



## YORKTOWN CLASS CARRIERS

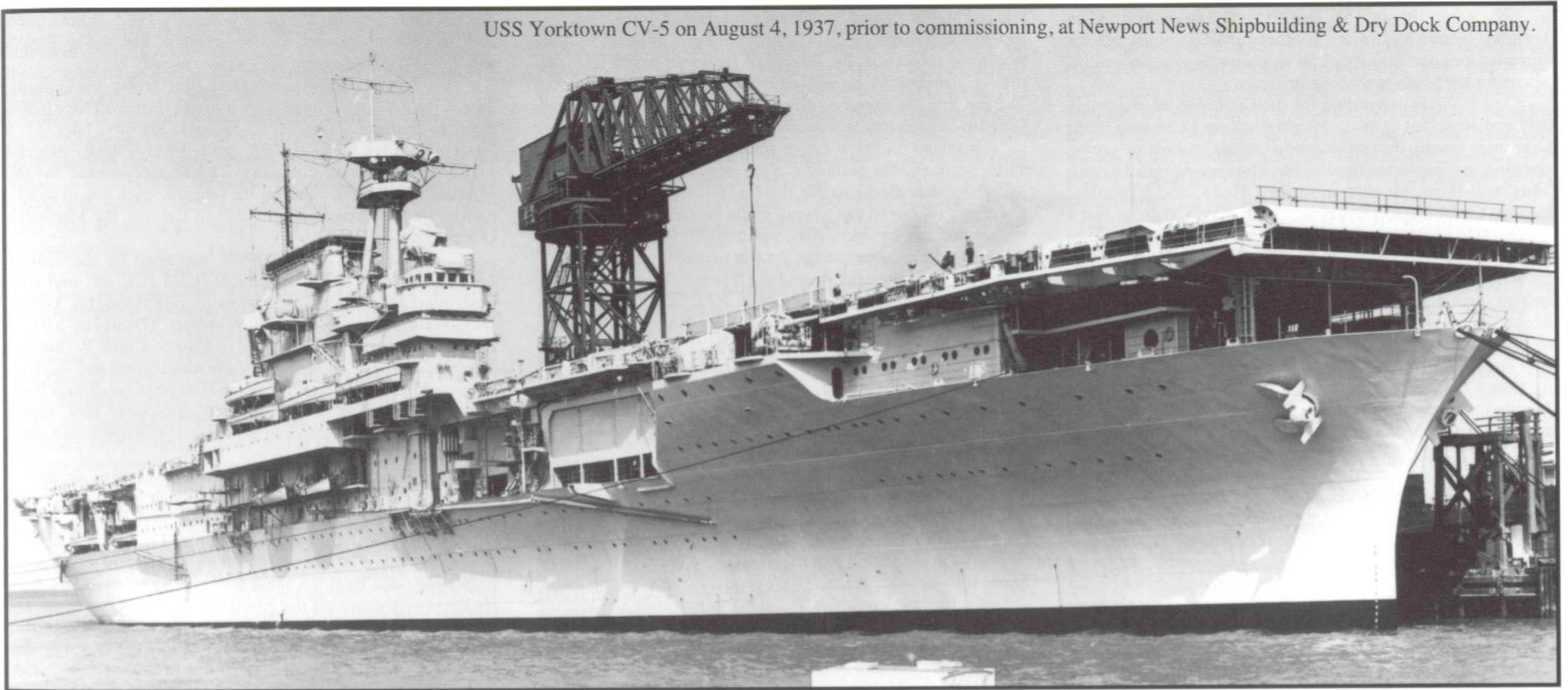


WARSHIP PICTORIAL # 9

# *YORKTOWN CLASS CARRIERS*

by Steve Wiper

USS Yorktown CV-5 on August 4, 1937, prior to commissioning, at Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company.



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# History of the USS Yorktown CV-5

*YORKTOWN* (CV-5) was laid down on 21 May 1934 at Newport News, Va., by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. She was launched on 4 April 1936, sponsored by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, and commissioned at the Naval Operating Base (NOB), Norfolk, Va., on 30 September 1937, Capt. Ernest D. McWhorter in command.

After fitting out, the aircraft carrier trained in Hampton Roads and in the southern drill grounds off the Virginia capes into January of 1938, conducting carrier qualifications for her newly embarked air group.

*YORKTOWN* sailed for the Caribbean on 8 January 1938 and arrived at Culebra, Puerto Rico, on 13 January. Over the ensuing month, the carrier conducted her shakedown cruise, touching at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Gonaives, Haiti, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Cristobal, Panama Canal Zone. Departing Colon Bay, Cristobal, on 1 March, *YORKTOWN* sailed for Hampton Roads and arrived there on the 6th and shifted to the Norfolk Navy Yard the next day for post-shakedown availability. After undergoing repairs through the early autumn of 1938, *YORKTOWN* shifted from the navy yard to Norfolk on 17 October and soon headed for the Southern Drill Grounds for training.

*YORKTOWN* operated off the eastern seaboard, ranging from Chesapeake Bay to Guantanamo Bay, into 1939. As flagship for Carrier Division (CarDiv) 2, she participated in her first war game—Fleet Problem XX—along with her sistership *ENTERPRISE* (CV-6) in February 1939. The scenario for the exercise called for one fleet to control the sea lanes in the Caribbean against the incursion of a foreign European power while maintaining sufficient naval strength to protect vital American interests in the Pacific. The maneuvers were witnessed, in part, by President Roosevelt, embarked in the heavy cruiser *HOUSTON* (CA-30). The exercise revealed that carrier operations, a part of the scenarios for the annual exercises since the entry of *LANGLEY* (CV-1) into the war games in 1925, had achieved a new peak of efficiency. Despite the inexperience of *YORKTOWN* and *ENTERPRISE*, comparative newcomers to the Fleet, both carriers made significant contributions to the success of the problem. The planners had studied the employment of carriers and their embarked air groups in connection with convoy escort, antisubmarine defense, and various attack measures against surface ships and shore installations. In short, they worked to develop the tactics that would be used when war actually came.

