USS NORTH CAROLINA

THE 'SHOWBOAT'

By DICK GORRELL and BRUCE ROBERTS
The U.S.S. North Carolina was born for war, and the only life she knew was the life of battle. Her short career ended when the sounds of battle faded at the end of World War II. She was a little over four years old when Japan surrendered, but in the action-filled years between 1941 and 1945 she earned for herself a reputation that will live as long as men remember the brutest war in the Pacific.

The enemy could not kill the North Carolina, although they claimed she had been sunk six times. They shelled her, shelled her, torpedoed her, but still she lived to win triumphantly into Tokyo Bay at war's end.

Time and advancing technology ended her fighting days. Once, the North Carolina and her sister battleships were the most feared warships afloat. Now she is part of yesterday's Navy, a museum piece. Today, the capital ships are the trim, missile-carrying nuclear submarines and the super carriers.

But write no epitaph for the U.S.S. North Carolina. She lives by decree of the people of the state for which she was named. They raised by subscription more than a quarter of a million dollars to save their ship from execution. The citizenry, Tar Heels declared, would not dismember this fighting lady. They endowed her as a war memorial to the men and women of all the U.S. military services who fought for this nation's freedom in World War II.

True, her guns are masked in a safe and final port. But each day the high drama of her fighting years is lived by the men, women and children who board her for a look at the mightiest battleship to face the overwhelming Japanese forces in the early days of World War II.

She raised Japanese land installations, shipping, ground forces and air power from Guadalcanal to Tokyo Bay. Her log is a history of the U.S. offensive in the Pacific. She earned 12 battle stars during her 40 months of combat duty. These engagements took the lives of nine of the North Carolina's men, and 40 others were wounded.

The bell old into the water at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.
SHOWBOAT

She did not get a great deal more punishment than she took. She was credited with downing 24 Japanese planes during her 507,000-mile wartime cruise. She sank one merchantman, and on nine different occasions she steamed within range of enemy guns to dump tons of explosives on Japanese strongholds.

But this is just part of the saga of the lady-of-war sailors called The Showboat.

Her part in history actually began when diplomats from the major powers sat around polished tables in Washington and produced the Naval Treaty of 1922. A battleship North Carolina was being built in Norfolk at that time, but because of treaty provisions dealing with the number of capital ships and armament, the hull was scrapped. The Navy abandoned plans for building battleships for some years to come.

Fourteen years later the worthlessness of the treaty became evident. An arms race was on, and the treaty provisions were disregarded. War was coming, though few in the United States cared to admit it. There were among our national leaders those who foresaw the dangers and took early steps to prepare the United States to defend her shores and far-flung interests. On June 3, 1936, Congress took one of the biggest of these early steps and authorized the building of BB 59, the U.S.S. North Carolina.

The original plans for the new battleship included 14-inch rifles, the maximum size allowed by the Washington Treaty. However, in July, before the keel was laid, the State Department announced that "there is not a universal acceptance of the limit of gunpower at 14 inches." When the final plans came off the drafting board, all turret fittings had been changed to house the new 16-inch rifles.

On October 27, 1937, the keel was laid in Brooklyn Navy Yard.

The announcement caused little stir on Main Street, U. S. A. For one thing, a man earning $20 a week found it hard to grasp the significance of a
The North Carolina fired the first 16-inch salvo of the war into Japanese territory at Narua.

$200 million battleship. For another, he considered Hitler some new kind of German fanatic and Mussolini was his posturing Italian counterpart. The Japanese lived in houses with thatched roofs and made cheap toys. Attack us? Not very likely! There were thousands of miles of ocean between the Axis countries and Main Street. Besides, this nation was beginning to stride out of depression. Its people were learning to laugh again. The ominous rumblings of war were drowned in the new music of the day. Swing was the thing, and its high priests included Artie Shaw who later served on the North Carolina in the Pacific. Their temples were dance halls which spawned something new on the American scene, the jitterbug. On any spring night on any U. S. street you could hear radio comedians cracking jokes about Der Fuehrer and his "supermen."

While America laughed and jitterbugged and enjoyed the return of prosperity the grim business of building the U.S.S. North Carolina moved ahead. The national mood had changed considerably by the time she slid down the ways on June 13, 1940.

There were 54,000 persons on hand when Miss Isabel Hoey, daughter of North Carolina Governor
Clyde R. Hoey, broke a bottle across the bow of The Showboat and launched the new hull herself with champagne. "In the name of the United States of America, North Carolina," she said. And her father added: "In very power is fascinating. It commands our respect and it will help to command the respect of the world. It speaks a language that even a dictator can understand."

