

THE WORLD CRUISE of the
GREAT WHITE FLEET

HONORING 100 YEARS OF GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SECURITY



Edited by MICHAEL J. CRAWFORD

With a foreword by THE HONORABLE DONALD C. WINTER

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NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON 2008

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Published by

Naval Historical Center
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington, DC 20374-5060
www.history.navy.mil
Contact us at 202-433-9785

Book design by Maureen Nugent

Front cover: Detail of banner commemorating the
world cruise of the Great White Fleet.
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Use of ISBN

This is the Official U.S. Government edition of this publication and is herein identified to certify its authenticity. Use of the 978-0-945274-59-9 is for U.S.

Government Printing Office Official Editions only. The Superintendent of Documents of the U.S. Government Printing Office requests that any reprinted edition clearly be labeled as a copy of the authentic work with a new ISBN.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The world cruise of the Great White Fleet : honoring 100 years of global partnerships and security / edited by Michael J. Crawford ; with a foreword by Donald C. Winter.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-945274-59-9 (alk. paper)

1. United States. Navy—Cruise, 1907–1909. 2. United States. Navy—History—20th century. 3. United States—History, Naval—20th century. 4. Voyages around the world. 5. United States—Foreign relations—1901–1909. 6. National security—United States—History—20th century. I. Crawford, Michael J.

VA58.W64 2008

359.40973'09041—dc22

2008006229

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements for permanence established by the American National Standards for Information Sciences "Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials" (ANSI Z39.48-1984).

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov; Phone: toll free 866-512-1800, DC area
202-512-1800, Fax 202-512-2104; Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-0001.

ISBN 978-0-945274-59-9 (alk. paper)

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This banner commemorating Edward S. Oliver's participation is typical of the many souvenirs that Sailors kept of the Great White Fleet cruise, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Navy Art Collection.*

F O R E W O R D

CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S NAVY

One hundred years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt launched the United States Navy on its first circumnavigation of the globe. The fleet's world cruise marked a "coming of age" for both our Navy and our nation. Widely considered one of the greatest peacetime achievements of the United States Navy, the circumnavigation made Roosevelt's message clear: America is a respected world power, with a strong Navy leading the way.

A passionate supporter of the United States Navy, and a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt recognized the unique role and value of our nation's maritime services. He understood that America's interests had become intertwined with the global community and that the fate of the nation was, in many respects, inextricably tied to the strength of its Navy. For the man who made famous the phrase "speak softly and carry a big stick," maritime power was uniquely suited to safeguard the interests of the nation. In a speech at the Naval War College on June 2, 1897, Roosevelt, inspired by the words of George Washington, declared, "To be prepared for war is the most effectual means to promote peace." Naval presence unquestionably provided a measure of power projection, but it was also a valuable instrument for diplomacy and international partnership.

As President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt put his ideas into action. In 1907, he made the prescient decision to take the United States Navy "global." Some considered Roosevelt's

vision to be inordinately risky and espoused isolationism. Roosevelt, however, challenged his political detractors by stating, “We have no choice as to whether or not we shall play a great part in the world.”

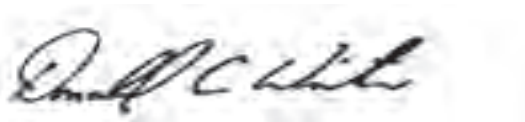
Accordingly, the “Great White Fleet” deployment embodied many of the core virtues that continue to shape our Navy. Today the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard jointly implement our shared vision as outlined in “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower.” The most important tenets of this maritime strategy are our commitment to our friends and allies, our desire to help those in need with disaster response capabilities, and our determination to maintain preeminence in the maritime domain. All have historical antecedents in the experiences of the Great White Fleet and remain as important now as they were then.

As the Great White Fleet embarked on its around-the-world voyage with port visits across the globe—from Brazil and Chile to Australia, Japan, and Italy—the Sailors and Marines of the fleet furthered U.S. diplomacy and built relationships that still flourish today. Informed by its diplomatic tradition, the Navy continues to work with partners to deter aggressors, protect the right to operate freely at sea, and provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief around the world. Today our Navy remains an essential element of U.S. power. The U.S. fleet is present around the world 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, reassuring friends, deterring potential adversaries, maintaining security at sea, and providing for the defense of our homeland.

Roosevelt understood that a great Navy cannot be built overnight and requires sustained support. Rallying U.S. public opinion in support of the Navy, and winning over recalcitrant Members of Congress who opposed his shipbuilding program, he used the tour of the Great White Fleet to drive home the need for a strong, standing Navy that

could provide maritime presence from east to west. Indeed, Roosevelt was emphatic about public support for the Navy, claiming, “In a great self-governing republic like ours the Army and Navy can only be so good as the mass of the people wish them to be.” One hundred years later, our fleet is strong because of the support of our Sailors and Marines, their families, and the American public.

The United States is a maritime nation with maritime interests that continue to grow in both scale and importance. With Sailors and Marines deployed overseas, we recognize that a robust Navy is as vital to preserving life and liberty as ever before—not only during wartime but in times of peace. As Secretary of the Navy, I am grateful to President Roosevelt for imparting to the nation that perspective. Commemorating Theodore Roosevelt’s “Great White Fleet” expresses our understanding of the value of a strong, globally positioned Navy. We honor our naval personnel and their families, as well as the freedom and friendships their common service has bestowed on the people of the United States. By reflecting on the past and focusing on the future, we celebrate one hundred years of global partnerships and security. Further, we renew our commitment to our great Navy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald C. Winter". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

The Honorable Donald C. Winter
Seventy-Fourth Secretary of the Navy



Commanding officers of the fleet's ships, photographed in 1908. Left to right, standing: Captains Hamilton Hutchins, Frank E. Beatty, Reginald F. Nicholson, Thomas B. Howard, William H. H. Southerland, Walter C. Cowles, John M. Bowyer, Alexander Sharp, and Lieutenant Commander Charles B. McVay. Left to right, seated: Captains Hugo Osterhaus, Kossuth Niles, William P. Potter, John Hubbard, Joseph P. Murdock, and Charles E. Vreeland.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.

O V E R V I E W

Michael J. Crawford

Beginnings and Ends

The world cruise of the Great White Fleet had dual origins, a diplomatic crisis with Japan and a need to test new U.S. battleships.

On June 27, 1907, at the height of a crisis in Japanese-American relations, President Theodore Roosevelt decided to send the Atlantic battleship fleet to the Pacific in the fall. The 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War had demonstrated the military and naval might of Japan, while the decisive Russian defeat at Tsushima impressed on the public's consciousness that a battle fleet, after steaming great distances, could arrive at its destination in no condition to fight. With nearly all U.S. battleships in the Atlantic Fleet, the U.S. naval force in the Pacific was no match for the Japanese Imperial Navy. Aware of these conditions, West Coast residents of the United States felt vulnerable to attack.

Coinciding with the Japanese-American diplomatic crisis in 1907, the Atlantic Fleet possessed a sufficient number of new first-class battleships available for a sustained exercise.

Roosevelt seized the opportunity and ordered the Atlantic battleship fleet deployed to the Pacific Ocean. The exercise would test the new battleships' mechanical systems and their ability to reach the Pacific in fit condition to engage an enemy as well as bolster the security of the West Coast. On July 2, Secretary of the Navy Victor H. Metcalf announced that "eighteen or twenty of the largest battleships would come around Cape Horn on a practice cruise, and be seen in San Francisco Harbor."

In publicizing the cruise to the Pacific, Metcalf said nothing about the fleet's return route to the Atlantic. Remaining flexible in case a circumnavigation of the globe proved impractical, the administration waited until the fleet reached the west coast of Mexico without major mechanical difficulties before stating officially that it would return to the Atlantic by way of Australia, the Philippines, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean. President Roosevelt's message precipitated a wave of invitations from countries along the route for the fleet to pay port visits. By this time, diplomatic relations with Japan had also improved as it became clear that the Japanese had no intention of declaring war. The Japanese ambassador extended his country's invitation, pointing out that a visit by the American fleet to Japan would emphasize the "traditional relations of good understanding and mutual sympathy" between the two countries.

President Roosevelt did not send the battle fleet on its globe-girdling voyage principally to awe Japan. Rather, he intended to exercise the fleet, demonstrate America's naval prowess to the nations of the world, and garner enthusiasm for the Navy among Americans at home as well



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* leads the fleet, steaming out of Hampton Roads, Virginia, December 16, 1907. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

as votes in Congress for naval construction. Seen in this light, the first half of the cruise would be an exercise in naval contingency planning, and the second half, an exercise in naval diplomacy at home and abroad.

First Leg

From Hampton Roads, Virginia, December 16, 1907
to San Francisco, California, May 6, 1908
14,556 Miles

“Did you ever see such a fleet? Isn’t it magnificent? Oughtn’t we all feel proud?” exclaimed President Roosevelt as, from the presidential yacht *Mayflower*, he watched the sixteen gleaming white and buff first-class battleships pass out of Hampton Roads, through the Virginia Capes, and into the open sea. The fleet was organized into two squadrons, and each squadron consisted of two divisions of four battleships each.

The first stop was Port of Spain, Trinidad, where the fleet anchored on December 23 to coal. The fleet crossed the line into the southern hemisphere on January 6 and anchored in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, six days later. Off the coast of Argentina, a squadron from that nation’s navy formally saluted the fleet as it proceeded south to Punta Arenas, Chile, where it stopped once again to coal. After passing through the Strait of Magellan without mishap, the fleet paraded through the harbor of Valparaiso, Chile, without stopping, then continued north. On February 20 it arrived at Callao, Peru. In every port, officers attended formal receptions and Sailors partook of liberty ashore.

After pausing a month in Magdalena Bay in Mexico’s Baja California for its annual gunnery exercises, the fleet reentered U.S.



A Japanese print of Theodore Roosevelt's image, distributed at the time of the Great White Fleet's visit. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*

territory and dropped anchor at Coronado, California, on April 14, for a visit to San Diego. Four days later it moved north to Los Angeles. On the way to San Francisco, the fleet visited Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and Monterey. Each town sought to outdo its neighbors in welcoming the fleet.

The most significant event on the West Coast was the grand entry of the Atlantic and Pacific Fleet ships into San Francisco Bay where the Secretary of the Navy reviewed the combined formations.

In the course of nearly three months, elements of the fleet visited cities up and down the West Coast. The entire fleet visited Seattle. Some of its ships went into dry dock at Bellingham, Washington, for cleaning of their underwater hulls, while other ships returned to San Francisco.

Second Leg

From San Francisco, California, July 7, 1908
to Manila, Philippine Islands, November 7, 1908
16,336 Miles

On July 7, the fleet bid farewell to San Francisco, weighed anchor, and began its voyage across the Pacific Ocean.

On July 16, the fleet arrived at Honolulu, Hawaii, where the officers enjoyed luaus and sailing regattas. The ships departed six days later, reaching Auckland, New Zealand, on August 9. After six days of festivities there—Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry, who had replaced Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans at San Francisco as the fleet's commander, traveled with his staff to the center of the North Island to observe tradi-

tional Maori ceremonies—the fleet proceeded to Australia, spending nearly a month visiting the ports of Sydney, Melbourne, and Albany.

On its way to Japan, the fleet made a stop at Manila, Philippine Islands, where a cholera epidemic prevented the Sailors from taking liberty in the capital.

Yokohama, Japan, extended its hospitality to the fleet for a week, beginning October 18. Following a visit to Amoy (present-day Xiamen), China, the Second Squadron rejoined the First Squadron, practicing gunnery in Manila Bay.



The first of a set of four postcards of Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans, each with a different verse about the visit of the Great White Fleet to California.
William Stewart Collection.



Electrician Roy W. Davis, a member of U.S. Battleship *Vermont*'s crew, drew this map tracking the Great White Fleet's voyage. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.