Following Fleet Problem XX, *YORKTOWN* returned briefly to Hampton Roads before sailing for the Pacific on 20 April, 1939. Transiting the Panama Canal a week later, *YORKTOWN* soon commenced a regular routine of operations

with the Pacific Fleet. Operating out of San Diego into 1940, the carrier participated in Fleet Problem XXI that April.

Fleet Problem XXI, a two-part exercise, included some of the operations that would characterize future warfare in the Pacific. The first part of the exercise was devoted to training in making plans and estimates in screening and scouting, in coordination of combatant units, and in employing fleet and standard dispositions. The second phase included training in convoy protection, the seizure of advanced bases, and, ultimately, the decisive engagement between the opposing fleets. The last pre-war exercise of its type, Fleet Problem XXI, contained two exercises (comparatively minor at the time) where air operations played a major role. Fleet Joint Air Exercise 114A prophetically pointed out the need to coordinate Army and Navy defense plans for the Hawaiian Islands, and Fleet Exercise 114 proved that aircraft could be used for high altitude tracking of surface forces. This was a significant role for planes that would be fully realized in the war to come.

With the retention of the Fleet in Hawaiian waters after the conclusion of Fleet Problem XXI, *YORKTOWN* operated in the Pacific off the west coast of the United States and in Hawaiian waters until the following spring, when the success of German U-boats preying upon British shipping in the Atlantic required a shift of American naval strength. To reinforce the Atlantic Fleet, the Navy transferred a substantial force from the Pacific including *YORKTOWN*, a battleship division, and accompanying cruisers and destroyers.

*YORKTOWN* departed Pearl Harbor on 20 April 1941 in company with *WARRINGTON* (DD-383), *SOMERS* (DD-381), and *JOUETT* (DD-396), headed southeast, transited the Panama Canal on the night of 6 and 7 May, and arrived at Bermuda on the 12th. From that time to the entry of the United States into the war, *YORKTOWN* conducted four patrols in the Atlantic, ranging from Newfoundland to Bermuda and logging 17,642 miles steamed while enforcing American neutrality. After another Neutrality Patrol stint in November, *YORKTOWN* put into Norfolk on 2 December and was there five days later when American fighting men in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii were rudely awakened to find their country at war.

The early news from the Pacific was bleak. The Pacific Fleet had taken a beating. With the battle line crippled, the unhurt American carriers assumed great importance. There were, on 7 December, only three in the Pacific. *ENTERPRISE*, *LEXINGTON* (CV-2), and *SARATOGA* (CV-3). While *RANGER* (CV-4), *WASP* (CV-7), and the recently commissioned *HORNET* (CV-8) remained in the Atlantic, *YORKTOWN* departed Norfolk on 16 December 1941 and sailed for the Pacific, her secondary gun galleries ogmented

with new 20mm Oerlikon machine guns. She reached San Diego, Calif., on 30 December 1941 and soon became flagship for Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher's newly formed Task Force (TF) 17.

The carrier's first mission in her new theater was to escort a convoy carrying Marine reinforcements to American Samoa. Departing San Diego on 6 January 1942, *YORKTOWN* and her consorts covered the movement of marines to Tutuila and Pago Pago to augment the garrison already there.

Having safely covered that troop movement, *YORKTOWN*, in company with sistership *ENTERPRISE*, departed Samoan waters on 25 January. Six days later, TF 8 built around *ENTERPRISE*, and TF 17, built around *YORKTOWN*, parted company. The former headed for the Marshall Islands, the latter for the Gilberts, each bound to take part in the first American offensive of the war, the Marshalls-Gilberts raids.

At 0517, *YORKTOWN*, screened by the cruiser *LOUISVILLE* (CA-28) and *ST. LOUIS* (CL-49) and four destroyers, launched 11 torpedo planes (Douglas TBD-1 Devastators) and 17 scout bombers (Douglas SBD-3 Dauntlesses) under the command of Comdr. Curtis W. Smiley. Those planes hit what Japanese shore installations and shipping they could find at Jaluit, but adverse weather conditions hampered the mission in which six planes were lost. Other *YORKTOWN* planes attacked Japanese installations and ships at Makin and Mili Atolls.

The attack by TF 17 on the Gilberts had apparently been a complete surprise since the American force encountered no enemy surface ships. A single, four-engine, Kawanishi E7K "Mavis" patrol-bomber seaplane attempted to attack American destroyers that had been sent astern in hope of recovering planes over-due from the Jaluit mission. Antiaircraft fire from the destroyers drove off the intruder before he could cause any damage.

Later, another "Mavis", or possibly the same one that had attacked the destroyers, came out of low clouds 15,000 yards from *YORKTOWN*. The carrier withheld her antiaircraft fire in order not to interfere with the combat air patrol (CAP) fighters. Presently, the "Mavis" pursued by two Wildcats, disappeared behind a cloud. Within five minutes, the enemy patrol plane fell out of the clouds and crashed in the water. Although TF 17 was slated to make a second attack on Jaluit, it was canceled because of heavy rainstorms and the approach of darkness. Therefore, the *YORKTOWN* force retired from the area.

*YORKTOWN* subsequently returned to Pearl Harbor and replenished there before she put to sea on 14 February, bound for the Coral Sea. On 6 March, she rendezvoused with