

"FIRE ON THE HANGAR DECK!"

IF IT WASN'T FOR THE QUICK-THINKING HEROIC ACTION OF HER CREW, DAMAGE TO THE USS BOXER DURING THE KOREAN WAR COULD HAVE KNOCKED THE CARRIER OUT OF SERVICE

BY J.B. RIVARD

It was hard for US Navy Captain Marshall B. Gurney to accept: A .50-caliber machine gun bullet had punctured an aircraft's gas tank below decks, causing a fire. Yet the North Korean enemy was nowhere near his aircraft carrier, the USS *Boxer* (CV-21). Harder still, Capt. Gurney had assumed command of the ship only two days earlier! The *Boxer* had become a vital component of the early days of the Korean War and it was imperative that the carrier be saved so she could fight on.



Flight jacket patch Korean War-era from USS *Boxer*. The carrier had an overall length of 888 feet with a beam of 93 feet and a draft of 28 feet 7 inches.

First, let's take a brief look at the USS *Boxer*. She was one of 24 hard-hitting *Essex*-class carriers and the fifth ship to be named for HMS *Boxer* (captured by the US Navy during the War of 1812). Launched on 14 December 1944, she was commissioned too late to see action in World War Two but she would have another war in the very near future and would go on to undertake ten tours in the Western Pacific.

Boxer was known as one of the "long-hull" designs of the *Essex*-class.

This meant her bow above the waterline was lengthened into a "clipper" form. This increased rake and flare provided deck space for two quad 40mm mounts. The "long-hulls" also had slightly shortened flight decks to provide better arcs of fire. Of the *Essex*-class, only the *Bon Homme Richard* kept the original "short-bow" design. Later ships were variously referred to as "long-bow units" or "long-hull group" or as the "Ticonderoga-class." However, the Navy never maintained any institutional distinction between long- and short-hull units of the *Essex*-class. Upgrades and refits done post-war were equally applied to both groups.

Boxer was completing her shakedown when Japan unconditionally

surrendered. Joining the Pacific Fleet out of San Diego during August 1945, the gleaming new carrier would soon head for Guam where she became the flagship of Task Force 77 and would continue in this position until near the end of August 1946. During this time, she sailed to Okinawa,



The carrier slides down the ways at the Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company on 14 December 1944. Note the banner spread across *Boxer*'s flight deck reading "He We Go to Tokyo! Newport News Shipyard Workers' War Bonds Help to Sink the Rising Sun." Power came from eight boilers and four geared steam turbines capable of 150,000-shp.



Korean War naval airpower at its best. Vought F4U-5N Corsair night-fighters from VC-3 overfly USS *Boxer* (CV-21) on 4 September 1951. *Boxer* weighed in at 27,100 long tons standard.