The division paid little attention. They were drunk on money and they thirsted for more. As the North Carolina slid down the ways, German troops were crossing over France. The Japanese were talking peace, but they were planning war.

A worried America watched closely when the North Carolina joined the fleet on April 9, 1941. She was the first battleship commissioned since 1923. All of the major radio networks were there with microphones when Captain O. M. Howard read his orders to the 1,500 men who would man the North Carolina. She carried newsmen whose bylines were familiar in every part of the country when she steamed out of New York Harbor on trial runs. New Yorkers, watching the massive and majestic ship slide in and out of port, were quick to nickname her the Showboat.

And The Showboat she was. She made history when she slid down the ways and she made history on her shake-downs. She carried the first modern anti-aircraft battery, destined to down many a Japanese aerial, but her 36-inch turrets were the real show pieces. She used them to tell the world that a mighty fighting ship was on the commission of the United States when she fired the first 16-inch salvos in modern naval history. With one broadside, The Showboat threw 42,138 pounds of metal at a target off Casco Bay, Maine.

The North Carolina was striking down fast. Her crew was getting used to her and to life aboard, and the national and international attention she was getting rightfully brought a touch of pride to an officer named William S. Maxwell. On a cold Sunday morning as The Showboat steamed through peaceful blue waters in the North Atlantic, he could relax a bit and reflect on the events that had taken place since he was put in charge of her construction. Now he was her chief engineer, and he was proud of her progress. But this particular Sunday was December 7, 1941—the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. All the time for reflection and relaxation ended with the first wave of bombers that swooped in over a sleeping Honolulu and caught the Pacific Fleet at anchor. The United States was at war. The youthful Showboat had to grow up in a hurry to play the role history had created for her. And she did. For the next six months training abound the North Carolina was intense. For her gunners life was a continuous "Load and fire. Load and fire." On May 28, 1942, she put in at Hampton Roads, Virginia, to load ammunition. On June 4 she stood out for the Carol Zone. On June 15 she arrived at San Pedro, Calif. Six days later she was on her way to the war in the Pacific.
One of the less glamorous jobs of a sailor's life aboard.

A watch in the Pacific.
Mt. Fuji yama rises against the sky as the "Showboat" and American fleet arrive victorious off the Japanese coast.

Protection against Japanese submarines while anchored in the Eiloe Islands.
On July 11, 1942, the U.S.S. North Carolina moved into Pearl Harbor. Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, the Navy's commanding officer in the Pacific, recalls the moment:

"I well remember the great thrill when she arrived in Pearl Harbor during the early stages of the war—-at a time when our strength and fortunes were at low ebb. She was the first of the great new battleships to join the Pacific Fleet, and her mere presence in a task force was enough to keep morale at a peak. Before the war's end she had built for herself a magnificent record of accomplishment."

And indeed our fortunes in the Pacific were at low ebb this summer of 1942. Spread before the crew of The Showboat in Pearl Harbor were the ruins of the Pacific Fleet. The twisted, blackened hulls of once-great battleships marked the combis of 3,100 men and the gravesyard of a fleet. At Bataan and Corregidor, a heroic resistance by Philippine and American fighting men bought the time the United States needed to recover from the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The United States had suffered serious losses in the Java Sea campaign, but the threat to Hawaii and the West Coast had been removed by the fleet's success in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. The Japanese offensive had been checked, but the war was far from over.

The Showboat was a powerful youngster among the remnants of the fleet. But could she fight? Was she a good ship or would she be what sailors fear most—a junk ship?

The answer wasn't long in coming. On July 15, 1942, The Showboat stood out under secret orders to Tongatabu in the Tonga Group. On the 21st, she dropped her 25,800-pound anchor in Nukunono anchorage. Her venture into fighting waters had begun. That same day she rendezvoused with a task group that would cover the landing of troops on a little-known island called Guadalcanal.

Few of the Showboat's crew had ever heard of Guadalcanal, but it was on this little island that a small group of U.S. Marines and a determined, revenge-minded fleet would start the United States on the road to Tokyo Bay.

On August 7 the Marines hit the beach on Guadalcanal. Overhead, covering the landing, were carrier planes. The North Carolina was ordered to screen the carriers from enemy air and surface attack. Her position kept her out of the First Battle of Savo Sound, but her baptism of fire was coming.

On August 24, while steaming with the Carrier Enterprise and an accompanying force of four cruisers and 11 destroyers, the first Japanese air attack aimed at The Showboat developed. The force was moving between Malaita and混乱 Islands when the furious assault began.

