

USS SARATOGA ASSOCIATION
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SARATOGA I

(Ship sloop: tonnage 150; length 68' (keel); beam 25'4"; depth of hold 12'; complement 86; armament 16 9-pounders, 2 4-pounders)

The first *Saratoga*, a sloop built at Philadelphia by Warton and Humphries, was begun in December 1779 and launched on 10 April 1780.

Commanded by Capt. John Young, *Saratoga* departed Philadelphia on 13 August 1780 escorting packet, *Mercury*, which was sailing for Europe carrying Henry Laurens. The former President of the Continental Congress was planning to seek money on the European continent to finance the American government.

Two days later, *Saratoga* passed *Trumbull* and *Deane* in the upper Delaware Bay. However, the frigates, after communicating with Young and Laurens, continued on up the Delaware River to replenish at Philadelphia.

After waiting in vain for the frigates to return - to join *Saratoga* in a cruise as a squadron - *Saratoga* and *Mercury* passed through the Delaware capes to sea. Because of inadequate ballast, *Saratoga* was unstable under a heavy spread of canvas and was forced to proceed much more slowly than her fleet consort. Thus, *Mercury* was forced to heave to each night to allow *Saratoga* to catch up. This schedule continued until the 23rd when Laurens released the sloop with the suggestion that she "...make a short cruise and then return to Philadelphia..."

For more than a fortnight, Young operated east of the shipping lanes while he trained his crew in operating their ship and fighting her guns. On the afternoon of 9 September, a lookout spotted a sail to the northwest. By then, Young had managed to get *Saratoga* into fighting shape.

He headed his ship toward the unknown sail and set out in hot pursuit. By twilight, he was close enough to see that his quarry was a brig flying British colors. Some two hours later, *Saratoga* had closed within hailing distance and learned that the chase was the Royal Navy's brig, *Keppel*, and not about to surrender. *Saratoga* opened fire with a broadside and was quickly answered by the brig, opening an inclusive three-hour battle. During the action, gale force seas coincided with her insufficient ballast to prevent *Saratoga's* guns from inflicting serious damage to her adversary. The British brig also evaded Young's repeated efforts to close to boarding distance. Finally, as midnight approached, Young ordered the helmsman to head for home.

Three days later, as *Saratoga* approached Cape Henlopen; she overtook the British ship, *Sarah*, bound for New York laden with rum from the West Indies. The merchantman surrendered without resisting, and the two ships proceeded into the Delaware and anchored off Chester, Pa., the following afternoon. The prize and her cargo were promptly condemned and sold, bringing the continental treasury funds desperately needed to refit frigate, *Confederacy*, for sea.

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During her three days at Chester, *Saratoga* replenished her stores and took on additional iron ballast before heading back down the Delaware toward the open sea and another cruise. She cleared the Delaware Capes on 18 September and sailed northward along the New Jersey coast. A week later, off the Jersey highlands, she captured the 60-ton American brig, *Elizabeth*, which had been taken in Chesapeake Bay several weeks before by British privateer, *Restoration*. Young sent the brig to Philadelphia under a prize crew.

Saratoga remained in the vicinity of this score without encountering any further prey. Toward the end of the month, she turned south. The sloop cruised parallel to the coast. Far out to sea, Young constantly exercised her crew at her guns and in her rigging to sharpen their fighting capability. They proved their seamanship on 10 October by safely bringing their ship through a fearful storm with but superficial damage - a storm which decimated the British squadron which Admiral Rodney had sent out of New York to patrol the American coast.

That night, she turned north again; and, at dawn the next day, spotted two sails far off her port bow. The sloop was due east of Cape Henry when she began the chase. As *Saratoga* closed the distance between herself and her quarry, Young ordered his helmsman to head for the open water between the enemy ships which proved to be the large, 22-gun letter of marquee ship, *Charming Molly*, and a small schooner, *Two Brothers*. When *Saratoga* was between the two English vessels, he ordered the letter of marquee to surrender, but she refused to do so. After the Americans had fired a broadside into their hapless opponent, a boarding party, led by Lt. Joshua Barney, leapt to the merchantman's deck and opened a fierce hand to hand fight which soon compelled the British captain to lower his colors.

An American prize crew under Barney promptly took the place of *Charming Molly's* British skipper, officers, and tars. Young then set out after the fleeing sloop which surrendered without resistance. The second prize, *Two Brothers*, promptly headed for the Delaware for libeling in Admiralty court in Philadelphia.

