

WAR OF THE LUCKY LADY

USS SANTA FE WAS ANOTHER OF THE MANY PRODUCTION LINE CRUISERS BUILT FOR THE WAR EFFORT. BUT HER SERVICE TO COUNTRY WAS UNFALTERING, HER ACCOMPLISHMENTS NOBLE AND, LIKE ANY OTHER SHIP WITH A SOUL, SHE WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED BY THOSE MEN WHO BROUGHT HER LIFE

BY CHARLES BOGART

With the crash against her hull of a bottle filled with water from the Santa Fe River, the light cruiser roared down the ways at the New York Shipbuilding Yard, at Camden, New Jersey. As she eased herself into her natural environment, the archbishop of Santa Fe blessed her and her main mast quivered over a collection of Spanish American coins placed there for good luck. Thus was launched the *Cleveland*-class light cruiser *Santa Fe* (CL-60) on 7 June 1942. She was still only a hull with a hint of superstructure, but time would change that. Her story, however, had actually begun almost four years earlier.

With Europe gearing up for war, an undeclared war raging in China, an electorate looking for jobs, and the naval arms limitation treaties being abrogated virtually everywhere, Congress on 17 May 1938, passed a new naval bill which, among other provisions, provided an increase

of 68,754 tons in cruiser tonnage. Authorization and actual construction are, however, two different stories. Plans must be prepared, building ways constructed, equipment ordered, and shipyard gangs trained. Thus it was not until 7 June, 1941, that *Santa Fe* was laid down. By this time Europe was, of course, ablaze with war.

The *Cleveland*-class cruiser was a logical continuance in the US Navy's post WWII cruiser development. They traced their immediate ancestry from the *Brooklyn* light cruiser class through the modified *St. Louis*-class and the improved *Wichitas*. The *Cleveland*-class main battery was reduced by one triple 6-in gun turret (the "C" turret as found on the *Brooklyns* having been deleted). The additional space provided by the removal of the turret was in turn, used for fore and aft

centerline twin 5-in/38 dual purpose guns. As built, *Santa Fe*'s armament consisted of twelve triple 6-in/47, twelve twin 5-in/38, four quad 40mm, four twin 40mm and 21 20mm guns. Overall length was 610 feet, beam 66 ft 4 in and draft 25 ft 6 in. Four boilers drove turbines producing 100,000 shp to the four screws to drive *Santa Fe*'s 13,755 tons at 35 knots. Located on the stern was a hangar and two catapults for three aircraft. For most of the war these were Vought OS2U Kingfishers only giving



To give an idea of the pace of war-time construction, while the USS *South Dakota* (BB-57) is launched on 7 June 1941, at New York Shipbuilding Yard, the keel plate of USS *Santa Fe* is being swung into the building ways.

way in the last months of the war to Curtiss SC-1 Seahawks. Her original crew of 992 officers and men was increased to almost 1400 before the war was over. Her design provided excellent gunnery arcs for surface and air action and optimal water tight integrity without compromising crew space, storerooms for provisions to last 120 days and fuel oil for a 10,000-mile cruising radius. So well constructed were the *Cleveland*-class, that while a number were heavily damaged in action, not one of the 27 ships of the class were lost.

Santa Fe officially joined the Navy on 24 November 1942 when she was commissioned at Philadelphia under the command of Capt. R.S. Berkley. As with all Naval ships, she soon acquired a nickname. None would have been more suitable than "The Lucky Lady."

After a shakedown cruise on the East Coast, coupled with combat readiness training, *Santa Fe*, sailed for Pearl Harbor on 28 February 1943, six months ahead of schedule, via the



The Lucky Lady at sea during the Philippines campaign on 12 December 1944. USS *Washington* (BB-56) is alongside an oiler in the center background. The photo was taken from the USS *Essex* (CV-9).