Third Leg

From Manila, Philippine Islands, December 1, 1908
to Hampton Roads, Virginia, February 22, 1909
12,455 Miles

Departing Manila, the fleet made its way through the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, and the Indian Ocean to Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where it remained a week (December 13–20). After traversing the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, the fleet arrived at Suez, Egypt, on January 3, 1909. It then passed through the canal into the Mediterranean Sea. January saw the fleet split up to make several ports of call, including Algiers, Tripoli, Naples, Marseille, Athens, and Malta, while dispatching the battleships *Connecticut* and *Illinois*, supply ship *Culgoa*, and yacht *Yankton* to aid victims of an earthquake and a tidal wave on the island of Sicily. By February 6, the fleet had rejoined at Gibraltar. On February 22, the Great White Fleet filed back home into Hampton Roads, completing the circumnavigation of the globe just two weeks before President Theodore Roosevelt would leave office in 1909.

Accomplishments and Significance

During its 14-month world cruise, the Atlantic battleship fleet steamed 43,000 miles and made twenty port calls on six continents. Eighteen battleships participated in at least part of the tour, fourteen battleships made the entire cruise, and two battleships were replaced by two others in California. Fourteen thousand Sailors and Marines participated in the voyage.

The world cruise was a diplomatic triumph. Besides proving that the United States could project its power globally, the tour improved relations with many countries, in particular Australia and Japan. The visit to Australia led to important personal contacts between Americans and Australians while strengthening the sense of shared national interests. The visit to Japan contributed to the friendly relations that resulted in the 1908 Root-Takahira Agreement, a diplomatic note in which Japan and the United States pledged to uphold the status quo in the Far East and the Open Door to trade in China. The good behavior of the enlisted men made a positive impression in every port of call. The cruise also fulfilled the President's hope that the Great White Fleet would help educate the American public about naval affairs and stimulate widespread support for the Navy.

The cruise provided Navy personnel with practical experience in sea duty and ship handling, leading to improved formation steaming, coal economy, and morale. Gunnery exercises doubled the accuracy of gunfire in the fleet. At the same time, the tour underscored the dependence of the fleet on foreign colliers as well as the need for coaling stations and auxiliary ships for coaling and resupply.

The circumnavigation, without major mechanical mishap, demonstrated the remarkable cruising capabilities of the American fleet. While the cruise did uncover some design flaws—inadequate displacement, poor ventilation, and inconveniently placed rapid-fire guns—it did not test the capabilities of the battleships to engage in hostile action. In fact, the success of the deployment obscured design deficiencies in the battleships when it came to war-fighting: excessive draft, low armor belts, large turret openings, and exposed ammunition hoists.

Shortly after the fleet returned home, the battleships underwent major changes in appearance. New cage masts with fire-control tops replaced old style masts with fighting tops, and the ships were repainted battleship gray. The British HMS *Dreadnought*, launched in 1906, soon made the battleships of Theodore Roosevelt’s Navy obsolete. The Great White Fleet became a memory. Its legacy, however, continued on as an invigorated national commitment to naval power. It was not long before the American people would respond with enthusiasm to a new President’s call for “a navy second to none.”



Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry, assuming command in May 1908, served as commander in chief of the Great White Fleet from San Francisco to its return to Hampton Roads. This photograph was taken in Tokyo, October 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

U. S. S. Vermont

History of Our Cruise Around the World '07-'08

Port	Arrival	Departure	Miles
Hampton Roads, Va.	Dec. 16, '07	Jan. 1, '08	1,175
Port of Spain, Trinidad	Jan. 22, '08	Jan. 23, '08	1,075
St. John, Antigua, Barb.	Jan. 24, '08	Jan. 25, '08	1,075
Port Antonio, Barb.	Jan. 26, '08	Jan. 27, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jan. 28, '08	Jan. 29, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jan. 30, '08	Jan. 31, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 1, '08	Feb. 2, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 3, '08	Feb. 4, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 5, '08	Feb. 6, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 7, '08	Feb. 8, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 9, '08	Feb. 10, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 11, '08	Feb. 12, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 13, '08	Feb. 14, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 15, '08	Feb. 16, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 17, '08	Feb. 18, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 19, '08	Feb. 20, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 21, '08	Feb. 22, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 23, '08	Feb. 24, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 25, '08	Feb. 26, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 27, '08	Feb. 28, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Feb. 29, '08	Feb. 30, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 1, '08	Mar. 2, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 3, '08	Mar. 4, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 5, '08	Mar. 6, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 7, '08	Mar. 8, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 9, '08	Mar. 10, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 11, '08	Mar. 12, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 13, '08	Mar. 14, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 15, '08	Mar. 16, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 17, '08	Mar. 18, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 19, '08	Mar. 20, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 21, '08	Mar. 22, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 23, '08	Mar. 24, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 25, '08	Mar. 26, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 27, '08	Mar. 28, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 29, '08	Mar. 30, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Mar. 31, '08	Apr. 1, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 2, '08	Apr. 3, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 4, '08	Apr. 5, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 6, '08	Apr. 7, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 8, '08	Apr. 9, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 10, '08	Apr. 11, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 12, '08	Apr. 13, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 14, '08	Apr. 15, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 16, '08	Apr. 17, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 18, '08	Apr. 19, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 20, '08	Apr. 21, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 22, '08	Apr. 23, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 24, '08	Apr. 25, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 26, '08	Apr. 27, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 28, '08	Apr. 29, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Apr. 30, '08	May 1, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 2, '08	May 3, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 4, '08	May 5, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 6, '08	May 7, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 8, '08	May 9, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 10, '08	May 11, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 12, '08	May 13, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 14, '08	May 15, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 16, '08	May 17, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 18, '08	May 19, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 20, '08	May 21, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 22, '08	May 23, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 24, '08	May 25, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 26, '08	May 27, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 28, '08	May 29, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	May 30, '08	May 31, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 1, '08	Jun. 2, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 3, '08	Jun. 4, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 5, '08	Jun. 6, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 7, '08	Jun. 8, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 9, '08	Jun. 10, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 11, '08	Jun. 12, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 13, '08	Jun. 14, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 15, '08	Jun. 16, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 17, '08	Jun. 18, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 19, '08	Jun. 20, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 21, '08	Jun. 22, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 23, '08	Jun. 24, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 25, '08	Jun. 26, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 27, '08	Jun. 28, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jun. 29, '08	Jun. 30, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jul. 1, '08	Jul. 2, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jul. 3, '08	Jul. 4, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jul. 5, '08	Jul. 6, '08	1,075
London, Eng.	Jul. 6, '08	Jul. 7, '08	1,075

A GROSS TONNAGE OF 14,239 TONS.

World cruise itinerary from USS *Vermont*. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



U.S. Battleship *Kentucky*, oil painting by Frank Mueller.
Naval Historical Center, Navy Art Collection.

THE SHIPS

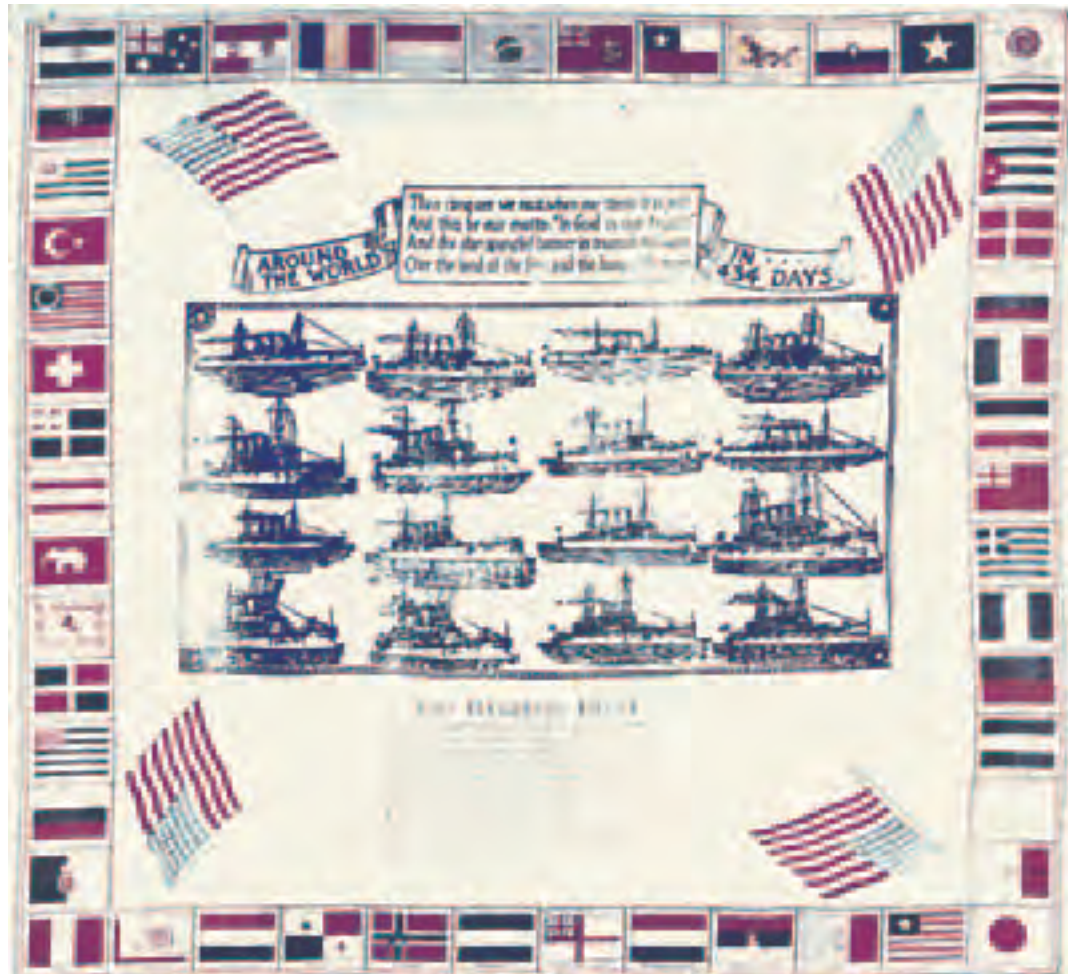
by Robert J. Cressman

Assuming the presidency in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy and an accomplished naval historian, became commander in chief of the “New Navy” characterized by steel hulls and long-range rifled guns. Modernization began in the 1880s with cruisers and proceeded to armored battleships in the 1890s. During the same period, the Navy’s strategy changed from coastal defense and commerce protection to offensive fleet action. The 1898 Spanish-American War manifested America’s revived naval strength and evoked greater understanding of the service and affection for the Navy. By Roosevelt’s inauguration, pictures of warships on stereo cards and sailor-suits for children had entered American popular culture.

Battleships

The most powerful warships of their kind built in the United States up to that time, the predreadnoughts that made up the imposing U.S. Atlantic Fleet reflected the steady progress of battleship design. The sixteen first-class battleships represented five separate groups of vessels. They included all of the *Kearsarge* class (*Kearsarge* and *Kentucky*, authorized by Congress on March 2, 1895); two of the three *Illinois* class (*Illinois* and *Alabama*, authorized June 10, 1896); all of the *Maine* class (*Maine*, *Missouri*, and *Ohio*, authorized May 4, 1898, during the war with Spain); four of the five *Virginia* class (*Virginia*, *Georgia*, *New Jersey*, and *Rhode Island*, authorized on March 3, 1899, and June 7, 1900); and five of the six *Connecticut* class (*Connecticut*, *Louisiana*, *Vermont*, *Kansas*, and *Minnesota*, authorized on July 1, 1902, and March 3, 1903). *Kearsarge* had been in commission the longest time (since February 20, 1900); *Kansas*, the shortest (since April 18, 1907).

A souvenir scarf celebrating the completion of the world cruise.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.





A four-part folding card with images of Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans and the original sixteen battleships of the Great White Fleet. *Navy Department Library, Church-Kingery Collection.*



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* steaming at high speed on trials, 1906. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

The earlier classes (*Kearsarge*, *Illinois*, and *Maine*) had been designed principally for coastal defense. The later classes (*Virginia* and *Connecticut*), by contrast, reflected lessons of the war with Spain, conforming to the authorization bills that called for ships with “the highest practicable speed and greatest radius of action.” Thus, the newer ships were modern predreadnoughts, truly seagoing battleships designed for long distance operations.

