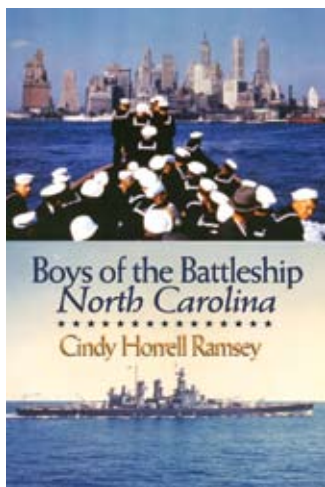


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## ***Boys of the Battleship North Carolina: Stories of the Navy's "Showboat"***



They came aboard as boys: orphans looking for a home, poor boys looking for a job, small-town boys looking for adventure.

The ship the boys boarded was commissioned in 1941 and was the largest battleship in the U.S. Navy. The press called her "the deadliest queen of the sea," "the world's toughest warship," "the king of the

heavyweights," and "the Showboat," the nickname that would stick to the ship throughout World War II.

She was the USS *North Carolina*, the BB55. She saw action across the Pacific Theater, survived a hit from a Japanese torpedo, and earned 15 battle stars.

Cindy Horrell Ramsey's new book, *Boys of the Battleship North Carolina*, tells the stories of the boys who fought those battles, won those stars, and grew into men while serving on the Showboat. From the ship's commissioning to the occupation of Japan, Ramsey weaves together the memories of the *North Carolina's* crew into an account of life during war.

When the Showboat was scheduled for the scrap heap, the people of North Carolina raised enough money to buy the ship and berth her in the Cape Fear River at Wilmington, where she became a memorial and museum. The boys, now old men, gather there every year to visit and swap stories.

"Sailors know the difference between a fairy tale and a sea story," Ramsey writes in her preface. "A fairy tale begins, 'Once upon a time.' A sea story starts simply, 'Now, this is no bullshit.' *Boys of the Battleship North Carolina* is a sea story."

In fact, this book is many sea stories. One story

began in April 1945 as the *North Carolina* supported the invasion of Okinawa. While Japanese planes attacked the fleet, friendly fire hit the BB55's signal bridge. Richard Fox, a member of the ship's Marine Corps detachment, saw a young sailor wounded so badly that parts of his insides were lying on the deck beside him.

Fox and his crew mate George Saffren carried the boy as gently as they could down many levels to sick bay, negotiating the steep, narrow stairs through the smoke of battle and the crowds of sailors responding to the attack. Fox and Saffren left the sailor in the care of pharmacist's mates without ever knowing his name or whether he survived.

That story ended in April 1999, when Fox toured the BB55 with his family. For the first time, he told them about the wounded sailor he managed to take to sick bay, doubting that the boy survived.

"Then someone taps him on his shoulder," Ramsey writes. It was Richard Reed, the sailor whose life Fox and Saffren saved. Fifty-four years later, he got a chance to say thank you.

*Cindy Horrell Ramsey is the director of Isothermal Community College's Polk County campus. She holds a bachelor's degree and an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of North Carolina Wilmington.*

***Boys of the Battleship North Carolina***

**Cindy Horrell Ramsey**

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