Enemy dive-bombers and torpedo planes swarmed down upon the Enterprise and the North Carolina. Three times the "Big E" was hit. Near misses sprayed The Showboat many times. A Japanese fighter raced in over the battleship, its machine guns chattering. One sailor was killed. The North Carolina's gunners blanketed the sky with exploding steel. Her batteries threw up such a barrage that the Enterprise inspired anxiously, "Are you alive?"

When the smoke cleared, the North Carolina's verified score was seven enemy planes destroyed and many probably and of which. The "Big E" planes had sunk an enemy carrier and damaged a cruiser and a destroyer.

They call this fight the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, and it all but stripped the Japanese of carrier support. The Japanese broke off the fight, although their surface forces were still largely intact.

The North Carolina had undergone her first ordeal of battle, and she had been blooded. Could she fight? Man, could she! The "Big E's" message, "Are you alive?" has become a military firepower leg-
The story on these pages is a personal one of two men who served together in the Navy, both of whom are now dead. One, a young enthusiast for the sea, was born and raised in the United States. The other, a seasoned sailor, came from a long line of sea captains. Both were aboard the battleship USS North Carolina during the Battle of Midway. Their experiences on that day were vivid and intense.

The North Carolina was one of the few battleships that survived the battle, sustaining only minor damage. The ship's crew worked tirelessly to repair the damage and continue the fight. The ship's captain, Commander John H. Coles, ordered the ship to return to Pearl Harbor under its own power for repairs.

By December 7, 1942, the North Carolina returned to Pearl Harbor and rejoined the fleet. The ship was refitted and returned to action, participating in the Guadalcanal campaign. The ship's crew was awarded the Battle of Midway as a unit citation for its outstanding performance.

In March 1943, the North Carolina was transferred to the Pacific Theater, where it continued to serve until the end of the war. The ship's crew was awarded the Battle of Midway as a unit citation for its outstanding performance.

The story of the North Carolina's service during the war is a testament to the dedication and bravery of its crew. The ship's story continues to inspire new generations of sailors and admirers of the sea.
planes downed. With further Japanese air attacks on the Marianas out of the question, the last U. S. force went after surface ships. U. S. planes sank two carriers, damaged three. The "turkey shoot" and the Battle of the Philippine Sea had the Japanese reeling. Air sea superiority belonged to the United States. The Showboat added the silhouettes of two more Japanese planes to her gun-director mounts, indicating her kills during the battle.

On July 8, 1944, the North Carolina was ordered to Bremerton, Washington, for repairs. Behind her as she steamed into Puget Sound were 25 months of warfare. She had seen the U. S. Pacific Fleet rebuilt from the smoldering ruins of Pearl Harbor to the greatest navy in the world. Newer and larger ships were assassing the Japanese now, but none were so proud as the crewmen of The Showboat when they strode down the gangplank at Bremerton to go home on leave.

After two months, the North Carolina stood out of Puget Sound for the battle area to rejoin the offensive in the Pacific.

The North Carolina hit Leyte, Luzon, Formosa and took part in attacks on the China Coast.

She was in on the assault and occupation of Iwo Jima and raiding the main Japanese Island of Honshu with the Fifth and Third Fleets. At Iwo Jima she emptied her entire store of ammunition on enemy installations in four days, one of the greatest naval bombardments in history.

At Okinawa, The Showboat was hit again. A shell killed three men and wounded 40. Despite the damage, the North Carolina continued to shell the island in support of Marine troops.

After repairs, The Showboat returned to action with the Third Fleet to strike again at Japan. Twice during the first week of August, 1945, The Showboat stood by her guns while the U. S. cut loose with a revolutionary weapon—the atom bomb.

On August 15, 1945, the crew of The Showboat witnessed a strange performance. Strike planes returned early from missions over Japan and jettisoned their bomb loads just outside the formation of ships.

Capt. R. H. Hatton, the right-hander of the North Carolina addressed the crew: Japan had capitulated. The war was over.

There was silence aboard The Showboat as daggere-clad sailors, officers in khaki, saluted with tattooed arms and fury-checked youngster thanked God for the end of hostilities.

On September 1, The Showboat anchored in Tokyo Bay. The next day, with her homebound pennant streaming behind her, The Showboat stood out from Sagami Wan for the happiest voyage of her career.

Four days in Pearl Harbor, three in Panama City and one in Cristobal allowed the crew to let-off a year's pent up steam.

Early in the morning of October 17, The Showboat raised Cape Cod and then Provincetown Light. Four hours later, the veteran of 16 months in the Pacific stood into Boston Inner Harbor amidst welcoming screams from whistle, siren and horn of girls.