The “most powerful ordnance for vessels of this class” consisted of 13-inch guns (*Kearsarge* and *Illinois* classes) and 12-inch guns (*Maine*, *Virginia*, and *Connecticut* classes); secondary battery weapons included 8-, 7-, 6-, and 5-inch guns, while each ship mounted a large number of 3-inch guns and 6- and 3-pounder rapid-fire batteries to combat the swift torpedo boats that most naval tacticians and strategists deemed the biggest threat to the battleship. Normal displacement ranged from 11,540 tons (*Kearsarge* class) to 16,000 tons (*Connecticut* class), length from 375'4" with a beam of 72'3" (*Kearsarge* class) to 456'4" with a beam of 76'10" (*Connecticut* class); ships' complements ranged from 536 men in the *Illinois* class to 827 in the *Connecticut* class.



U.S. Battleship *Minnesota*, commissioned in 1907, transferred from the Third to the First Division at San Francisco. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



U.S. Battleship *Missouri*, commissioned in 1903, of the Third Division. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



U.S. Battleship *Kansas*, commissioned in 1907, of the First Division.



Excessive coal consumption caused U.S. Battleship *Maine*, commissioned in 1902, of the Third Division, to withdraw from the world cruise at San Francisco.



U.S. Battleship *Vermont*, commissioned in 1907, of the First Division.



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut*, commissioned in 1906, flagship of the fleet and lead ship of the First Division.

All images on this page from the Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



U.S. Battleship *Nebraska*, commissioned in 1907, joined the Second Division at San Francisco.



U.S. Battleship *Kentucky*, commissioned in 1900, of the Fourth Division.



U.S. Battleship *Illinois*, commissioned in 1901, of the Fourth Division.



U.S. Battleship *Louisiana*, commissioned in 1906, was transferred at San Francisco from the First to the Third Division to become flagship of the Second Squadron.

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U.S. Battleship *Rhode Island*, commissioned in 1906, of the Second Division.



U.S. Battleship *Ohio*, commissioned in 1904, of the Third Division.



U.S. Battleship *Kearsarge*, commissioned in 1900, of the Fourth Division.



U.S. Battleship *New Jersey*, commissioned in 1906, of the Second Division.

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U.S. Battleship *Georgia*, commissioned in 1906, of the Second Division.



Because of engineering problems, U.S. Battleship *Alabama*, commissioned in 1900, of the Fourth Division, detached before the Great White Fleet departed San Francisco to cross the Pacific Ocean.



U.S. Battleship *Virginia*, commissioned in 1906, transferred from the Second to the Third Division at San Francisco. It is seen here saluting President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906.



U.S. Battleship *Wisconsin*, commissioned in 1901, joined the world cruise at San Francisco to become flagship of the Fourth Division.

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Torpedo Boat Destroyers

A flotilla of six torpedo boat destroyers, *Hopkins*, *Hull*, *Lawrence*, *Stewart*, *Truxtun*, and *Whipple*, and the supply ship *Arethusa* transferred from the Atlantic to the Pacific in company with the Great White Fleet. Proving themselves reliable seagoing vessels, the torpedo boat destroyers—forerunners of today’s guided missile destroyers—came from four different classes. Congress had authorized their construction on May 4, 1898, during the war with Spain. One ship (*Stewart*) represented the Navy-designed *Bainbridge* class; the other ships represented private designs: two of the *Hopkins* class (*Hopkins* and *Hull*), one *Lawrence*-class ship (*Lawrence*), and two of the *Truxtun* class (*Truxtun* and *Whipple*). Carrying a main battery of two 3-inch guns with a secondary battery of either five or six “6-pounders,” each torpedo boat destroyer mounted two 18-inch torpedo tubes. Displacing between 408 and 433 tons, and measuring between 248’ and 260’ in length with beams ranging from 23’3” to 24’6”, these swift (29–30 knot) warships carried crews of between seventy-one and seventy-three men.



Postcard. *William Stewart Collection.*



U.S. Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Truxtun* at anchor. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



U.S. Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Hopkins* at anchor, circa 1904.



U.S. Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Lawrence* at anchor, circa 1903–1908.



U.S. Supply Ship *Arethusa* off New York City, October 3, 1911.



U.S. Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Hull* at anchor, May 2, 1907.

All images on this page from the Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



Postcard of U.S. Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Whipple*, Boston, Massachusetts.
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



U.S. Repair Ship *Panther*.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.

Fleet Auxiliaries

A decade before the sailing of the Great White Fleet, the war with Spain demonstrated the U.S. Navy's requirements for auxiliary vessels such as supply, hospital, refrigerator, water distilling, and repair ships. After the war, the Navy incorporated a greater number of auxiliaries into the fleet. Congressional appropriations in the years between the Spanish-American War and World War I provided for an unprecedented level of new construction of auxiliary ships necessary to maintain a fleet on deployments around the world.



U.S. Yacht *Yankton*.
*Naval Historical Center,
Photographic Collection.*



U.S. Supply Ship *Glacier*.
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



U.S. Hospital Ship *Relief*. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



U.S. Supply Ship *Culgoa* at Boston,
Massachusetts, October 1, 1901.
*Naval Historical Center,
Photographic Collection.*



Shipmates. *William Stewart Collection.*

THE SAILORS

by Michael J. Crawford

There has been ordered supplied to you upon arrival at Port of Spain, Trinidad, 750 gallons of coal tar, 90 gallons of varnish, 400 pounds of sulphur, 4 sets of razors complete, 18 brushes, 4 sets of fine rib saws, 4 surgical knives, 2 large meat axes and 15 pairs of handcuffs.

NOTICE POSTED ON THE BATTLESHIP LOUISIANA'S SCUTTLEBUTT

On December 19, 1907, just three days out of Hampton Roads, every ship in the Great White Fleet received a wireless message from “King Neptune,” warning it to be ready to receive the ruler of the deep on crossing the equator. In the days leading up to the event, additional messages relayed through Neptune’s official representative, “Fore Topmast,” raised the crews’ anticipation by intimating to all “landlubbers, pollywogs, and sea lawyers” how unpleasant the initiation rites would be, and how even less pleasant would be the consequences for anyone who sought to avoid

those rites. Finally, January 6 arrived, and at 37°11' W longitude, the ships of the Great White Fleet crossed 0° latitude. Each ship's commanding officer turned command over to Neptune, who came on board with his wife and fantastically dressed retainers. Throughout the fleet more than twelve thousand Sailors underwent examination by the royal surgeons, a shave with an oversized razor, a long descent into a pool of water, and a ritual bath, from which they emerged no longer pollywogs but shellbacks inducted into the Order of the Deep.¹

In one form or another, similar rough play dated to the earliest days of seafaring and has been practiced by the United States Navy from its beginning. John Adams witnessed a "crossing-the-line" ceremony during a transatlantic passage in the Continental Navy frigate *Boston* during the War of Independence.² The ritual, as performed in the frigate *Essex* during the War of 1812, included all the standard elements: Neptune and his wife drawn in a carriage, retainers with their bodies painted, barbers with razors made of iron hoops, and baths in a ship's boat filled with water.³ The crossing of the line in the Great White Fleet may have been more elaborate than usual, but it bound the new steel Navy of 1907 firmly to the ancient traditions of the sea.



Officers and crew of U.S. Battleship *Vermont*, 1909. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

Sailors of the navy of wood and canvas would have found many aspects of life in the navy of steel and steam familiar. As was customary, the stern hand of discipline ruled firmly, and commanding officers granted liberty infrequently. Men still slept in hammocks in 1907 and would continue to do so until the eve of the Second World War. Herman Melville, who served as an ordinary seaman in the frigate *United States* in the 1840s, observed that “of all men-of-war, the American ships are the most excessively neat, and have the greatest reputation for it” and protested the inflexibility of the practice of cleaning the spar deck every morning, whatever the weather.⁴ Their passion for cleanliness continued to distinguish Sailors in 1907. Sailors were holystoning the decks each morning and would be swabbing decks late into the twentieth century. One experienced bluejacket in the Great White Fleet opined:

Man-o'-war cleanliness is different from any other that I know. I distinguish it from all other kinds because it is the most searching and far reaching thing of the kind in the world. . . . All must be immaculately clean, and this habit is so thoroughly ingrained in the men that to maintain it they will even commit crime. . . . For uncleanness a man would be stripped naked and his skin scrubbed with sand and canvas . . . and sometimes with ki-yar brushes, by two husky bos'n's mates.⁵

Despite things still familiar to older veterans, many aspects of the new Navy made sea service fundamentally different from the Navy of the previous century. Take the basic facts of the motive power by which ships moved through the water. The amount of provisions a sailing warship carried principally limited the length of time it could



Electrician Roy W. Davis and shipmate from U.S. Battleship *Vermont*, 1908.
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



This is one of a series of some one thousand photographs taken by H.O. Brown and J. Schaffer, two of USS *Georgia's* musicians, during the cruise of the Great White Fleet. Subsequently the two men copyrighted many of the images and marketed them in the form of postcards. *William Stewart Collection.*

cruise. As long as potable water and victuals held out, a sailing ship could remain at sea. In contrast, a steam-powered warship could cruise only as long as there was coal in its bunkers. Frequent stops for coaling became a part of every cruising plan.

The Navy of Theodore Roosevelt underwent an extraordinary and rapid transformation that created an environment for sea service very different from what had preceded. As change is a constant in human society, it is easy to describe any period as a time of transition from one era to another. The changes in naval service during the first decade of the twentieth century, however, proved so sweeping as to constitute a revolution. Conditions in the ships of the Great White Fleet exemplified the transition from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth-century Navy.

Consider provisions and messing arrangements. From earliest times, deep-sea Sailors had lived on provisions preserved in barrels: salted beef and pork, dried peas, ship's biscuit—as hard as concrete and laden with



Lt. B. A. Long and Lt. S. M. Robinson of U.S. Battleship *Connecticut*, with crew of sailing launch in Magdalena Bay, Mexico. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

weevils—and cheese that grew moldy and filled with worms that came in two flavors, distinguished by eye color. The main innovation in the seafarers' diet in the nineteenth century came from the practical implementation of the eighteenth-century discovery of the antiscorbutic virtues of citrus fruits.

Then, on the eve of the twentieth century, the Navy introduced seaborne refrigeration, placing a world of possibilities on the Sailors' menu. In 1893, shipyards fitted out *Maine*, *Cincinnati*, *Puritan*, and *Terror* with refrigerated storerooms, ice-machine compartments, white-tiled galleys, and coal ranges. The year 1898 saw the introduction of the Navy's first refrigerator ships, *Glacier*, *Culgoa*, and *Celtic*. The first two accompanied the Great White Fleet around the world, and *Celtic* joined the ships of the fleet that aided the earthquake and tidal wave victims in Messina, Sicily. Improvements in refrigeration made possible an experiment in the battleship *Texas* with a general mess for all the enlisted that replaced the traditional system of numerous messes of fewer than a dozen men each who rotated the responsibility for cooking. Success of that experiment prompted the Navy's Bureau of Supplies and Accounts to recommend adoption of the general mess and to report the need for a more liberal and flexible food allowance, with a variety of food items. Congress embodied these recommendations in a new Navy rations law in 1902. That same year Paymaster F. T. Arms published the first mess manual, which included recipes for fresh roast beef and apple pie. Each squadron was assigned a supply ship



Ready for landing force duty. *William Stewart Collection.*

to provide increased space for perishables. In 1906 President Roosevelt, having read Upton Sinclair's muckraking novel *The Jungle* (which graphically described unsanitary conditions in American meatpacking plants), ordered an investigation of the so-called Beef Trust. The findings led Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. The following year, the Bureau of Animal Industry began inspection of canned and fresh meat sold to the Navy.⁶ At the time, the Navy also created a school for cooks and bakers at the Newport, Rhode Island Training Station.

These changes made it possible for Sailors in the Great White Fleet to eat palatable and healthy meals most days and to enjoy holiday feasts that inspired paeans like the following manuscript poem found in the papers of Roy W. Davis, an electrician in the battleship *Vermont*:

Thanksgiving Day in the Fleet

Thanksgiving Day, the bo'sun's pipe / Is answered double quick.

Each wearer of the uniform / Is eager for his trick.

For talk about our millionaires / And what they have to eat

It can't compare with what we eat / Thanksgiving in the fleet.

The turkey's roasted crisp and brown / Enough for every man.

The apple, mince, and pumpkin pies / All baked a golden tan.

