

# Saratoga Sailing

By George L. Nace #9449

*I, George Nace of Sutherlin, Oregon, would like to tell my experience of World War II.*

I was born in Middlesex, Pennsylvania, on October 9, 1925. I was raised on a farm in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, where I walked behind a plow with a pair of mules, from age eight. I stayed on the farm until World War II started. I was 17 and, rather than wait to be drafted, I joined the Navy in August 1943.

My six weeks of boot camp training was at Great Lakes, Illinois. When finished with training, we were put on a troop train with the blinds pulled down; we were not told where we were going.

After about five days on the train, we ended in Shoemaker, California. We were then taken to San Francisco, California, where the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Saratoga was in dry dock at Hunter's Point.

After we took a torpedo hit on the Pacific Ocean, I was put on the ship Division #1, which was the Deck Hand Gunnery Division. There were a couple of weeks of scrubbing decks, chipping paint and painting until I was assigned to the Boat Division. I was given the title of coxswain of two whale boats and a captain's gig.

I stayed on the captain's gig except for general quarters (battle stations), and then I was second loader on a five-inch double gun turret. My job on the captain's gig was to usher the captain and lieutenants to shore when we pulled into port or anchored out in port.

When we left San Francisco heading for Hawaii, I got seasick before we had even gone under the Golden Gate Bridge. (In fact, I've gone *under* the Golden Gate more times than I've been *over* it.)

When we reached Hawaii, we tied up at Hickam Field, where we loaded the aircraft. When at sea we always had plenty of protection with us, generally two battleships and four destroyers, because we could not go very fast.

The carrier was as long as three football fields and carried 3,500 men, mostly sailors with 50 marines. It was just like a small city.

We sailed the Pacific Ocean for the three-and-a-half years that I was on it, from 1943 to 1946 covering the Solomon Islands; Sydney, Australia; Perth,

Australia; Ceylon; India, and within 20 miles of Japan.

The planes on the carrier were F4F Hellcats, TBM torpedo planes and F4U Corsairs.

Over Iwo Jima, we were hit with 18 kamikaze planes. We shot down 10 of their planes and hit eight.

We buried 140 of our men at sea.

When the war was over, we took the carrier to Bikini Atoll. It was sunk with the atomic bomb test.

The carrier was built in 1925, so it was as old as I was. It had done its duty, including “magic carpet runs” (bringing back troops from Hawaii). In fact, we made 10 trips.

It was quite an experience for an old farm boy.