

USS Ranger: Navy's first born-carrier

USS Ranger (CV 4) • Part of an ongoing Gosport series celebrating the Centennial of Naval Aviation (CoNA) – 100 years of naval aviation covering the scope of naval aviation activities, including aircraft, people, ships and events

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United States Navy carrier operations in World War II may be forever associated with actions in the Pacific Ocean, but one ship's proud service in the Atlantic serves to balance naval aviation's contributions on both fronts.

were re-designated in 1927 as aircraft carriers. First lady Lou Henry Hoover became the first presidential wife to christen an aircraft carrier when she smashed a Prohibition-era bottle of grape juice on the hull of the Ranger, celebrating the launch of the ship Feb. 25, 1933. The Ranger was born "the first built from the

down in late 2009. This supercarrier will be nearly 1,200 feet long and be able to sail more than 30 knots.

While the Gerald L. Ford will displace about 100,000 tons, the Ranger only displaced 17,577 at full capacity.

Ranger conducted her initial flight operations off the Virginia Capes in June 1934, followed by a brief trip to Rio de Janeiro. She stayed in the Norfolk area running operations off the coast until April 1, 1935, when she set sail for the Pacific through the Panama Canal.

She participated in fleet operations on the western coast of the United States for close to four years before she returned to the Norfolk area. Her time spent in the Pacific prior to 1944 led to participation in the first-ever carrier test trials in Alaska and western seaboard operations that took her as far south as Peru.

Briefly visiting Guantanamo Bay, Cuba,



A World War II-era photo taken of the USS Ranger with more than 50 Grumman F3F biplanes. U.S. Navy photo

intense. On the day the United States entered World War II – Dec. 8, 1941, Ranger had just returned from escorting a British troop convoy in the southeast Atlantic.

By the early months of 1942, Ranger was engaged in war operation in the South Atlantic. Mid-year saw Ranger in service carrying U.S. Army fighter planes to West African bases.

Later that year, Ranger became an important element in Operation Torch, providing air cover for the invasion of North Africa.

This conflict was the first major airborne assault carried out by the United States, and the result halted the advancement of Axis troops into northern Africa, eventually aiding in their surrender in May 1943.

Her contribution to the British-American invasion of French North Africa led the Ranger to be awarded two Battle Stars.

The Ranger was assigned to work with the British Home Fleet

during 1943. Operating from the northeastern Atlantic from August to November she launched strikes on German shipping vessels along the Norwegian coast. Her actions in October of that year in the raid code-named "Leader" saw that Ranger was awarded a third Battle Star.

Her task force launched a total of 30 bombers and 14 Wildcats over the course of the mission. The two attacks severely damaged a 10,000-long-ton tanker and an 8,000-long-ton freighter; they destroyed two small German merchant ships, a German freighter and a small coastal ship.

Considered too small and slow for Pacific combat, the Ranger remained in the Atlantic for most of her service. Although not directly associated with harsh combat, her missions led the Sailors and aviators from her bow to improve their naval careers.

She took the responsibilities of a training carrier in late 1944. Operating out of Naval Air Stations Alameda and San Diego, the

Ranger assumed the role as a carrier-qualification training ship.

This role led the Ranger to host more than 14,850 day and night carrier landings between Aug. 9, 1944, Feb. 1, 1945. These programs continued through mid-1945; qualifying and re-freshing Naval and Marine pilots in ship born operations.

She spent the remainder of the war preparing air groups for combat operations. After Japan surrendered Ranger returned to the Atlantic for the final time.

The Ranger, along with the USS Enterprise (CV 6) and the Saratoga were the only three pre-war aircraft carriers (CV 1 through CV 8) to survive World War II.

Decommissioned Oct. 18, 1947, the Ranger had survived a lifetime of tumultuous war and conflict and had commenced training programs to keep the Navy and Marine Corps members ready for combat.

The Ranger was honored in 1957 when a second carrier, the USS Ranger (CV 61), was commissioned. The new supercarrier served primarily in the Pacific, especially during the Vietnam War, where she earned 13 Battle Stars.

The re-naming of ships has been done traditionally with many carriers like the Enterprise, the Yorktown and the Saratoga. Each of their contributions has allowed the Navy and the United States to sail the world's oceans with pride.

Regal and steadfast, the aircraft carrier that the USS Ranger was built to be shines through in every carrier today. Aircraft carriers have become some of the most elite members of military vessels. Not always the case, the USS Ranger was a keystone in the evolution of Navy ships to the respectable force that they have come to be known for today.



Douglas SBD "Dauntless" scout bomber heads around the deck for a second landing attempt after being "waved off" by the landing signal officer in 1942. Photo courtesy U.S. Naval Historical Center

Ordered by the Navy Nov. 1, 1930, the USS Ranger (CV 4) became the first ship designed and built from the keel to be an aircraft carrier.

ground up" U.S. aircraft carrier in 1934 when she was commissioned June 4 under the command of Capt. Arthur L. Bristol.



USS Ranger (CV 4) under way at sea during the late 1930s. U.S. Naval Historical Center photo

Prior to this ship, the Navy's aircraft carriers were designated as other vessels. The USS Langley (CV 1) was originally designated a collier, and it was re-designated as the first aircraft carrier in 1922.

The USS Lexington (CV 2) and the USS Saratoga (CV 3) were designated as battle-cruisers. Both ships

The ship was 769 feet long and was equipped to carry a maximum 86 aircraft, though usually only carried around 75. With a top speed of 29.25 knots, the Ranger was considered a slower ship during her reign of the seas.

Today, aircraft carriers are much larger. The USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) was laid

for winter fleet operations in January 1939, she arrived in Norfolk April 20 to continue performing routine training functions and participating in routine battle maneuvers. The Ranger contributed to neutrality patrols after war broke out in Europe through 1941, with the operations becoming increasingly more

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