From the prisoners captured on *Charming Molly*, Young learned that she and *Two Brothers* had been part of a small merchant fleet which had sailed from Jamaica and which had been scattered by the recent storm. As a result, as soon as his crew had finished temporary repairs to *Charming Molly's* battle-damaged hull, *Saratoga* began to search for the remaining Jamaica men, a ship and two brigs. About mid-day on the 10th, a lookout saw three sails slowly rise above the horizon dead ahead, and another chase began. As the sloop of war approached the strangers, the remainder of the Jamaica fleet, Young ordered her helmsman to head her between the ship and one of the brigs. As she passed between the enemy vessels, she fired both broadsides, her port guns at ship, *Elizabeth*, and her starboard muzzles belched fire and iron at the brig, *Nancy*. The enemy's fire passed above *Saratoga*, causing only minor damage to her rigging while the first American salvo knocked *Nancy* out of the action and did substantial damage to *Elizabeth* which surrendered after taking another volley. Meanwhile, the other brig raced away; and Young, busy with his first two new prizes, allowed her to escape free of pursuit.

Saratoga's crew labored repairing the battered hulls of the prizes before sending them toward the Delaware capes. About midnight, *Saratoga* herself got underway northward. At dawn, near Cape Henlopen, a blue jacket aloft reported seeing two unknown sails, one dead ahead and the other several miles off her port quarter. The first was later identified as American brig, *Providence*, and then a British prize heading for New York; the second was the 74-gun British ship-of-line, *Alcide*. Despite the proximity of the British man-of-war, Young set out after the merchantman and recaptured her after about an hour's chase. Young quickly put a prize crew on board *Providence* and then *Saratoga* got underway for the Delaware. The sloop of war was anchored off Chester, Pa., at dawn on 14 October.

On 15 December, after being refitted at Philadelphia, *Saratoga* got underway for Hispaniola to load French military supplies there which were awaiting transportation to America. New Officers and men had come on board to replace those who had left the ship to man her prizes. A number of merchantmen awaited her just inside the capes hoping to be escorted to a safe offing. On the morning of the 20th, favorable weather enabled the sloop of war to put to sea escorting her 12 charges. The next afternoon, after one of the merchantmen signaled that an unknown sail had appeared, *Saratoga* set out to

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investigate. Within two hours, she reached within firing range and sent a warning 4-pounder shot across the stranger's bow. Instead of surrendering, the British privateer, *Resolution*, maneuvered to attack. The ships fired at the same instant. *Resolution's* gunners fired high and so did superficial damage to the American warship while *Saratoga's* broadside damaged the privateer's hull and superstructure and forced her to surrender.

Young embarked the privateer's crew in *Saratoga* as prisoners; and placed an American crew on the prize. The two ships then headed toward Cape Henlopen which *Saratoga* reached on New Year's Day, 1781. Young turned his prisoners over to the Continental agent at Lewes, Del., and headed his sloop of war back toward the Caribbean the same day.

On the morning of 9 January 1781, in a fierce battle off the coast of England's loyal province of East Florida, *Saratoga* captured *Tonyn*, a 20-gun letter of marquee which had recently sailed from St. Augustine laden with turpentine, indigo, hides, and deerskins intended for Liverpool. Young spent a day repairing the prize and his own ship rigging. Then the two ships got underway on the morning of the 11th for Hispaniola. On the 16th, *Saratoga* captured without resistance, armed brig, *Douglas*, carrying wine from Madeira to Charleston, S.C., that important Southern port which had fallen into British hands. Young sent this prize to Philadelphia. On the 27th, *Saratoga* and *Tonyn* reached Cap Francais where Young turned the prize over to the French Admiralty court and arranged to have *Saratoga* docked to have her hull scrapped and coated with pitch while awaiting the arrival of military cargo and French frigates to assist in convoying a fleet of Allied merchantmen. Meanwhile, the governor of the French colony of Saint Dominique suggested that *Saratoga* join her sister Continental frigates, *Deane* and *Confederacy*, American privateer, *Fair American*, and French naval brig, *Cat*, in a cruise through the windward passage to Jamaica. The little fleet departed Cap Francais on 20 February and returned eight days later with prize, *Diamond*, which they had captured as it approached Jamaica laden with plunder taken by the British during Admiral Rodney's conquest of the Dutch Island, St. Eustatius.

By mid-March, all was ready. The French warships were on hand; the Continental warships were loaded, and 29 heavily-laden merchant ships were in the harbor awaiting escorts. The convoy sortied from Cap Francais on the 15th, the ides of March. Three days later, a lookout high over *Saratoga's* deck reported two sails far off to westward, and the eager sloop of war left the convoy in pursuit of the strangers. About midafternoon, she caught up with one of the fleeing ships which surrendered without a fight. Young placed an American crew on board the prize and got underway after the second chase. Midshipman Penfield, commander of the prize crew, later reported that, as he was supervising his men's efforts to follow *Saratoga*, the wind suddenly rose to fearful velocity and almost capsized the prize. When he had managed to get the snow-rigged merchantman back under control, he looked up and was horrified to learn that *Saratoga* had vanished, and no further details of her fate have ever been discovered.



Courtesy of: US Navy