

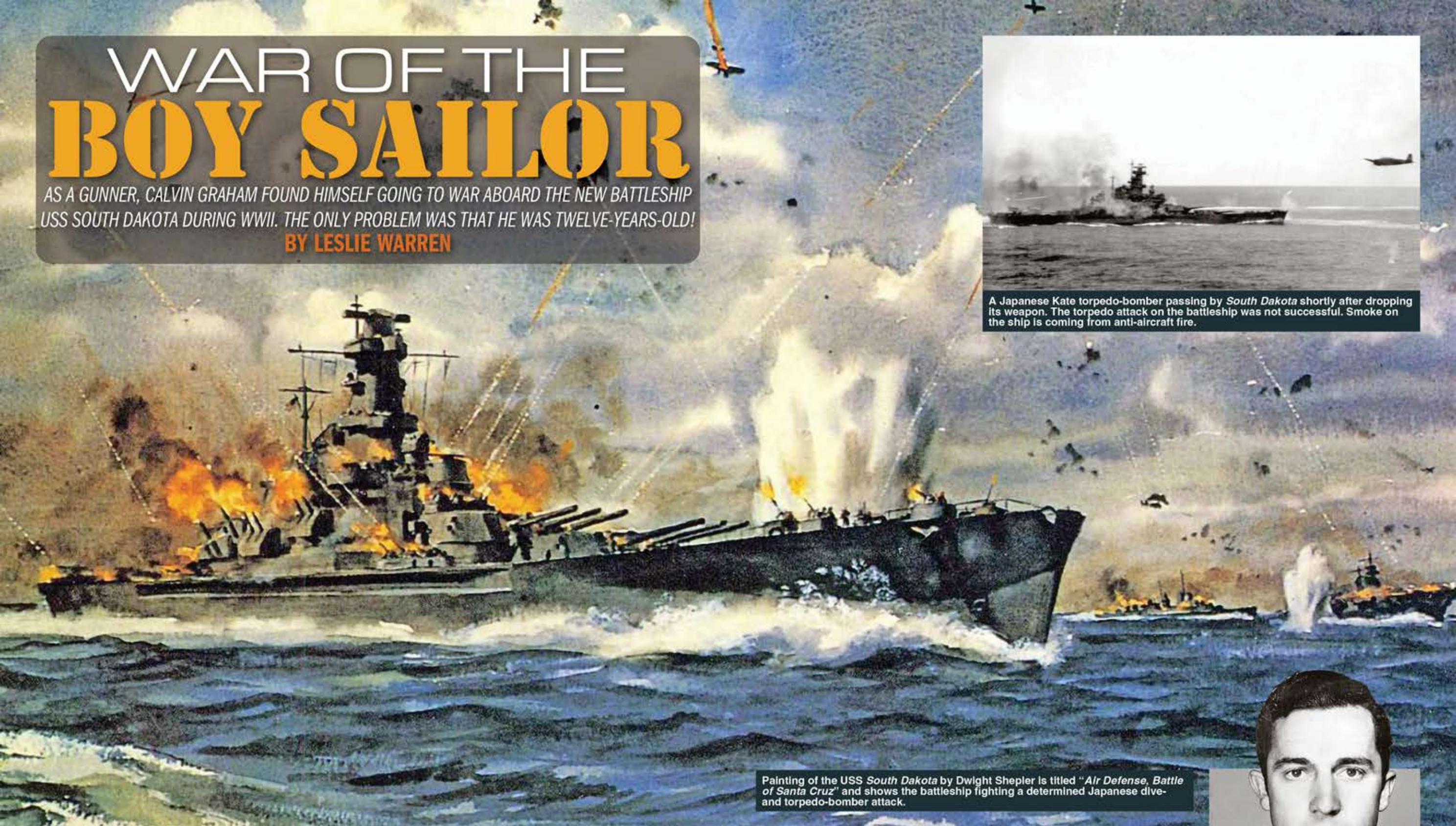
WAR OF THE BOY SAILOR

AS A GUNNER, CALVIN GRAHAM FOUND HIMSELF GOING TO WAR ABOARD THE NEW BATTLESHIP USS SOUTH DAKOTA DURING WWII. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS THAT HE WAS TWELVE-YEARS-OLD!

BY LESLIE WARREN



A Japanese Kate torpedo-bomber passing by *South Dakota* shortly after dropping its weapon. The torpedo attack on the battleship was not successful. Smoke on the ship is coming from anti-aircraft fire.



Painting of the USS *South Dakota* by Dwight Shepler is titled "Air Defense, Battle of Santa Cruz" and shows the battleship fighting a determined Japanese dive- and torpedo-bomber attack.



Calvin Graham after enlisting as a twelve-year-old sailor.

Like many children growing up in the Great Depression, Calvin Leon Graham did not have a good life. Born in Canton, Texas, his father had died and his mother remarried by the time of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. He was in grade school when the enemy struck and the young boy had a strong desire to "pay back" for the disaster.

He had also been abused on numerous occasions by his stepfather as one of seven children in the home. The continuing abuse at home would force Calvin and his brother to move into a boarding home when he was eleven. To earn money, he sold newspapers on weekends while delivering Western Union telegrams after school. That is when he began planning a

very dramatic move.

Reading newspapers and watching newsreels at the local movie theater, Graham wanted to join the military more than anything else in his life — just as tens of thousands of other young Americans were doing. "I didn't like Hitler to start with," Graham would recall. He then learned that some of his cousins had been

killed in action and this deepened his desire to fight. "In those days, you could join up at 16 with the consent of your parents but they [the military] preferred 17," he told a reporter. On 15 August 1942, Graham went to an enlistment office in Houston and joined the US Navy. There was one problem and it was a big one. Graham had been born on 3 April 1930

and he was only twelve-years-old!

Now, the 1940s were a completely different time from today and many underage young men would not exactly tell the truth about their ages when they attempted to enlist to fight the enemy that had attacked their home country. However, none of them were as young as Calvin Graham.