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Cruise book chronicler solving 'jigsaw puzzle' of naval history

By David Christenson

Military history is one of the most avid areas of collecting. Books on the Civil War, World War II, Vietnam and other conflicts are popular; collectors and readers seek out analyses of battles by military experts, biographies of leaders, war novels, and books on weapons, tactics and the trappings of war.

Go a little deeper into this hobby and it gets personal. There are diaries and published accounts by combatants, and histories of military units, depicting war in close-up detail. There is great interest in military memorabilia such as uniforms, medals and weapons.

Cruise books belong in this latter, more personal category. A cruise book is a chronicle of a single deployment or voyage of a military vessel, in peacetime or war. The events depicted could include combat or the day-to-day hard work of a ship; in any case, the books get up close and personal with photos and listings of officers and crew and their activities. Think of them as incorporating some qualities of a school yearbook and a military unit history.

Cruise books have some unique qualities too, though, according to collector and chronicler Richard W. Dillard.

Dillard, an Operations Specialist Master Chief (Surface Warfare) in the U.S. Navy, has one of the largest collections of cruise books in the country. His goal is to document every cruise book ever published for Navy or Coast Guard ships – a huge undertaking, he says, that demands patience.

“To my knowledge, nothing like this has been done before on this scale,” Dillard wrote, in an email interview. “Since



there is no master list somewhere that lists every ship cruise book ever published you have to continuously construct such a list. You never know when you're finished."

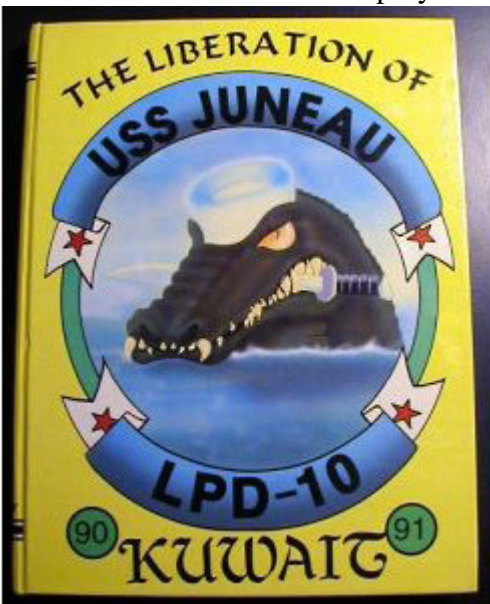
Dillard guesses that between 8,000 and 10,000 cruise books have been published from the late 1800s to the present, and he has evidence of at least 6,414 different titles. His collection contains 1,663 books; he has documented his own books and others in public libraries and private collections for a total of 2,951 in a computer database he started in 1998.

"It is like putting a giant jigsaw puzzle together but you don't know how many pieces there are and what it will look like when you're done," says Dillard.

The most comprehensive work on this subject is *Cruise Books of the United States Navy in World War II* by Dr. Dean L. Mawdsley, published in 1993. Dillard says his work generally follows the guidelines set by Mawdsley's research.

In Mawdsley's definition, a cruise book is not an official document of the military, but is written, photographed and published by a ship's crew for the crew.

Since it covers one deployment, it's not properly a unit history, which covers the entire history of, say, a ship, aviation division or army division in a particular war. Dillard says, "For example, a unit history of the USS SARATOGA (CV-60) would cover the period between 1952 (keel laid) to 1994 (decommissioning). During that time, "SARA" made at least 26 deployments for which at least 26 cruise books were published."



Mawdsley's book includes naval aviation, construction battalions and other varieties of naval units in his book, while Dillard specializes in U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard ships only.

While cruise books and unit histories are both collectible categories, buyers should beware of yearbooks of schools or training camps. These books generally are of limited interest or value, because they cover such a short period and a small group of personnel. Exception: yearbooks from the U.S. Naval Academy, because these frequently contain autographs of graduates, including many who go on to become prominent military leaders.

A typical recent cruise book, chronicling action of the first Gulf War, 1990-1991

Because of their grassroots origins, cruise books were not recorded in any official list of government publication, and they were typically printed in small numbers.

"A general rule of thumb used by most ships when ordering the number of cruise books to be published is to order 66 percent of the number of personnel on board," wrote Dillard. For a large vessel such as an aircraft carrier that could mean several thousand copies of a particular book were printed; for a smaller ship, such as a fleet tug, with a crew of 75, only 50 copies available, he said. In the early 1950s, and occasionally since then, cruise books were published for entire squadrons of smaller ships that could not

afford to publish individual books per ship. Depending on the number of copies printed, the cost per book currently ranges from \$10 to \$50 to the crew member, a number that could eventually go much higher in the resale market, depending on interest.

