party USS *Saratoga's* Scouting and Bombing Squadrons took delivery of SBD-3 Dauntless aircraft, fresh from the Douglas Aircraft at El Segundo, California. VS-3, my assigned squadron, replaced its Curtis SBC-3s while VB-3 said goodbye to its Vought SB2Us. Fighter Squadron VF-3 began replacing its F2As with the new Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat. The three squadrons VS-3, VB-3, and VT-3 continued flight operations off the coast of San Diego. Meanwhile, the *Saratoga* was entering the Bremerton, Washington Naval Ship Yard for a long deferred modernization, including widening her flight deck forward and installing a blister on her starboard side plus additional small aircraft guns.

In Washington D.C. two Japanese Envoys, Kichisaburo and Saburo Kurusu were carrying on peace talks as the crisis with Japan was coming to a head. When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, *Saratoga* was just entering San Diego Harbor after repairs at Bremerton. As *Saratoga* let go her anchor at 1125 hours the first line was thrown at the dock. Twelve minutes later the public address system of the USS *Saratoga* announced, "War has been declared with Japan, air raid on Pearl Harbor." All hands worked frantically



throughout the day and all night getting *Saratoga* ready to go to war. All Thanksgiving leave parties were recalled and with many at home throughout the states, many missed ship movement. Wives, children and friends gathered on the dock to be with their loved ones in their last hours ashore.

*Saratoga* hurriedly got underway the following day as the nucleus of a third carrier force (*Lexington* and *Enterprise* were already at sea) carrying Marine aircraft intended to reinforce the vulnerable garrison at Wake Island. Presence of these aircraft on the *Saratoga* was the logical choice for the actual relief effort. *Saratoga* reached Pearl Harbor on December 15 and stopped only long enough to refuel. She then rendezvoused with the USS *Tangier* (AV-8), had relief troops and supplies on board, while the USS *Lexington* and USS *Enterprise* provided distant cover for the operations. However, the *Saratoga* was delayed by the speed of its oiler and a decision to refuel destroyers on December 21. After receiving reports of a Japanese Carrier's aircraft over Wake Island and Japanese troops landings on it, the relief force was standing by for orders. Word was received by the Task Force that the *Saratoga* was being recalled to Pearl Harbor. L. Jimmy Thachs, Commanding Officer, Fighting Squadron-3 was on the bridge when orders came to Admiral Fitch to look at his orders with his "blind eye". Admiral Fitch responded, "I'd like to look at it with my blind eye, because I don't like it any better than you do, but it could be that they have more information than we have, either in Washington or Pearl Harbor, and have reason to pull us back." The reaction was universally against the recall, and some mutinous remarks were made. *Saratoga's* Captain and Squadron Commander of VS-3, VB-3, VF-3 and VT-3 felt each squadron could run up Prime Minister Hideki Togo's dream for conquest a heavy butcher bill. Wake fell the next day. This incident turned



out to be a blessing in disguise. Several poorly armed sailors and marines were facing a vastly superior, well-armed forces. Others were bayoneted, beheaded or shot by Japanese soldiers after their surrender. The sailors and marines who ran to the ocean for protection were picked up by the Japanese destroyers, interrogated and executed, many were thrown overboard with weights tied to their feet. Those taken prisoner were made to suffer nearly four long years in Japanese labor camps.

On December 25, USS *Saratoga* and her air group spent Christmas day crossing the International Date Line and the *Saratoga's* Commanding Officer ordered the ship's cooks to prepare a second Christmas dinner to be served after doubling back over the International Date Line. *Saratoga* continued operations in the Hawaiian Island region, but on January 11, 1942, while heading for a rendezvous with the USS *Enterprise* 500 miles southwest of Oahu, she was hit without warning by a deep running torpedo fired by Japanese submarine I-16. The ship's loudspeaker announced the damage to the ship was under control. Two days later *Saratoga* was resting on keel blocks in Pearl Harbor. An Ensign from "M" Division led a party into the damaged fire rooms and brought out the dead bodies of six shipmates. The bodies were laid out on the forward elevator for burial.

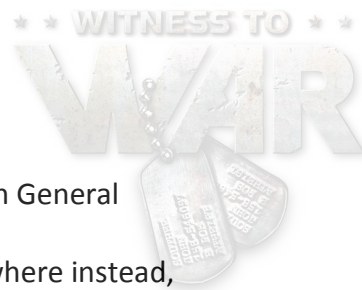
The Captain of the Japanese submarine I-16 reported sinking the USS *Saratoga*, but she was far from defeated. She headed back to Pearl Harbor. My Division Officer, Lt. D.K. "Bullet Lou" Kirn, during flight debriefing, always stated, "that trying to dive-bomb a Japanese destroyer was like trying to drop a ball bearing on a cockroach." It was soon determined *Saratoga's* damage would require a trip back to the mainland. During this brief stay at Pearl



Harbor, combat aircrews who had leave on the books could stay at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel with four to a room at 25 cents a night. *Saratoga* departed Pearl Harbor on April 14 and sailed to Bremerton, Washington Naval Shipyard remaining there three months. In addition to having their torpedo damage repaired, a stability blister was added to her starboard side, and her silhouette was forever changed when her stack was lowered.

After returning from Bremerton Naval Ship Yard, *Saratoga* was able to get underway from San Diego with her air group on June 1, 1942. She reached Pearl Harbor on June 6. *Saratoga* crossed the Equator on Sunday July 12, 1942. Davy Jones, representing NEPTUNIS REX, appeared on the forward elevator. He was received with the appropriate honors by Rear Admiral Aubrey Fitch and Air Group Commander Harry Felt. All of *Sara's* non-shellbacks were initiated from being Polly Wogs into Shellbacks. Each new Shellback received certificates from NEPTUNIS REX himself. After the initiation no Polly Wogs were reported aboard.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, *Sara* joined up with her Task Force and was assigned the enviable task of ensuring the Marine's successful assault on Guadalcanal. From August 15, 1942, to April 19, 1942, *Saratoga* was involved in many engagements and operations which included: 1. Guadalcanal – Tulugi landings 7-9 August, 1942. 2. Capture and Defense of Guadalcanal, August 10, 1942 to February 9, 1943. 3. Eastern Solomon – Stewart Island. 4. Treasury-Bougainville Operations October 27 to December 15, 1943. 5. Gilbert Island Operation November 20, 1943. 6. Occupation of Enewetok Atoll. 7. Sabong Raid April 19, 1944. During this time the crew worked 18 hour shifts servicing and re-arming planes. In my 24 years in the U.S. Navy and serving during WW-II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Occupation of Lebanon, I believe



that Navy is more democratic than other military services – possibly because when General Quarters is sounded for the call to battle, senior officers do not send anyone anywhere instead, they all go to man their battle stations. Since the date when *Saratoga* hit the waves until the day she was bombed with a subsurface Atomic Bomb, she existed for but one purpose, and that purpose was not to impose tyranny upon weaker people, not to conquer or subdue the unfortunate, but to protect the freedom to which we as a nation are pledged.