Potatoes mashed & cranberry sauce / And celery and cake

That's almost rich enough to be / The kind our mothers make.

And candy, nuts, and fine cigars / And coffee, too, with cream.

O, dinner on a warship is / A gastronomic dream.

For weeks before Thanksgiving Day / We talk about its joys

For dear old Uncle Sam you bet / Is good to all his boys.⁷

It was more than the food that Uncle Sam's boys were fed that changed. The boys being fed were different, for the size, work, classification, and character of the enlisted force underwent a metamorphosis, beginning with the introduction of steam power before the Civil War and accelerating in pace at the turn of the century.

Ratings changed as the skills needed evolved. Seamen were no longer needed who could reef sails, but electricians who knew how to operate electrical apparatuses were. Between 1866 and 1904, sixty-three new ratings were established, forty-four were disestablished, and another thirty-eight changed. In 1897, there were seventy-one ratings and by 1910, there were eighty-eight. Growth came principally in the skilled trades and engine-room responsibilities, while the number in the seaman's branch declined.⁸

The number of Sailors burgeoned after the Spanish-American War. On the eve of that conflict, the enlisted force stood at ten thousand men. As of 1903, the number had jumped to twenty-eight thousand, and during the world cruise it reached nearly thirty-nine thousand. That constituted a nearly fourfold increase in a single decade.

The Navy had always recruited from the eastern seaboard. Now, it made up for the increased demand for hands by reaching inland. Between 1890 and 1906, the percentage of recruits that the non-Atlantic seaboard states provided rose thirty points, from 6.4 percent to 37 percent.

The Navy sought solid, patriotic young men who possessed or could develop technical proficiencies. To attract these types of recruits, the Navy purposely improved living conditions, sponsoring such activities as organized sports and establishing a system of ship libraries. At the same time, with the victories of the Spanish-American War and the increasingly powerful battle fleet, the Navy came in national conscious-



Athletic contests—boat races, sparring matches, and foot races—exercised and entertained bluejackets of the Great White Fleet. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

ness to embody the country's might. Pro-Navy sentiment benefited recruiting across the United States.

Whatever the significance of the world cruise for U.S. international relations, and whatever its significance for the Navy as an institution, imagine what participation meant individually to the fourteen thousand Sailors and Marines who circumnavigated the globe in the Great White Fleet. They had joined the Navy and, literally, seen the world. Consider the reaction of Frank B. Leshner, for instance, an electrician in USS *Virginia*. In a letter home Leshner marveled, "It all seems a sort of a dream to me now that it is over with but never-the-less the cold fact remains that I have been to Cairo and have stood upon the Sahara Desert while the pyramids built over forty centuries ago gazed down upon me."⁹

The Sailors came home and eventually left the Navy. Some, like Davis, married the sweethearts to whom they had written from half-way around the world. They went into civilian life: Davis, for instance, worked for Bell Telephone Laboratories and the Improved Paper Machinery Company;¹⁰ Leshner rose to the rank of chief petty officer but left the Navy in 1913 to found an electrical contracting firm—still in operation today—in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.¹¹ Some, like Davis and Leshner, preserved their souvenirs; most retained to their deaths at least their memories of the cruise.

The good conduct the Americans displayed when on liberty left a positive impression in every port of call around the world. Similarly, the patriotism with which the Sailors of the Great White Fleet wore the uniform made an impression on their character that they carried throughout their lives.

The Great White Fleet's Sailors bridged two worlds. They could look back to a Navy that had recently converted from sail to steam and from wooden to steel hulls. They experienced rapid changes in the conditions of naval service. And most lived to see the even greater transformations brought about by submarines and aircraft carriers. Conditions in today's fleet are dramatically improved over those in the 1907 battle fleet. Sailors' rights are better protected under the current Uniform Code of Military Justice than they were under the Articles of War. Now officers and enlisted of the modern Navy interact on a more egalitarian level than did naval personnel one hundred years ago. Yet one hundred years after the world cruise of the Great White Fleet, United States Navy personnel continue to take part in ancient seafaring traditions like the crossing-the-line ceremony, piping the side, and gun salutes. Through naval traditions, today's Sailors and Marines can feel an affinity with those who sailed around the world in 1907 and share an identity with all who proudly wore the uniform before them in any of the Navy's warships, whether powered by wind, steam, or nuclear fission.



Brown and Schaffer photographs of daily life on board battleship *Georgia* of the Great White Fleet.
William Stewart Collection.

"Uncle Sam's Personally Conducted Tour of the World."



"That's Going Some."

Postcard. Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.

NARRATIVE

by J02 Mike McKinley

On the warm, cloudy morning of December 16, 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt stood on the weather deck of the presidential yacht *Mayflower*, anchored in the waters of Hampton Roads, Virginia. He flashed his famous broad, toothy smile and thought how “bully” it was to see a mighty armada of U.S. battleships passing in review before him. The President, and indeed the throngs of onlookers gathered on shore, felt a great sense of pride and exhilaration as sixteen battleships of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, all painted white, save for gilded bows and buff-colored superstructures, steamed in a long majestic column out of Hampton Roads to the open sea, flanked by their attending auxiliary ships.¹²

To the familiar strains of “The Girl I left Behind Me,” the procession of battleships passed before the President at 400-yard intervals with their crews smartly manning the rails. This newly designated battle fleet was made up of ships commissioned since the end of the Spanish-American War. They were *Kearsarge, Kentucky, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, Missouri, Ohio, Virginia, Georgia, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Louisiana, Vermont, Kansas, and Minnesota*.

The two squadrons of two divisions each, later dubbed the “Great White Fleet,” were manned by 14,000 Sailors and Marines under the command of Rear Admiral Robley D. “Fighting Bob” Evans. All were embarking upon a naval deployment the scale of which had never been attempted by any nation before—the first round-the-world cruise by a fleet of steam-powered, steel battleships. The 43,000 mile, 14-month circumnavigation would include twenty port calls on six continents; it is widely considered one of the greatest peacetime achievements of the U.S. Navy.

The idea of sending the new battle fleet around the world was the brainchild of the energetic “Teddy” Roosevelt, former colonel of the Rough Riders and one-time Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Assuming the presidency after the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901, Roosevelt brought to the White House a deep conviction that only through a strong navy could a nation project its power and prestige abroad.

In 1898, at the end of the Spanish-American War, the United States was thrust into the mainstream of international affairs and gained status as a world power, acquiring as possessions the Philippines and Guam in the Pacific, and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean. In 1904, the United

President Roosevelt reviews the Atlantic Fleet from the presidential yacht *Mayflower*. *William Stewart Collection.*



States also established a naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to ensure the safety of the Panama Canal, then under construction.

Roosevelt stressed upgrading and expanding the U.S. fleet in order to protect American interests abroad. From 1904 to 1907, American shipyards turned out eleven new battleships to give the Navy awesome capabilities. This proved timely, for in 1907 hostilities with Japan seemed possible; the Japanese Navy dominated the Pacific and posed a potential threat to the Philippines.

America's problems with Japan arose shortly after Roosevelt mediated the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1906, ending the Russo-Japanese War. In that conflict the Russian fleet had been annihilated by the Japanese. But despite their triumphs over the Russians on the high seas, the Japanese failed to get all they believed they deserved at the peace table and blamed Roosevelt.

Roosevelt did not want a break with Japan, as the United States was ill-prepared for war. Most of our battle fleet was concentrated in the Atlantic, with only a handful of armored cruisers in the Pacific. In the event of war with Japan, this small Asiatic squadron would have to abandon the Philippines for West Coast ports until the United States had strength enough to go on the offensive.

Thus, to reassure residents of the West Coast that the U.S. Navy could protect them, Roosevelt ordered the Atlantic battleship fleet to shift to the Pacific.

The President also wanted to find out in what condition the fleet would be after such a transit. As he stated before the fleet's departure, "I want all failures, blunders and shortcomings to be made apparent in time of peace and not in time of war."



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* leading the Atlantic Fleet to sea.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



Producing thick black smoke, the fleet steamed out of Hampton Roads on December 16, 1907. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Officers and ratings buying parrots in Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies, the fleet's first stop, December 23, 1907. *Around the World, 33.*

But, more important, Roosevelt believed that a successful cruise of this magnitude would provide the American people with an example of U.S. naval preparedness, strength, and reach. Such an impression, he hoped, would help gain the desired appropriations for four more battleships.

Although the original announcement of the cruise did not state that after reaching the West Coast the fleet would proceed westward around the globe, discussion of that intention in the public media reflected a general understanding of American goals.

Once plans for the cruise became public, not everyone was impressed. Some critics thought this show of force would encourage a Japanese attack on the fleet. Others worried that the Atlantic naval defenses would be weakened by taking away so many ships. Some reasoned that since the Panama Canal was unfinished, the ships would have to pass through the Strait of Magellan, an area that posed considerable danger because of tricky currents and great storms.

Senator Eugene Hale from Maine, chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, threatened to withhold money for the cruise. The undeterred Roosevelt replied in his typically brusque and forthright fashion that he already had sufficient funding to get the fleet to the Pacific, and if the Congress wanted the fleet to return to the Atlantic, it would have to authorize additional funding.

Nobody took Roosevelt up on his challenge, and the Great White Fleet got underway that December morning, with its stacks billowing clouds of black coal smoke into the gray sky. On board the flagship *Connecticut*, Rear Admiral Evans looked out with pride upon the majestic fleet under his command. He had stated earlier that his ships “were ready at the drop of a hat for a feast, a frolic or a fight.”

Late on the first day of steaming, Evans passed the word to the officers and enlisted men of the fleet that after a short stay on the West Coast, the fleet would return home by way of the Pacific, through the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean, and then to the Atlantic. In short, they would be circumnavigating the globe. When this announcement became general knowledge the next day, countries throughout the world tendered invitations for the fleet to visit their ports.

The first leg of the cruise took the fleet into the South Atlantic. On December 23, the fleet made its first port visit, at Port of Spain in Trinidad, a small island off the coast of Venezuela.

On January 6, 1908, the fleet steamed across the equator and crossing-the-line ceremonies made up the plan of the day. Some twelve thousand Sailors were introduced to Davy Jones. Following traditional initiation rites that included suffering through various indignities to make them worthy, all were welcomed into the exalted realm of King Neptune.



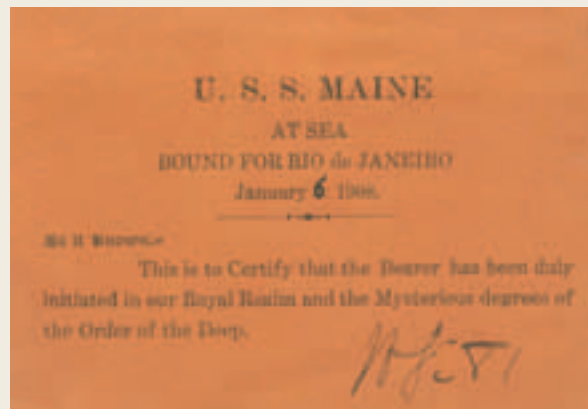
When the Great White Fleet crossed the equator, King Neptune and his entourage paid a visit to each ship to induct those who had never crossed the line into the Order of the Deep. *William Stewart Collection.*





In a tradition carried on from ancient times to the present day, Sailors who first cross the equator (or in earlier times, the Tropic of Cancer) go through a ritual induction into the Order of the Deep. The ceremony is a diversion from shipboard routine, affording an opportunity for considerable sport and good humor. The photographs seen here show an inductee being shaved and then bathed in a pool. He was one of the thousands in the fleet who underwent the initiation rites into the realm of King Neptune on January 6, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

Each inductee received both a shellback certificate and a wallet card. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection; Navy Department Library, ZC Files, USS Maine.*



Oil painting by G. Dall'aros of units of the Great White Fleet in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, with the Brazilian protected cruiser *Almirante Tamandaré* in the foreground, January 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



The fleet anchored in Rio de Janeiro on January 12. Unfortunately, there was an incident the first night that came close to shattering goodwill between the U.S. Navy and Brazil.

