

Office of Naval Records and History  
Ships' Histories Section  
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS AARON WARD (DD 483)

The USS AARON WARD, gallant hero of the Third Battle of Savo Island, was sunk by an air attack on April 7, 1943, bringing to an end a colorful wartime career that was marked by numerous clashes with the enemy.

Five aerial bombs delivered the fatal blows to the fighting destroyer as she steamed on her screening station off Guadalcanal. Twenty of her crew were killed, seven were missing, and 8 seriously wounded. Eight officers and 43 men were slightly wounded.

Early months of the Pacific war found the AARON WARD just out of her building cradle. However, after a brief training period off Casco Bay, Portland, Maine, the new destroyer was on her way to fight the Pacific war. On May 26, 1942, she passed through the Canal Zone and set her course to San Diego, a preliminary stop to the Pacific combat area.

Her early duties consisted of escort work. During the beginning of August, the AARON WARD screened the USS CIMARRON (AO 22) enroute to Suva Harbor, Southwest Pacific. At least two excellent sound contacts were attacked by the new destroyer, each resulting in possible damage to the enemy submarines.

During the middle of August, the vessel joined a rather depleted American task force that was heretofore carrying the brunt of the Allied naval war. She steamed continuously with this fighting unit in its brave stand to protect what footholds the American forces had gained during those early days of the war. Fueling was necessarily performed at sea and only brief periods at Espiritu Santo were afforded for upkeep and rest.

During task force operations on September 15, the AARON WARD saw the carrier WASP (CV 7) take a torpedo and sink. The task force had previously assembled in full strength to meet an enemy naval force threat that did not materialize.

On October 17, the AARON WARD and the USS LARDNER (DD 487) steamed together on a bombardment mission at Guadalcanal. Before picking up liaison officers from the First Marine Division, the two destroyers weathered a Jap aerial bombing attack. Three bombs were evaded by the AARON WARD and the LARDNER likewise escaped the explosives, although both vessels were sprayed with shrapnel.

Possible shore batteries and other suspected Jap emplacements were raked by the two destroyers who continued on their planned mission despite threats of recurring air attacks.



Rejoining her task force, the AARON WARD steamed in the forward screen on October 20 when the cruiser CHESTER was sunk. Shortly after the explosion, the destroyer left her screening area and rushed to the aid of the CHESTER. A sound contact was gained and heavy pattern charges were laid upon the suspected enemy raider.

Another assault upon Jap positions on Guadalcanal was launched on October 30 with good success. On November 11, the AARON WARD was in the thick of things again, this time repelling a flight of 9 planes. One of the enemy fliers was shot down and two others were damaged. Two more were shot down the next day off Lunga Point, as enemy activity began to reach a tempo that was to bring on a full scale battle.

The head-on clash between Jap and American naval forces in what was to be known as the Third Battle of the Savo Island reached its full fury on the night of November 12-13. Repulsed in late October with heavy losses of troops on Guadalcanal and of aircraft in the carrier duel of October 26, the Japs began to assemble troops and ships for another offensive.

The Americans knew well enough what was brewing, but their situation, nevertheless, was critical. Only one carrier, the incompletely repaired ENTERPRISE could be counted upon to participate in the battle.

In spite of the odds, the small American task force, including the AARON WARD which led the destroyer force, steamed through the overcast night to meet the enemy force.

Shortly after midnight on November 13, the battle began to rage. The three-column Jap forces threw confusion into the Americans who had not fully grasped the strategy employed by the Japanese.

Sometime after 2 a.m., the AARON WARD, her guns blazing as fast as their crews could handle the ammunition, steamed through the entire enemy formation, scoring damaging blows as her guns kept hitting repeatedly.

Her fire sunk or helped sink one enemy cruiser and damaged two destroyers. However, she did not come through her daring escapade unscathed. Nine direct hits, four of them from major caliber projectiles, were received. The shells blew apart her director, range-finder, radar antennae, searchlights, telephone cables, radar room, and even sheared the foremast off above the stay ring. Shrapnel holes were also spattered throughout the entire galley bulkheads.

Daylight the next morning found her dead in the water, unable to muster any steam. The USS BOBOLINK (ATO 131) took her in tow and headed for Tulagi. However, a KONGO class Jap battleship, which was slowly steaming in circles, let loose at the AARON WARD with two-gun salvos which straddled her on the third splash. Friendly aircraft came to the foundering ship's rescue, however, and sent the Nip battlewagon to the bottom.