A proud ship had borne her crew from war into peace. She had won 12 battle stars, scoured 907,000
miles, entered 26 different ports, saw 24 Japanese planes, sank a merchantman and bombarded nine different Japanese strongholds. She had toured the war road from Guadalcanal to Tokyo Bay.

Now her fighting days were done, her usefulness finished. The battleship was obsolete. On June 27, 1947, the North Carolina was decommissioned.

For 14 years the lifeless body of the great fighting ship swung at anchor with the mothball fleet at Bayonne, N. J. In 1960 the Navy condemned her to the scrap heap. She would be cut into scrap metal if the state of North Carolina didn't want her.

But North Carolina did want her, and got her. Then school children gave dinners, citizens from all walks of life contributed dollars and a levy of North Carolina "admirals" each gave $100 or more to bring The Showboat home. In less than nine months, Tar Heels had contributed more than $250,000. Cyril S. Adams, an engineer at Houston, Texas, drew up the launching plan for her and gave much additional vital technical assistance and constant encouragement.

In late September 1961, the North Carolina started her final voyage. This time she was under tow. On October 2 she appeared at the mouth of the fog-shrouded Cape Fear River. Like a gray ghost from the past she loomed out of the mist, and into the channel. Thousands lined the river bank to cheer her progress. A Southport pilot, Capt. B. M. Burris, guided her through the narrow (for a 108-ft. wide battleship) channel without bruising a boney. It was late afternoon when her massive superstructure, dwarfing waterfront buildings, slid majestically into the Port of Wilmington. Admiral was the ticklish job of maneuvering her into her slip. At the point she was turned, the 728-ft. battleship was longer than the channel was wide. Everything had to go exactly right, and it almost did. Unfortunately, The Showboat jammed her stern against a floating restaurant and her bows went aground. For 30 feverish minutes 11 tugs and a bulldozer worked to free her.

Waiting for her was the man who helped build her and as chief engineer, sail her in combat—Rear Admiral William S. Maxwell USN (Ret.). Admiral Maxwell was awaiting his old ship for good reason. He had been named superintendent of the North Carolina Battleship Memorial.

As tugs and men fought to free her bows from the mud bank at the entrance of the permanent slip, the admiral gripped the rail of her temporary gangway hard and said over and over, "Come on, baby. You never failed us before. Don't do it now."

And she didn't. BB 55 was a lady to the last.
Governor Terry Sanford glances the North Carolina as she approaches the bar off the Cape Fear River.

Red weather delayed her one day bringing the

Governor Sanford presents President Kennedy with a certificate making him the first admiral in the North Carolina Navy. Left to right are: Secretary of Commerce Luther H. Hodges, President Kennedy, Senator Sam Ervin and Hugh Morton, Chairman of the U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship Commission.

Homecoming for the North Carolina

The North Carolina comes up the channel of the Cape Fear River.

Tugs ease The Showboat around the turn from the Cape Fear channel into her berthing area.
How the Money Was Raised to Bring the North Carolina Home

Thousands of North Carolinians contributed money to the Save-Our-Battleship effort, but there were some men who poured their hearts and souls into the operation. They were the men appointed by Governor Terry Sanford to membership on the U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship Commission. Their tireless efforts to help save The Showboat drew the gratitude of a state. They are:

Hugh M. Morton, Chairman, Wilmington
Orville B. Campbell, Vice-Chairman, Chapel Hill
John H. Fox, Treasurer, Wilmington
G. Andrew Jones, Jr., Secretary, Raleigh
Victor Bryant, Sr., Durham
Thomas C. Ellis, Raleigh
Percy B. Furbee, Andrews
J. D. Fiz, Morganton
T. Ed Pickard, Jr., Charlotte
Ed L. Rankin, Jr., Raleigh
Marvin R. Robbins, Rocky Mount
Eugene G. Thompson, Warsaw
William W. Wilkin, Wilmington
William Womble, Raleigh
Jack Young, Southern Pines

The idea came from Jimmy Craig.

The idea that motivated the Save-Our-Battleship undertaking came from Wilmington’s James S. Craig, Jr., a member of the commission and of the American Legion. Jimmy Craig did not see the trim hull of the battleship slide majestically into its new memorial shrine at the Port of Wilmington. He was in the Army Barracks Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in critical condition from injuries received in a September 20, 1961, air show crash. He died October 18, the day The Showboat was first opened to the public.