It all began in one of Rio's rowdier drinking establishments when two local longshoremen got into an argument. In expressing his particular point of view, one of the longshoremen threw a bottle at the other. The missile sailed past the intended target and continued its flight across the smoke-filled room. At the bar, a group of Great White Fleet Sailors were enjoying a drink and good conversation when the wayward bottle found a target—a Sailor from *Louisiana*. The rest was right out of a Hollywood movie. Sailors rallied around the victim, the longshoremen called up their reserves, and the battle was joined.

When the shore patrol arrived, the donnybrook had flowed out into the street, as longshoremen and Sailors threw rocks and bricks at each other. Shore patrol and local police brought about order, separated the combatants, and escorted the Sailors back to their ships.

The next day, during an inquiry, *Louisiana's* master-at-arms testified that the "civilians seemed to be the aggressors." After all the evidence was in, Brazilian officials agreed with this assessment and,



U.S. Battleships *Vermont* and *Kansas* entering the harbor of Rio de Janeiro.
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



The U.S. Atlantic Fleet entering the Strait of Magellan, February 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



The American Fleet in the Strait of Magellan the Morning of February 8, 1908, oil painting by Henry Reuter Dahl.
United States Naval Academy Collection.

to improve relations, publicly invited the American Sailors to continue to enjoy Rio.

There were no further incidents while the fleet was in Rio. Many of the Sailors participated in local political parades, marching gleefully with the locals and shouting slogans they probably did not remotely understand. Brazilian President Affonso Augusto Moreira Penna gave high praise to what he termed “the glorious American Navy,” and Penna’s foreign minister described the visiting fleet as “the pride of the continent.”



During the Rio visit, Evans suffered an attack of gout, an affliction that plagued him throughout the voyage and would be responsible for his being relieved of command when the fleet reached San Francisco.

Even before the fleet arrived at Trinidad, wild rumors about threats to the ships had reached the Secretary of the Navy. In Rio, the chief of police had been advised, through unknown sources, that anarchists were plotting to blow up the fleet. Nothing came of it, although Washington did cable for details. These rumors, which gave the folks back home the impression that the Great White Fleet was in constant peril, came to an end after it entered the Pacific Ocean.

On January 21, the fleet weighed anchor and got underway, leaving Rio and setting a course for the Strait of Magellan near the southern tip of South America.

There, rumor had it, massive whirlpools could twist a ship completely around. Winds, known as *williwaws*, were said to be so wild that



Coaling ship was a dirty job that lasted several days. Derricks lowered bags of coal into bunkers, and Sailors spread out the coal with shovels. It took several days more to clean the coal dust that covered everything and everyone. *William Stewart Collection.*



Electrician Leslie Haines, in *USS Connecticut*, wrote home about the “genuine bullfight” he and hundreds of other bluejackets attended in Lima, Peru, as “something I will never forget and never want to witness again for it was too genuine for me. Six bulls, two men, and one horse were killed in about two hours’ time” (Haines, 50).
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.

ships would be dashed to pieces on the rocky shores of such nightmarishly labeled places as Delusion Bay, Desolation Island, Point Famine, and Dislocation Point. One newspaper in California, the *Sacramento Union*, prophesied shipwreck and worse should the Great White Fleet attempt the Strait.

The Chilean cruiser *Chacabuco* met the fleet at Punta Arenas, Chile, and after the fleet had coaled there, guided it through the Strait. Despite considerable fog and wind, the fleet completed its passage without mishap and encountered none of the calamities conjured up by the over-active imaginations of newspaper editors. Now in the South Pacific, the fleet set its track for Peru, following a naval parade through the harbor of Valparaiso, Chile.

Although normal day-to-day routine and training evolutions kept the Sailors busy while underway, there were diversions after hours for those not on watch. Aboard the ships were pianos and phonographs, various games, plenty of playing cards, and handball and billiard equipment. There were also player pianos and silent movies.

In referring to the movies, a fleet veteran assigned to *Connecticut* remarked, "They had one they showed us about fifty times . . . *The Perils of Pauline*. It was a film series. They might show number nine one day and then show number forty-seven the next. But we enjoyed it anyway; she was always in some kind of fix, getting thrown off cliffs and things like that."

On February 20, the fleet pulled in to Callao, Peru, just north of Lima. Their arrival sparked a nine-day celebration that included commemoration of George Washington's birthday, a holiday the Peruvians felt they should share with their American friends to the north. Peruvian composer Cesar Penizo paid homage to the fleet by compos-

ing a special dance piece entitled "The White Squadron." To help the American Sailors feel at home, a small tugboat roved about the anchored ships, its passengers regaling the Great White Fleet crews with lively renditions of Cornell University football cheers.

Having absorbed an abundance of Peruvian hospitality, the fleet reluctantly got up steam to continue its journey northward to California, with an intermediate one-month stopover at Magdalena Bay, Mexico, for gunnery practice.

The fleet arrived on March 12 for its gunnery exercises at Magdalena Bay, while California's coastal cities tried everything in their power to get the fleet into their ports. Ulysses S. Grant Jr., a noted citizen of San Diego, went so far as to write Roosevelt to request that the fleet steam directly into San Diego harbor instead of anchoring at Coronado.

The President took this request under consideration and contacted the Navy Department about the possibility. Word came back that, should the fleet attempt anchoring in San Diego harbor, there was a good chance that the ships would remain permanently mired in the mud. Thus, Grant and his fellow San Diegans had to be content with greeting the fleet at Coronado.

When the fleet pulled in on April 14, thousands of enthusiastic residents welcomed the Sailors as the great ships anchored off the Hotel del Coronado. Small boats of all descriptions surrounded the warships, and Sailors were pelted with blossoms by "Flower Committees" and filled to capacity with free lemonade by "Fruit Committees." For the next four days, San Diego celebrated, and the Sailors received the royal treatment that ended only with the fleet's departure for Los Angeles on April 18, 1908.



Making a gunnery target. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Erecting targets. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Firing at targets. *William Stewart Collection.*



A 6-inch gun crew. *William Stewart Collection.*



Tallying results of U.S. Battleship *Tennessee's* shooting. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Prize-winning crew. *William Stewart Collection.*

In Los Angeles, the officers and men enjoyed such entertainment as a giant Spanish barbecue, a breathtaking balloon ascension by a group of daring aeronauts, and a number of prize fights between well-known local pugilists.

Meantime, as the fleet was being pampered and honored by the good citizens of Los Angeles, Santa Cruz, to the north, geared up for its welcome to the fleet and attempted to crowd out rival Monterey just across the bay. But when the Santa Cruz townsmen got the word that only part of the fleet would be visiting their community, they became so upset that they threatened to call off the entire reception if they were not visited by all the ships. The Navy relented and Santa Cruz got its wish, after the fleet visited Santa Barbara and Monterey.

With their city the announced West Coast destination when the fleet departed Hampton Roads, San Franciscans had made extensive preparations for a lavish welcome. They made even more elaborate welcoming plans on learning that Secretary of the Navy Victor H. Metcalf would arrive to review the fleet, and that the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets would sail into the harbor together.

When the fleet arrived in San Francisco on May 6, the hills surrounding the City by the Bay were packed with hundreds of thousands of greeters, many brought in by special trains from outlying communities. San Francisco greeted the fleet in a warm-hearted and ostentatious fashion by staging a 48-hour ball at the luxurious Fairmont Hotel (where dinners normally went for ten



“I am going out to see the big trees [California redwoods] tomorrow on an excursion and will get back the day after.” Electrician Leslie Haines in USS *Connecticut*, to his parents, May 2, 1908 (Haines, 54). *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



The Atlantic Fleet in San Francisco Harbor, by Henry Reuter Dahl, for *Collier's* magazine. *William Stewart Collection.*



“We had an excellent time in Los Angeles and were sorry to leave so soon. . . . We were entertained with baseball, dancing boxing bouts . . . Wild West shows, Theatres, Spanish Barbecues, Auto Rides and in fact the whole city was thrown open to us free of charge.” Electrician Leslie Haines, in USS *Connecticut*, to his parents, April 27, 1908 (Haines, 53). *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Sailors of the Great White Fleet parade in Santa Barbara, California, April 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



The Great White Fleet steaming in line ahead, about to pass through the Golden Gate, San Francisco Bay, May 6, 1908.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* leads the fleet into San Francisco Bay, May 6, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

dollars per plate). The officers and enlisted men of the Great White Fleet were treated to a welcome they would long remember. Citizens went so far as to pitch tents in Jefferson Square and Portsmouth Square for Great White Fleet Sailors who ran out of hotel money.

While in San Francisco, the battleships *Maine* and *Alabama* were replaced by *Nebraska* and *Wisconsin*. The reason behind this change was *Maine's* and *Alabama's* voracious appetite for coal. They seemed to eat up more “black diamonds” than any other ships in the fleet.

San Francisco was also the last port of call for fleet commander Evans, still suffering from gout. He was relieved by Rear Admiral Charles M. Thomas, who after one week in command handed the fleet over to his successor, Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry. After eleven days in San Francisco, the fleet, under Sperry's command, sailed for Puget Sound and conducted port calls in Seattle, Bellingham, and Tacoma, Washington. An estimated four hundred thousand people gathered from Washington, its surrounding states, and British Columbia to view the grand parade of Sailors through Seattle's main street. Selected ships then went into dock at Bellingham to clean marine growth from their underwater hulls, while the remainder returned directly to San Francisco and docked there to prepare for the rest of the cruise.

“Everywhere the people were gathered to see the fleet come. Golden Gate Park was a black mass of people, and everywhere they gathered by the thousands.” Electrician Frank Leshar, in *USS Virginia*, to his father, May 7, 1908 (Leshar Letters). *William Stewart Collection.*





Crewmen of U.S. Battleship *Maine* parade through downtown San Francisco, May 7, 1908.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



Postcard commemorating the visit of U.S. Battleship *Vermont* to San Francisco, sent by Electrician Roy W. Davis to his future wife, Etta M. Cowles, June 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

Sailor with one of a number of bear cubs presented to the fleet by the city of Seattle, Washington, May 1908. *William Stewart Collection.*





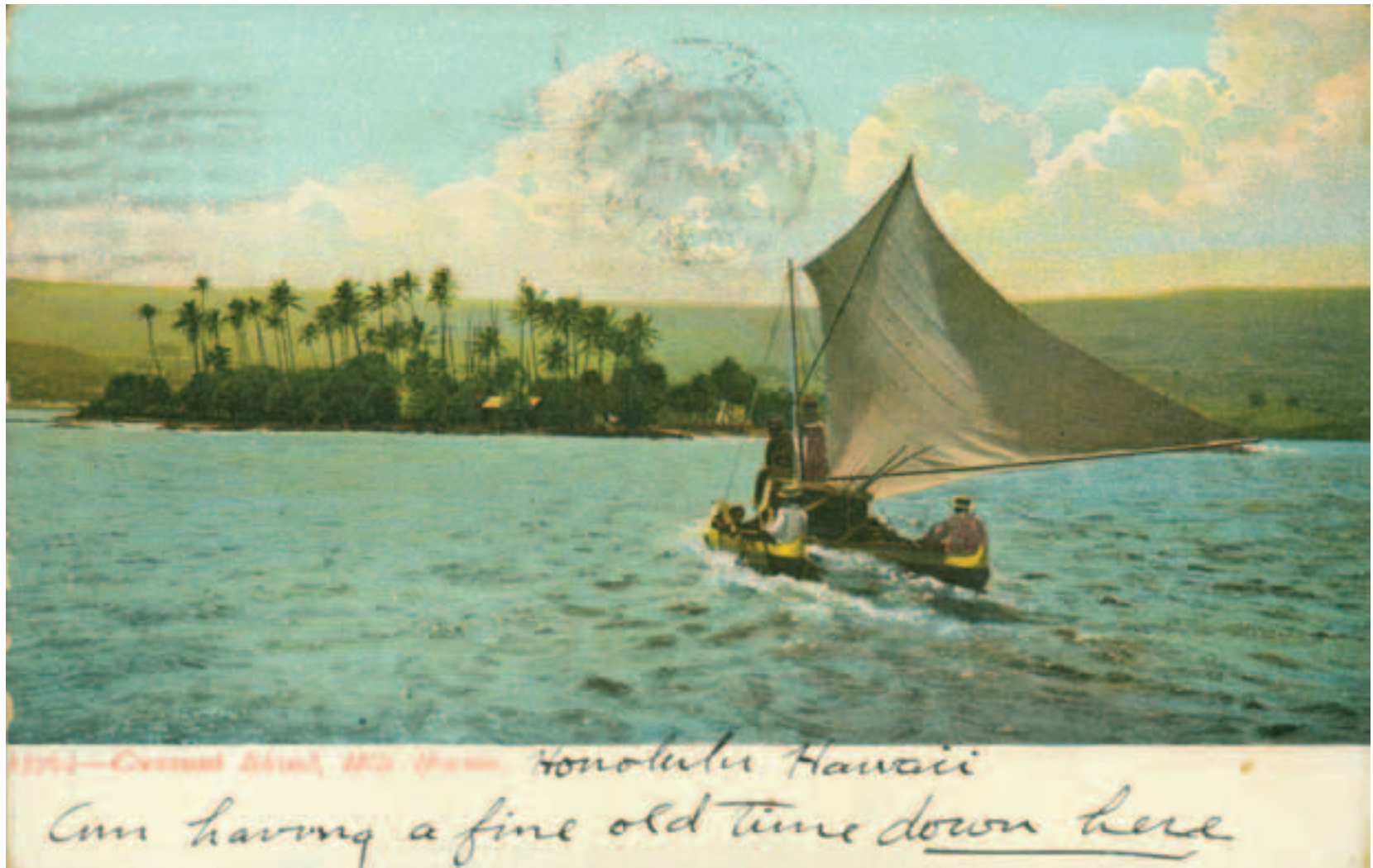
The Great White Fleet departing Puget Sound, Washington, May 27, 1908.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