What's in a cruise book? Dillard says the earlier versions, from the late 1800s to World War II, contain primarily text descriptions of events, summarizing the prior history of the ship and detailing a particular cruise, with a few photos of individual officers, group shots of the crew and pictures of the ship itself. Books of that period are primarily bound in paper covers and were often titled "log" books, and could range from 10 to 50 pages.

The period covered could be up to two years, a common length of a ship's deployment in the early 1900s, Dillard said. Today a cruise typically lasts about six months.

After World War II the term "cruise book" came into common use, and the books themselves became more elaborate. Cruise books published for veterans of that war were often bound in decorated hard covers and contained an increasing array of photographs, formal and informal.

Current cruise book contents are "pretty well standardized," he said. There are pages for formal photos of officers and crew, a text summary of ship history, photos of port visits and shipboard life, highlights of the cruise, comments from the editor, and a section "in memoriam."

The "shipboard life" and "highlights" pages are where these books show their individuality. Shipboard life, Dillard said, might include photos of chow lines, sports events, beard growing contests, drills, practical jokes or events such as "crossing the line." "Crossing the line is a ceremony that turns a sailor from a slimy 'Wog' into a 'Shellback' and is conducted as the ship crosses the Equator. In earlier years the initiation into King Neptune's realm could result in broken bones but is has calmed down since then," he said.

Of course highlights of a trip might include exciting photos and accounts of battles, landings, bombardments and other wartime action. But this section has other points of interest: peacetime exercises and operations, changes of command, assistance to civilian victims of disaster, rescues at sea and other important events. There are often records of visits to foreign ports and VIP visits that could include unique photos and descriptions.

And then there are the memorial pages, an essential element of each book, and one that drives home the meaning of service and sacrifice. Dillard says, "The reprint of the 1945 cruise book for the USS Franklin (CV-13) lists all 800 crewmen and embarked personnel killed when she was struck by a kamikaze off Japan. Pretty sobering. USS Franklin was the most heavily damaged ship to ever make it back to port.

In format, cruise books have grown from thin paperbacks to hardcover tomes totaling 700 pages or more, complete with fancy graphics and color photography. Dillard reports that some ships are taking a higher technology route with cruise documentation on videotape or CD-Rom.

Dillard grew up next to the SEABEE base in Port Hueneme, Calif. where his father was frequently stationed, and where retired Navy ships were moored on their way to being sunk in weapons tests. "I would frequently visit the port and wonder where these ships had been and what they had done in their careers," he said.

He began collecting Navy history early, and bought his first three cruise books in a Santa Barbara bookstore in 1970 for under \$10.

He joined the Navy himself in 1974, and had little time for collecting, but he kept books issued for the crews in which he served. One of the first such books covered a 1975 cruise of the USS Halsey (CG-23) to the western Pacific.

He restarted collecting in earnest in 1978, when he was stationed in Hawaii. By 1996, after tours in San Diego, the Philippines and Japan, he had accumulated more than 200 books.

In 1998 he bought a computer and set out to document every cruise book he could find, setting up a format with entries for ship name, years covered and copies printed, plus detailed descriptions of contents.

Part of the increasing challenge of this project is the increasing cost. Since the 50th anniversary of World War II there are more collectors looking for these scarce items, and competitive bidding on internet auctions has actually driven prices up, according to Dillard.

While he could expect to spend only \$5 to \$10 for a book thirty years ago, the same books can cost hundreds today. "About three years ago I bought an 1898 cruise book from the USS Olympia for the Battle of Manila Bay in the Spanish American War for \$40. I have seen that same book for sale on the internet at \$600," he wrote.

Like many collectors in this field, Dillard's interest is tied to personal experience. "I enjoy looking at how the Navy has changed over the years. I enjoy seeing what ports I have visited looked like 25, 50, or 100 years ago. I get a kick out of seeing some of my old shipmates and what they looked like when they were younger. Man, they were goofy looking! Weren't we all!"

But besides the nostalgic aspect, the books provide history in a level of detail not found elsewhere. "Keep in mind that a ship may have a career of 30-40 years in which thousands of crewmen served aboard her at one time or another. A single cruise book covers only one small portion of that ship's career and a small portion of her total crew. Collecting and, or, documenting all of the cruise books for a given ship provides a much more interesting look at the history of the ship and crew."

Richard W. Dillard is currently stationed aboard MCAS Miramar in San Diego, Calif. He welcomes email with information on Navy and Coast Guard ship cruise books at oscmd@hotmail.com.

Reproductions of cruise book covers and contents can be found on several websites. Dillard recommends a [search](#) for "Fred's Place" for Coast Guard ships, or for the

homepages of USS Towers (DDG-9), USS Porterfield (DD-682), USS Arnold J Isbell (DD-869), USS Marvin Shields (FF-1066), or USS Whetstone (LSD-27).