Acting on Craig’s idea, Governor Luther H. Hodges in November 1960 appointed a U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship Advisory Committee to investigate the feasibility of saving the ship. The Advisory Committee reported to Governor Hodges and later to Governor Sanford that the ship should be saved, and in April 1961 the Battleship Commission was named to carry out their recommendation. Many members of the Advisory Committee were appointed to the Commission.
Facts about the ‘Showboat’

Keel laid: October 27, 1937 (Navy Day)
Launched: June 13, 1940
Commissioned: April 9, 1941
Overall length: 728 feet, 6 inches
Draft: 30 feet
Beam: 108 feet, 4 inches
Maximum speed: 27 knots
Crew: 1,890 officers and men
Main battery: Three turrets of three 16-inch guns
Secondary battery: 20 five-inch guns
Anti-aircraft battery: 40-mm. and 20-mm. multiple-mount guns
Salvo capability: 19 guns, 92,750 pounds of steel
Armor belt: 18 inches
Total cost: $200,000,000
Aircraft: Carried two OS2U (Kingfisher) catapult-launched planes
Displacement: 35,000 tons
Earned 12 battle stars in World War II in the Pacific

Successive Commanding Officers:

- Captain O. M. Howard
- Captain O. C. Badger
- Captain G. H. Fort
- Captain W. B. Baker
- Captain F. P. Thomas
- Captain F. G. Fabric
- Captain O. S. Golclough
- Captain B. H. Hulan
- Captain T. J. O’Brien

Two of the most daring acts of heroism in the Showboat’s 40-month combat cruise came in the last week of the war. The North Carolina’s scout plane pilots, Lt. Jacob and Lt. (j.g.) Oliver, were set into the air to rescue 150 men downed during strikes off the main Japanese island of Honshu.

One pilot landed his float plane to rescue an airman downed in Tokyo Bay. In his efforts to fish the pilot from the water, he was thrown from the plane into the rough water. The scout plane (Kingfisher) ran wildly around the bay until destroyed by machine gun fire.

The other scout plane pilot, who had witnessed the incident, landed and rescued the two masked airmen. The rescue plane and the three pilots were under machine gun attack from Japanese planes during the entire operation.

Both of the North Carolina’s pilots were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their heroism.

OTHER NORTH CAROLINAS

The first ship-of-the-line to bear the name North Carolina was a full-rigged sailing ship mounting 34 guns. She patrolled the Mediterranean and the Pacific from 1820 to 1835.

The second namesake of the state was the armored cruiser North Carolina. She mounted four 16-inch guns and 27 three-inch rapid fire guns. The cruiser served in combat and transport forces during World War I. In 1920, her name was changed to Charlotte so that a battleship might assume the name of the state.

The Showboat after arriving in her specially designed berth at Wilmington.
BATTLE STARS AWARDED THE U.S.S. NORTH CAROLINA

★ Guadalcanal-Tulagi Landings—Aug. 7-9, 1942
★ Battle of Eastern Solomons—Aug. 23-25, 1942
★ Gilbert Islands Operations—Nov. 19- Dec. 8, 1943
★ Marshall Islands Operations—1944
  Occupation of Kwajalein and Majuro Atolls—Jan. 29-Feb. 8, 1944
★ Atlantic-Pacific Operations—1944
  Truk Attack—Feb. 16-17
  Marianas Attack—Feb. 21-22
  Palau, Yap, Ulithi, Woleai Raid—March 5-9
  Truk, Satawan, Ponape Raid—April 29-May 1
★ Western New Guinea Operations—1944
  Hollandia Operation—April 21-24
★ Marianas Operation—1944
  Capture and Occupation of Saipan—June 11-24
  Battle of Philippine Sea—June 19-20
★ Leyte Operation—1944
  Luzon Attacks—Nov. 15-14, 19-25, Dec. 14-16
★ Luzon Operation—1944-45
  Luzon Attacks—Jan. 6-7, 1945
  Formosa Attacks—Jan. 10, 13, 21, 1945
  China Coast Attacks—Jan. 12, 16, 1945
  Namei Shoto Attack—Jan. 22, 1945
★ Iwo Jima Operation—1945
  Assault and Occupation of Iwo Jima—Feb. 15-March 1
  Fifth and Third Fleet raids on Honsi and the Namei Shoto—Feb. 18, 25-March 1
★ Okinawa Guato Operation—1945
  Fifth and Third Fleet raids—March 17-April 27
★ Third Fleet Operation against Japan—July 10-Aug. 13, 1945
THE ‘SHOWBOAT’
The North Carolina takes part in the assault on Iwo Jima.
Bad weather delayed for one day bringing the ship across the bar and up the river.