“We keep adding a little to our host of pets in most every port and the Conn. begins to look more like a menagerie than a warship. Our list now stands as follows—six dogs all breeds, about the same number of cats, a pig . . . parrots and a monkey from Trinidad, a black bear from Seattle, a kangaroo, an eagle, two native opossums, and more parrots, from Sydney. The Elecs have a pair of white rats from Los Angeles, two Angora goats from Punta Arenas and one from Santa Barbara and a raccoon from Rio.” Electrician Leslie Haines, in USS *Connecticut*, to his parents, August 26, 1908 (Haines, 61). *William Stewart Collection.*



Postcard collected in Hawaii. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Postcard sent from Honolulu, Hawaii, by Electrician Roy W. Davis, in U.S. Battleship *Vermont*, to his future wife, Etta M. Cowles, July 22, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Front and back panels of the official program for the reception of the U.S. fleet in Auckland, New Zealand, August 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

The fleet visit up and down the West Coast lasted one week shy of three months. That part of the cruise included constant festivities, with everyone, sailor and civilian alike, celebrating this great adventure. On July 7 the fleet, now reassembled under Rear Admiral Sperry, bid farewell to San Francisco and weighed anchor to continue its journey across the Pacific.

On July 16, the fleet arrived in Hawaii. After a six-day layover at Pearl Harbor, where it was feted with luaus and sailing regattas, the great armada got underway for New Zealand, anchoring in Auckland on August 9.

The New Zealanders gave the fleet a very warm reception and invited Sperry and his staff to observe tribal ceremonies at a Maori village. At the conclusion of the traditional Maori welcome to a warrior, the *haka*, one Maori warrior came forward. Halting before the admiral and his staff, the Maori dancer broke into a broad, toothy smile and exclaimed, "Bully!" Even among the people in far off New Zealand, Roosevelt had made his mark, to the great surprise and amusement of Sperry and his staff.

On August 15, the fleet sailed for Sydney, Australia, where it arrived five days later. The fleet was greeted by half a million people who had stayed up all night so as not to miss the ships' arrival. For the next eight days, there was a nonstop celebration in honor of the Navy visitors.



"One of the great sports is to get a canoe made of a tree trunk hollowed out with an outrigger lashed to it and go surfriding. . . . The game is to get five or six in a canoe and paddle out about a mile. There you wait until you see a wave you like, then everyone paddles as hard as they can to get a start. If things are properly timed a big wave catches the canoe and curved on the shore side and shoots it along the front of it. Sometimes you can go half a mile and you go like the devil." Lt. Edward S. Willing, USMC, in USS *Illinois*, to his father, July 20, 1908 (Willing, 26).
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



The members of the U.S. Navy Rifle Team, which won the Auckland Cup at Auckland, New Zealand, during the visit there of the Great White Fleet, August 1908. All were U.S. Naval Academy graduates. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Maori women dancing for Rear Admiral Sperry and officers of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet at Rotorua, New Zealand, August 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



An artist's impression of the entrance of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet into Sydney Harbor, Australia, in *The Sydney Mail*, August 19, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Marines parade in downtown Melbourne during the visit of the Great White Fleet to Australia, September 3, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Bluejackets from the Great White Fleet parade through the streets of Sydney. *William Stewart Collection.*



Hand-colored postcard photograph of the Great White Fleet entering Sydney Harbor. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

Battleships of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet in Sydney Harbor, August 1908. In the foreground are the 6-inch broadside guns of U.S. Battleship *Wisconsin*. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*





Souvenir, printed on silk, of the fleet's visit to Sydney, with advice on "how to view the arrival of the American fleet." *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Invitation from the government of New South Wales to the officers of U.S. Battleship *Wisconsin* to attend a state banquet at the town hall of Sydney, in honor of the fleet's visit there, August 21, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

With all this celebrating, some of the crewmen were beginning to feel the wear and tear. One Sailor was found asleep on a bench in one of Sydney's parks. Not wishing to be disturbed, he posted a sign above his head that read:

"Yes, I am delighted with the Australian people.

"Yes, I think your park is the finest in the world.

"I am very tired and would like to go to sleep."

Being truly hospitable, Sydney let him sleep.

Melbourne also rolled out the red carpet for the fleet. Nothing was too good for the American Sailors, who were given the key to the city. Melbourne's hospitality made such an impression that many Sailors were reluctant to leave when the ships got underway for Albany in Western Australia. The late arrival of contracted colliers delayed the fleet's departure from Albany for the Philippines.

The fleet arrived at Manila on October 2 and, after a brief sojourn, turned north for Japan on October 10. While en route in the South China Sea, the fleet ran into one of the worst typhoons in forty years. According to one Sailor, "The typhoon happened right off Formosa. All you could see, when a ship was in trough, was the trunk of its mast above the wave tops. That was all you could see of an entire battleship. Then our turn would come to go into a trough, and we couldn't see anything for a while."

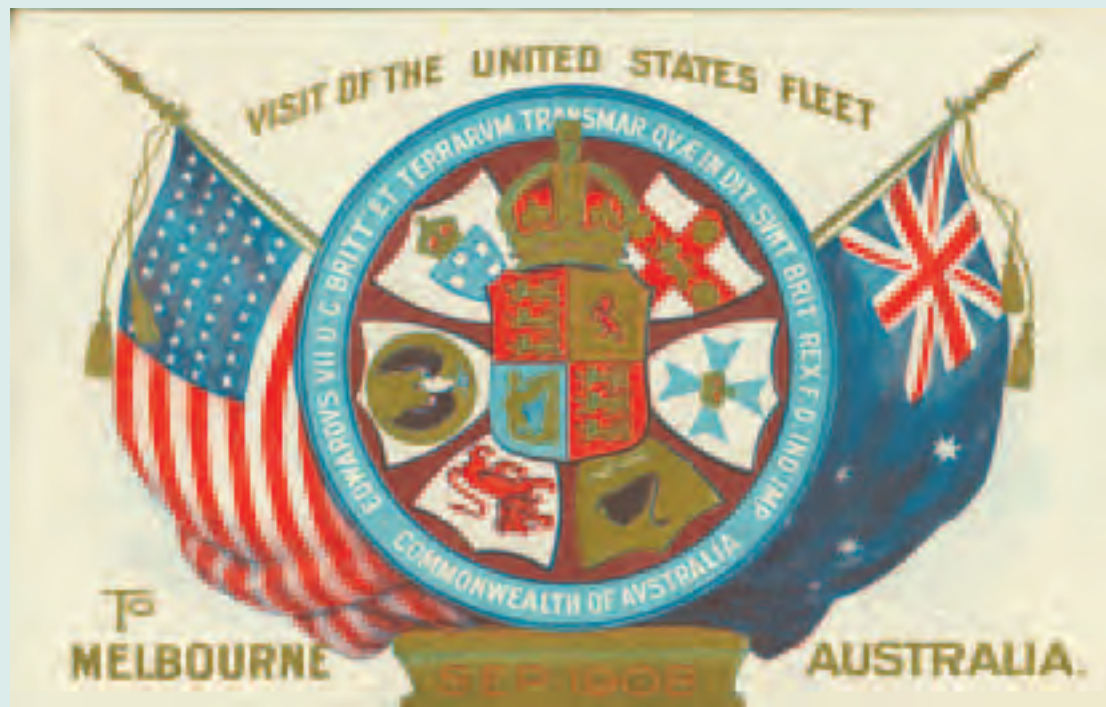
In riding out the storm, there was a moment of high drama when, as the Sailor recalled, "Something happened that you're just not going to



"Our menagerie on board is growing every day, and I am afraid to think what it will be when the fleet gets back. The bear and the kangaroo don't agree very well, that is, the bear don't like the kangaroo very much and the other day Teddy swatted the Australian and pretty nearly did for him." Lt. Edward S. Willing, USMC, in USS *Illinois*, to his mother, September 7, 1908 (Willing, 30). Sailor with a wallaby presented to the American fleet by the citizens of Sydney, Australia. *William Stewart Collection.*



During the world cruise, many commercial enterprises linked their brand names to the Great White Fleet. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Postcard of the visit to Melbourne in August–September 1908.
*Naval Historical Center,
Roy W. Davis Collection.*



On this Australian postcard the merging of the identities of Uncle Sam and John Bull (personifications of the United States and the United Kingdom), as well as of the American eagle, the British lion, and the Australian kangaroo, and the motto “We’re all one” suggest the unity of national interests of the United States and Australia.
Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



“We ran into what is called out here ‘A Typhoon’ which lasted two days and three or four knots was as fast as we could go. If it had lasted much longer I think the most of us would have been down and out for it was so rough that you couldn’t sleep, sit down, lay down or stand up.” Electrician Leslie Haines, in USS *Connecticut*, to his parents, October 19, 1908 (Haines, 64). U.S. Battleship *New Jersey* in a typhoon in the China Sea. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



A view of U.S. Battleship *Kansas* in heavy seas on the way to Japan in October 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



While en route to Japan, the fleet came through two powerful typhoons undamaged. Unfortunately two of several Sailors who were washed overboard could not be rescued and drowned. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*

believe. One of the sailors on a ship in our squadron was picked up and washed overboard by a big wave. Then that same wave carried him over to another ship in another squadron and it threw him up on the deck.”

The fleet came through the typhoon unscathed, and as it approached Tokyo Bay and Yokohama, Sperry circulated a directive concerning liberty in Japan. In it he stated that, to ensure against diplomatically damaging incidents, “only first-class men, whose records showed no evidence of previous indulgence in intoxicating liquor,” would be allowed ashore. In the classification system established for granting liberty, first-class libertymen were those who had been on board for at least six months without any in-

fringement of Navy regulations. By limiting liberty to first-class libertymen, Sperry ensured that all potential troublemakers remained safely on board. In reference to a planned reception for the crew, the directive went on to state that “the men will be made to understand that this, though an entertainment, is a matter of military duty,” and all Sailors should conduct themselves accordingly.

On October 17, the day before the fleet’s arrival, the Yokohama newspaper *Boyaki Shimpo* came out with what it called a “Fleet Banzai Number” and showered printed praise upon the fleet. When the U.S. ships arrived the next day, sixteen Japanese battleships and three cruisers accompanied them into the bay, while on shore school children sang “Hail Columbia” and the “Star-Spangled Banner.”



The landing of the first liberty party, Yokohama, Japan, October 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection; Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



“There are three long docks built out from the bund. . . . They are made of poles and planks but are covered with evergreens and are not only by far the best landings we have had anywhere but are attractive looking.” Lt. Edward S. Willing, USMC, in *USS Illinois*, to his mother, October 22, 1908 (Willing, 36). Rear Admiral Sperry and others on a decorated pier at Yokohama.

Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



Bluejackets from the American fleet en route to a garden party in Yokohama.
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.



Postcard issued in Japan in honor of the visit of the Great White Fleet, showing the fleet in Tokyo Bay, with Mount Fuji in the background.
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.



Officers of the Japanese Navy's armored cruiser *Nisshin* with officers of U.S. Battleship *Missouri* on the latter ship's deck, at Yokohama, Japan, October 24, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

Front and back covers of an Imperial Japanese Government Railways ticket specially printed for distribution to Sailors of the Great White Fleet. Ticket numbers correspond to the day of the visit for which the pass was good. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection; Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



Image (above) of the inside of an Imperial Japanese Government Railways ticket. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



Cover of an invitation to a reception in the Japan Tea Hall at Yokohama Railway Depot. *Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.*



This postcard welcoming the American fleet to Japan shows a young child wearing a hat imprinted with the name of the Japanese battleship *Kashima*. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*

Souvenirs issued in Japan in honor of the visit of the Great White Fleet, October 1908.
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.





Japanese visitors on board U.S. Battleship *Kansas* during the fleet's visit to Japan. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



This postcard, mailed from Tokyo, includes the message "These ladies are the wives and daughters of the captains that just left our country. The ladies are dressed in kimono and obis around their waists." *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



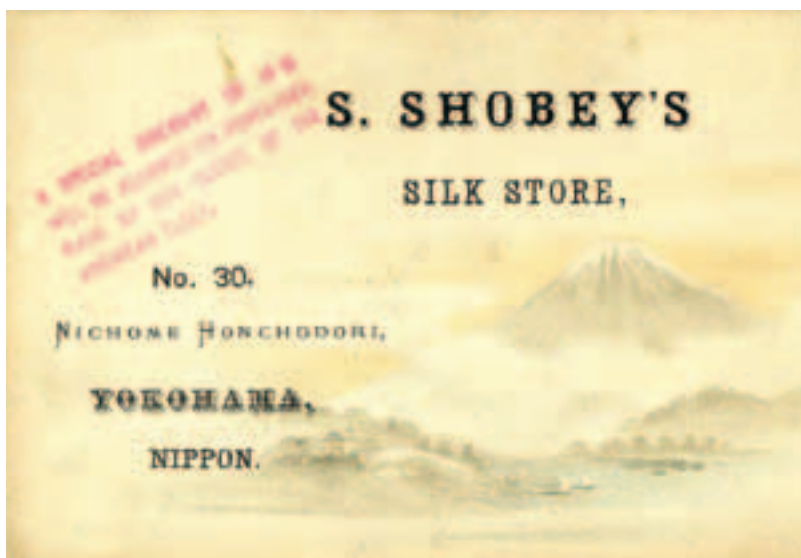
American bluejackets and Japanese visitors on board one of the ships of the Great White Fleet during the visit to Japan. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*

Japanese hospitality was indeed overflowing. The four flag officers of the fleet were accommodated at the Emperor's Palace, while the ships' captains occupied suites at Tokyo's elegant Imperial Hotel. Junior officers received railroad passes, and selected enlisted men were given free trolley car privileges. For the entire week that the fleet was in Japan, there was a constant round of celebrations, balls, and parties. Admiral Togo of the Imperial Japanese Navy gave a garden party; Premier Katsura hosted a formal ball; and fifty thousand Tokyo residents honored the fleet with a torchlight parade.

During a champagne party in the Japanese battleship *Mikasa*, Sperry suffered an indignity, albeit an unintended one, from his Japanese Navy hosts. It occurred when a group of exuberant Imperial Navy cadets suddenly picked up Sperry and hurled him into the air three times, shouting "Banzai!" with each liftoff. In Japanese naval circles, the Banzai cheer and tossing were considered tributes. This was explained to a ruffled Sperry after he was placed back on the deck,



"Another episode of the visit was the distribution of some fifteen thousand sunshades by the *Hochi Shimbun*. Needless to say that the decorative design on each of these consisted of the American and Japanese national flags. Many of the sailors carried the sunshades with them on landing, and since to all inquiries they pointed to the legend *Hochi Shimbun*, the guides, previously instructed, led them to the great Mitsui-Koshi dry goods store, where they were served to their advantage and to the store's profit. It was a subtle form of advertisement." *Japan Weekly Mail*, October 24, 1908.
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.



A Yokohama silk shop advertising a discount for customers from the Great White Fleet.
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.

gasping and trying to straighten out his twisted sash, dislocated sword, and wrinkled uniform. Sperry accepted the tribute as graciously as possible under the circumstances.

One of the first diplomatic gestures came about, not as part of an elaborately planned ceremony, but spontaneously during a crisis. On the night of October 22, an arch honoring the fleet caught fire, and the flames began creeping up one side of the arch toward a Japanese flag anchored on a pole at the top. Three U.S. Sailors and a Marine raced toward the scene. The Marine, reaching the blazing arch first, climbed the clear side of the arch and retrieved the Japanese flag before the flames could engulf it. The Japanese crowd that had gathered went wild and hoisted the Marine onto their shoulders and paraded about the streets. The Great White Fleet had scored a small but important diplomatic coup.

The fleet's Japan visit had the desired result: it generated goodwill between both countries and eased tensions that might otherwise have led to open conflict. Much of the credit goes to Sperry, whose skill as a diplomat and professionalism as an officer were crucial.

After their stop in Japan, half the fleet steamed back to Manila for a month's gunnery practice, and the other eight ships set course for the Formosa (Taiwan) Strait and the Chinese port of Amoy (Xiamen). The Peking government was prepared to welcome sixteen battleships, but when only eight arrived, the local officials were disappointed and embarrassed. This unintended slight was due to operational requirements of the fleet.



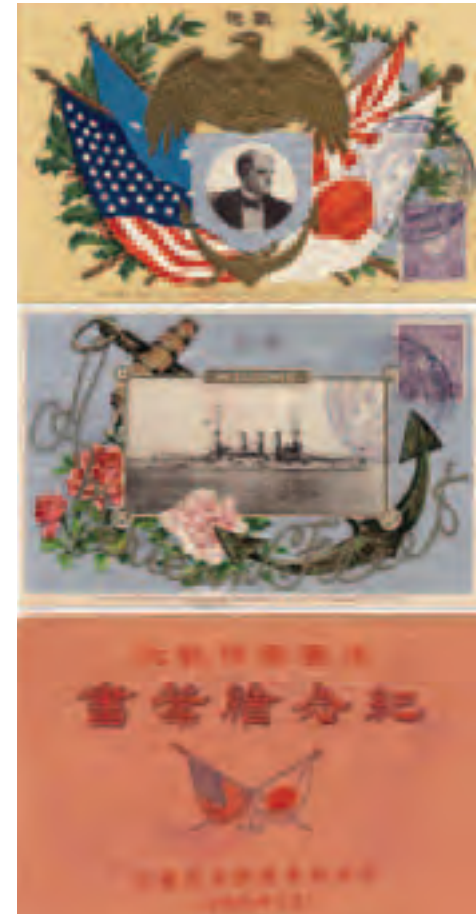
"I have just purchased a Japanese tea set for Mama with forty two pieces in it. . . . I am as ignorant concerning china ware, as to quality and worth, as the bull was awkward in the china store but I really don't think it was a gold brick." Electrician Leslie Haines, in USS *Connecticut*, to his sister, October 19, 1908 (Haines, 65). "If I was to buy all the stuff I have seen that I would like to have had, a thousand dollars would look like a plugged nickel and last about as long as a pie at the mess table." Haines to his parents, October 22, 1908 (Haines, 66).
Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.



Souvenir bowl advertising Kabuto Beer.
William Stewart Collection.



Welcome arch erected in Manila, Philippines, in honor of the fleet's visit there, October 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



A selection of postcards issued in Japan. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



A silk banner displaying an image of the Great White Fleet in Tokyo Harbor. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



The hobby of collecting souvenir spoons was in vogue at the time of the world cruise. Electrician Leslie Haines, for instance, attempted to collect a souvenir spoon at every port of call during the cruise for his sister's collection (Haines, 55, 58, 59, 65). Shown here is a souvenir spoon issued in honor of the Great White Fleet's visit to Japan. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



Officers of the Second Squadron and their Chinese hosts at Amoy (Xiamen), China, a seaport on two islands in Formosa (Taiwan) Strait, November 1, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Silk banner commemorating the fleet's visit to Amoy. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



Officers of the Great White Fleet at a banquet held in Amoy, November 1, 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

At Amoy, a specially built entertainment center awaited the officers and enlisted men of the fleet. All food and drink was brought in from Shanghai, along with rickshaws, mandarin chairs, horses, and wagons. It was at Amoy that many of the Sailors were introduced to the oriental delicacy of shark fin soup.

Concluding their call on Amoy, the eight ships steamed back to Manila to join the rest of the fleet on maneuvers. From there, the entire fleet sailed into the Indian Ocean, making a port call at Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), off the southeastern coast of India. While in Ceylon, the officers and crew were swamped with complimentary tea from none other than Sir Thomas Lipton, a man whose familiar face once adorned boxes of tea bags found in supermarkets throughout the United States.

Christmas of 1908 was celebrated by the fleet as it crossed the Indian Ocean en route to the Arabian Sea. During the holiday underway, the ships were decorated with palms, colored streamers, coconuts, and other fruit. Holiday routine was set throughout the ships, and Sailors enjoyed a number of competitions, including potato races, three-legged races, sack races, and bobbing for oranges.

At Suez, Sperry learned that a terrible earthquake and a tidal wave had brought death and destruction to Messina and other towns along the Strait of Messina on December 28, 1908. He immediately dispatched the supply ship *Culgoa* with foodstuffs to the scene of the disaster. *Yankton*, before following, transferred spare medical supplies as well as six surgeons from the battleships. After coaling, *Connecticut* and *Illinois* set a course for Messina at top speed. When they arrived, Sailors and Marines provided survivors every possible humanitarian aid.



U.S. Supply Ship *Culgoa* at Messina, Italy, January 1909.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



U.S. Sailors and Marines from the Great White Fleet landed at Messina, Sicily, to distribute provisions and clothing. They erected temporary shelters for survivors of the earthquake and tidal wave that struck the island. *William Stewart Collection.*



All told, the earthquake and tidal wave that hit southern Italy killed some two hundred thousand people. Seen in this photograph are some of the refugees who benefited from American humanitarian assistance at Messina. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*



Sailors and Marines also searched for and located the bodies of the American Consul and his wife who had perished in the disaster at Messina. *William Stewart Collection.*

It took three days for the fleet to transit the Suez Canal, the largest naval force to have used the canal since its opening forty years earlier. The ships then coaled at Port Said, Egypt, and proceeded independently and in groups to ports of call throughout the Mediterranean, paying visits to Algiers, Tangier, Tripoli, Naples, Marseille, Villefranche, Athens, Beirut, Smyrna (Izmir), Salonika (Thessaloniki, Greece), and Malta. At the completion of these visits, the fleet reassembled at Gibraltar for a few days of liberty. Then under cloudless skies the fleet got underway for home, the ships' bands playing "Home Sweet Home" on this last leg of the voyage.

Having crossed the Atlantic, the fleet entered Hampton Roads, Virginia, on a rainy February 22, 1909, ending its 14-month odyssey. The fleet arriving early, Sailors repainted the hulls in preparation for the formal reception. Steaming into the Roads, the ships (looking majestic in their fresh paint) had their bands belt out the rollicking tune "Strike Up the Band," followed by the slower, more poignant strains of "There's No Place Like Home."

The enthusiasm of the cheering multitudes waiting on shore to greet the fleet was not dampened by the inclement weather. Once again from the presidential yacht *Mayflower*, Roosevelt responded to the rendering of the fleet's 21-gun salute with enthusiastic waves.



Battleships of the Great White Fleet, having navigated the Suez Canal, circa January 5–6, 1909.
Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.



A bluejacket riding an elephant in Kandy, Ceylon, December 1908.

