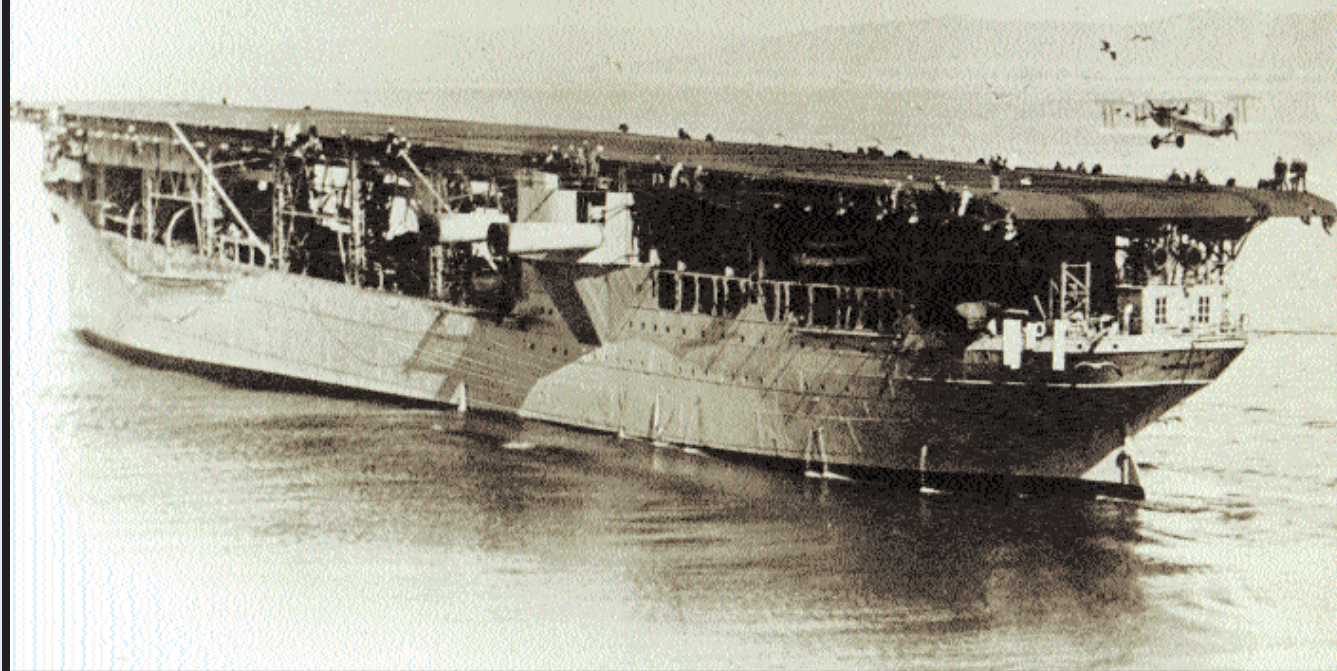


ANOTHER MILESTONE FOR CARRIER AVIATION



By Hill Goodspeed and Tom Wildenberg

Naval Aviation is replete with historic events that form its foundation, such as the celebration of its 75th anniversary in 1986. Less well recognized but arguably as important as its 8 May 1911 birthday is the 75th anniversary of the first operational deployment from a carrier, *Langley* (CV 1).

The year was 1925, three years after *Langley* was commissioned. Converted from the collier *Jupiter*, there was not much to the Navy's first flattop. *Langley* did not boast the bristling superstructures of the fleet's battleships; instead, a wooden flight deck stretched the length of her hull. "This poor comic ship," as an officer once described her, was soon relegated to a position astern of the battle group—inspiring her nickname, the "Covered Wagon." Such was her status in the mind of her first skipper, a nonaviator, that he did not bother to attend her commissioning ceremony! Nevertheless, it was upon the deck of *Langley* that Naval Aviation had to demonstrate the viability of the aircraft carrier in naval warfare.

Led by officers such as Commander Kenneth Whiting and Lieutenant Alfred M. Pride, Naval Aviators recorded the Navy's first carrier catapult launches and arrested landings aboard *Langley* and began perfecting the intricacies of flight deck operations. Yet not until the carrier deployed at sea with other ships of the fleet would the true merit of carrier aviation be determined. To this end,

A single-seat VE-7SF lands aboard *Langley* (CV 1) in 1925.

on 30 November 1924, *Langley* reported for duty as part of the Battle Fleet.

The personnel of Fighting Squadron (VF) 2 trained intensively for their date with destiny. During the closing days of 1924, the pilots practiced simulated carrier landings on a wooden platform that had been set up ashore, while squadron mechanics labored to prepare the aircraft for flight operations aboard CV 1.

On 2 March 1925, 7 pilots, 42 enlisted men and 9 Vought VE-7SF aircraft embarked as the carrier set sail for exercises off the California coast. Although the squadron's air activity was limited to scouting flights in advance of the fleet, the performance of the aircraft convinced Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet Admiral Robert E. Coontz to recommend hastening the completion of the large-deck carriers *Lexington* (CV 2) and *Saratoga* (CV 3), and developing more durable and capable carrier aircraft.

The success of carrier aircraft operating aboard *Langley* 75 years ago set the stage for the critical role that Naval Aviation plays in naval warfare in the new century.

Note: The squadron in this article shares no lineage with later squadrons designated VF-2.

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