

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic USS North Carolina (BB-55)

and/or common

2. Location

street & number West bank of the Cape Fear River not for publication

city, town Wilmington vicinity of

state North Carolina code 037 county New Hanover code 129

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name State of North Carolina
USS North Carolina Battleship Commission
c/o Captain F. S. Conlon USN (Ret.)
street & number P.O. Box 417

city, town Wilmington vicinity of state North Carolina 28402

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New Hanover County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Wilmington state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register Nomination Form has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division

city, town Washington state DC 20013-7127

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

USS North Carolina (BB-55) was built by the New York Naval Shipyard and was launched on June 13, 1940. When commissioned on April 9, 1941, she was considered the most powerful warship afloat in any navy. Since USS North Carolina was the first modern American battleship constructed in two decades she was built using the latest in shipbuilding technology. Constrained to 35,000 tons standard displacement by the Washington and London Naval Treaties, to a beam of less than 110 feet by the locks of the Panama Canal, and to 38-foot draft to enable the ship to use as many anchorages and navy yards as possible, she was a challenge to the designers of the day.¹

To save weight, USS North Carolina was built using the new technique of welded construction. Her machinery arrangement is unusual in that there are four main spaces, each with two boilers and one steam turbine connected to one of the four propeller's shafts. This arrangement served to reduce the number of openings in watertight bulkheads and conserve space to be protected by armor.

The initial design called for a main battery of twelve 14-inch guns in three quadrupled turrets. Because it became apparent that new foreign construction was favoring larger caliber guns, North Carolina's main battery was changed to 16-inch guns after construction had started.

The long sweeping flush deck of North Carolina and her streamlined structure made her far more graceful than earlier battleships. Her large tower forward, tall uncluttered stacks, and clean superstructure and hull were a sharp break from the elaborate bridgework, heavy tripod masts, and casemated secondary batteries which characterized her predecessors.

The LaFollette Law of 1926 governing living accommodations on American merchant ships was voluntarily applied to the design of North Carolina. This contributed to a large volumed superstructure and complex forced ventilation system. She was the first major combatant ship without portholes in the hull.

Specific ship data concerning USS North Carolina is:

Length Overall:	728 feet
Maximum Beam:	108 feet
Design Displacement:	36,600 tons
Full Load Displacement:	44,800 tons
Boilers:	8-Babcock & Wilcox

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Turbines: 4 sets, General Electric
Fuel Oil Capacity: 7,167 tons
Maximum Speed: 28 knots
Armament: 9 16-inch/45 caliber Mark 6 guns; 20 5-inch/38 caliber Mark 12 guns;
Various combinations of 40 mm and 20 mm antiaircraft guns.
Crew: 2,300 wartime

USS North Carolina is in excellent condition and retains all of her World War II integrity. The ship is essentially unaltered since she was "mothballed" in the New York Naval Shipyard in 1947. A fully restored OS2U Kingfisher plane, comparable to the three Kingfishers originally placed aboard the ship, is located aft.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below						
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion			
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science			
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture			
___ 1600-1699	___ architecture	___ education	X ___ military	___ social/			
___ 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian			
___ 1800-1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater			
X ___ 1900-	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation			
		___ invention		___ other (specify)			

Specific dates 1941-1945 **Builder/Architect** Brooklyn Navy Yard

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

General Statement: The Role of the Battleship in World War II

The first modern battleship had its inception with the launching of HMS Dreadnought by Great Britain in 1906. HMS Dreadnought was the world's first all-big-gun, fast, heavily armoured capital ship and her launching made all the major ships in all other navies obsolete. The design features of HMS Dreadnought were rapidly copied by other navies and by 1914 the modern big gun heavily armoured battleship dominated naval warfare.

Battleships fought their first and only decisive action of World War I in the Battle of Jutland in May 1916. Although the British fleet won the day and forced the Germans to retire to the safety of their ports the German design and construction of battleships was shown to be superior. After the Battle of Jutland, the Germans never again risked their battleships in open conflict with the His Majesty's fleet but turned instead to unrestricted submarine warfare.

After the end of World War I the battleship continued to dominate naval strategy. In an effort to reduce the expenditures required to fund new battleships the United States, Britain, France, Japan and Italy agreed to a moratorium on new battleship construction in 1922 at the Washington Naval Conference. As a result of this agreement, new American battleships in construction were broken up and scrapped. No new battleships were built until 1936 when USS North Carolina was authorized by the Congress.

During these years the nature of naval power was changing as a result of the perfection of the airplane and the introduction of a new capital ship utilizing this new weapon--the aircraft carrier. Supporters of air power argued that the battleship as the principal capital ship of the navy was obsolete because of the long reach of naval aircraft. This view was strengthened early in World War II when the British carried out a carrier strike on the Italian battle fleet at Taranto on November 11, 1940. Subsequent Japanese carrier strikes on the American battlefleet at Pearl Harbor and on the British ships HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse confirmed the new order of naval strategy.

While the rise of the aircraft carrier forever altered naval strategy, it did not totally eclipse the importance of the battleship. In both the Atlantic and the Pacific, old American battleships carried out extensive bombardments on enemy held shores while new generations of fast American battleships escorted aircraft carriers and provided them with a dense thicket of anti-aircraft fire when necessary.

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Both old and new American battleships saw heavy service during the war, providing cover for other ships and eventually bombarding the Japanese home islands in 1945. When the war in the Pacific ended on September 2, 1945, the surrender of the Japanese was signed on board the battleship USS Missouri anchored in Tokyo Harbor. Although replaced by the aircraft carrier as the principal capital ship of the Navy the battleship saw important and useful service during World War II and contributed to the eventual American victory.

USS North Carolina represents American battleships that fought against Japan in World War II for the following reasons:

1. USS North Carolina was the first modern American battleship built after World War I. She was the class leader for a new generation of American battleships and set a standard for new shipbuilding technology that combined high speeds with powerful armament and formidable protection.
2. As the first modern American battleship to enter the war against Japan, USS North Carolina symbolized the determination of the American people to win the war and the growing industrial might that would make the eventual victory possible.

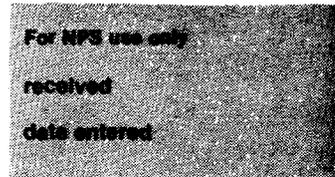
On July 11, 1942, USS North Carolina entered Pearl Harbor to provide her support in the war against Japan. Her entrance into Pearl Harbor moved all those who saw her to cheer including Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, commanding officer in the Pacific, who wrote:

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.²

3. During the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in August 1942, USS North Carolina was assigned to escort the carriers USS Enterprise and USS Saratoga. Her superior performance during this action proved the concept of the fast battleship providing antiaircraft coverage for the carrier. Her antiaircraft fire was so intense that USS Enterprise signaled her in alarm, "Are you afire?" This action established the primary role of the fast battleship throughout World War II as the protector of the aircraft carrier.
4. Beginning in August 1942 USS North Carolina continually saw service in the war against Japan until the surrender in 1945. USS North Carolina has the best war record for any surviving American battleship for the war in the Pacific. USS North Carolina received 15 battle stars for her World War II service.

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5. USS North Carolina is in excellent condition and retains all of her World War II integrity.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Capt. F. S. Colon, USN (Ret.), "National Register of Historic Places Inventory USS North Carolina" (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1981), pp. 2-3.
2. Dick Gorrell and Bruce Roberts, USS North Carolina -- The 'Showboat' (No place of publication: Heritage Printers, 1961), p. 7.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Conlon, F. S., Capt. USN (Ret.). "National Register of Historic Places Inventory USS North Carolina." Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1981.

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McMahon, William E. Dreadnought Battleships and Battle Cruisers. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978.

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