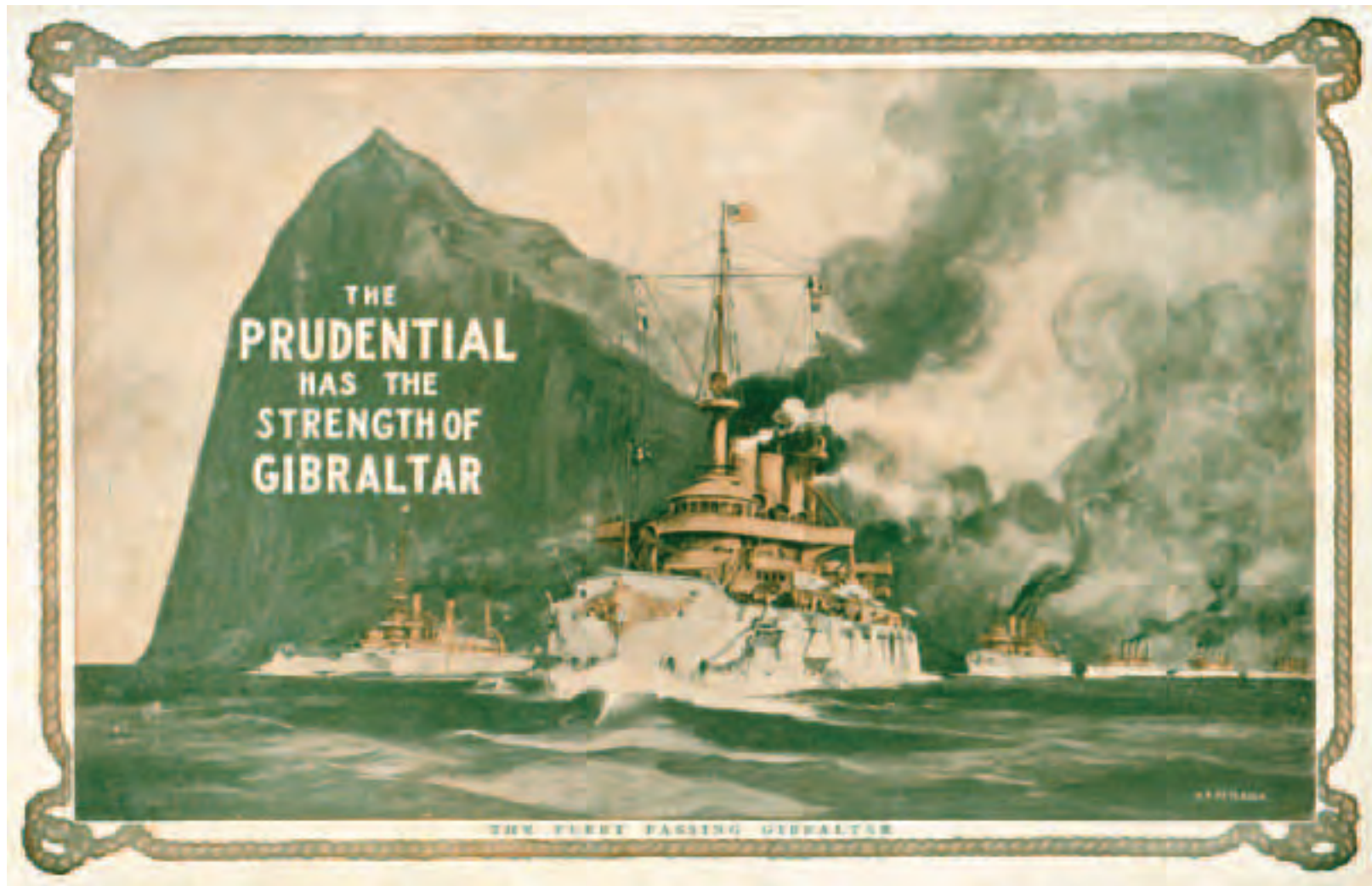


Sailors from the Great White Fleet consulting the Sphinx, January 1909.



An American bluejacket, perhaps contemplating the cost of a camel ride in Tangier, January 1909.

All images on this page are from the William Stewart Collection.



"The part of [the Rock of Gibraltar] which we see in the pictures denoting the strength of Gibraltar, in the Prudential sign, faces the land side and is on the North side of the Rock. Before we struck Gibraltar everybody was telling everybody else about the Prudential sign that one would see on reaching Gibraltar. The Chaplain cut the sign out of a magazine and pasted it out the side of his binoculars, which one holds away from him in looking through the glass. Then he went around the decks as soon as we sighted the Rock, giving everybody a look through the glass, and he deceived a good many of those who really believed that the sign was actually painted on the Rock." Electrician Frank Leshner, in USS *Virginia*, to his father, February 3, 1909 (Leshner Letters).

Naval Historical Center, Roy W. Davis Collection.



President Theodore Roosevelt tips his hat in salute as he boards the battleship *Louisiana* on its return to Hampton Roads after the world cruise of the Great White Fleet. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

Roosevelt, with only two weeks left in the White House before turning over the reins of government to his successor, William Howard Taft, was prompted by the return of the fleet and the success of its mission to declare later that this cruise was “the most important service that I rendered for peace.”

A Great White Fleet Sailor remembered the homecoming. “We hit Hampton Roads on Washington’s Birthday and it was raining. But by golly, we celebrated with hardtack and sow belly dinner that day. Later, all the deckhands had to go to Washington and parade in the snow for [President-elect] Howard Taft.”

The cruise of the Great White Fleet had many substantial results, for national self-esteem, for diplomacy, and for Navy technology. The cruise proved that the United States was a world power, capable of projecting its influence.

Diplomatically, our relations with the countries visited were either improved or established in a positive way. The most important improvement of relations was with Japan, a diplomatic priority from the beginning. The visit by the fleet provided the main thrust behind the Root-Takahira Agreement that went into effect shortly after the fleet’s return. According to this treaty, the United States and Japan agreed to maintain the status quo in the Pacific and to respect each other’s possessions there. Also, both nations consented to respect the “Open Door” policy in China and the independence and territorial integrity of that country.

Operationally, the cruise was a resounding success. Initially, the detractors of the enterprise did not believe the ships would be capable of making the round-the-world transit without frequently breaking down. Yet there were no serious repairs or maintenance problems; there were no breakdowns or serious accidents.



President Theodore Roosevelt, the newly appointed Secretary of the Navy Charles J. Bonaparte, and Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry, at Hampton Roads on the return of the fleet from its world cruise, February 22, 1909. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

The voyage confirmed certain technical defects in ship design that reformers within the Navy had campaigned unsuccessfully to correct. It demonstrated that ships' armor belts were placed too low, and in normal seas were often below the waterline. This was a deficiency that rendered the battleships' defense against enemy fire ineffective. Shipboard habitability also was inadequate, and ventilation had to be improved; hull casemate shutters could not keep the water out in rough seas; rapid-fire guns placed close to the waterline could not be used effectively since spray and water entering the gun ports were distracting to the crews; and the lofty upper works of the ships were found to be comfortable for peacetime conditions but would be "shell exploders" during wartime.

It became clear, too, that shipboard weights had to be reduced in order to bring the ships closer to their design drafts. To achieve this, the old-style military masts and "fighting tops" were replaced by new cage masts with fire-control tops; top-heavy bridges and charthouses were removed and replaced by open bridges; light-weight torpedo-defense guns gave way to more powerful pieces; and new fire-control gear was fitted out on the ships.

Sperry also recommended that the ships of the Navy be permanently painted in battle color, a shade of gray known as battleship gray. Changing color from peacetime white to battle gray at the height of diplomatic tensions with a foreign nation could, in itself, be an escalatory move. It made much sense to have the ships always painted in battle colors.

For the Sailors and Marines who participated in this historic, once-in-a-lifetime adventure, the deployment reinforced their pride in service and country. They had been the ambassadors of goodwill and the vehicles through which others perceived and judged America as well as the

Navy. The results were gratifying. But even more concretely, the Sailors and Marines saw their participation and the role of the Great White Fleet as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. As one Sailor put it, "We just wanted to let the world know we were prepared for anything they wanted to kick up. We wanted to show the world what we could do."



"We have now on board our homeward bound coal, and all hands are not sorry. Well, we will soon be in Hampton Roads, and seeing each other personally, Love to Mother." Electrician Frank Leshner, in USS *Virginia*, to his father, February 3, 1909 (Leshner Letters).

Note the Sailor's cap ribbon mimicking the long pennant streaming from the ship's foremast. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



"At last the cruise is at an end and a great trip it has been too. One that I consider myself lucky in getting to take part in, and one that I never expect to be able to enjoy again." Electrician Leslie Haines, in *USS Connecticut*, to his parents, February 23, 1909 (Haines, 74). *When Jacky Comes Marching Home*, by Henry Reuter Dahl, *Collier's* magazine cover, June 20, 1909. *William Stewart Collection*.



"Great White Fleet," oil painting by John Roach.
Naval Historical Center, Navy Art Collection.

A S S E S S M E N T

by James R. Reckner

In the early months of 1907, American relations with Japan reached a critical point. The quickening flow of Japanese immigrant labor had raised the concern of American workingmen on the West Coast and triggered reactive measures in California. Underlying the obvious fear of labor competition was apprehension about Japanese military prowess. Japan, recently victorious in land and sea battles against Russia, was viewed by many as a distinct military threat to the virtually defenseless West Coast and Hawaii. The possibility, however remote, that the Japanese government might take military action in response to California's regulations rapidly transformed the immigration concern into a war scare. Historians of later generations examining this period of Japanese-American relations have concluded that the situation in 1907 was less serious than originally thought. Despite this historical hindsight, it is difficult to deny that Americans perceived a crisis at the time.

While actively seeking to resolve the concern over and reaction to Japanese immigration, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the implementation, for exercise purposes, of a number of measures recommended by the Joint Board of the Army and Navy. These included the deployment of the entire battleship fleet—the U.S. Atlantic Fleet—to the Pacific. The voyage that followed, the world cruise of the Great White Fleet, has taken its place in American history as the single most significant naval event of the Roosevelt administration. But this assessment falsely suggests that the Far East was a preeminent naval concern. In reality, the Navy's preoccupation with the defense implications of the war scare of 1907 was quite short-lived, a brief distraction from the traditional concentration on events in the Caribbean and Europe.

Indeed, an appreciation of this Caribbean-Atlantic orientation is necessary to understanding the full significance to the Navy of the American rapprochement with Japan, formalized by the Root-Takahira Agreement of November 1908. American leaders, naval officers in particular, were convinced that Germany represented the greatest threat to peace. The need to resolve difficulties with Japan, important for further development of bilateral relations, assumed even greater global significance because rapprochement would permit continued concentration of the battleship fleet in the Atlantic, an advantage that amply compensated for America's weak position in the Pacific. American distrust of German motives, kindled in Samoa in the 1880s and nurtured at Manila Bay in 1898, had been sustained by the Venezuela blockade of 1903 and Germany's threatening position regarding Morocco in 1905–6. Most American naval deployments from 1903 to 1913 were in the direction of Europe, which reflected a continuing Anglo-French geopolitical interest.



Model of U.S. Battleship *Maine*. Curator of Navy Ship Models.



A selection of postcards issued in Japan in honor of the visit of the American fleet in October 1908. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*



The success of the world tour suggested that the United States could play its part in world affairs well. Few of Theodore Roosevelt's contemporaries in America would have argued with his claim that the United States had "no choice" as to whether it would "play a great part in the world." The only decision open to Americans, Roosevelt contended, was whether they would play that part "well or ill."¹³

Americans were unabashed in waxing poetic over the glory of the fleet and its cruise. Some Europeans decried such demonstrative pride, but whether they were critical or supportive of the cruise, the shifting of American naval power to the Pacific forced them to reappraise the balance of power in that ocean.

Unprecedented in many respects, including distance steamed and number of ships participating, the cruise commanded the world's attention. For the people of host ports, it provided a unique entertainment opportunity, the significance of which they were quick to grasp. Indeed, the arrival of sixteen gleaming white- and buff-colored first-class battleships was the event of a lifetime. One million people lined the shores off the Golden Gate to welcome the fleet to San Francisco; half a million gathered in Sydney; hundreds of thousands turned out in other ports.

A remarkable air of innocence surrounds contemporary attitudes toward the fleet and its cruise. This is understandable. The world would enjoy six more years of naval pageantry and splendor before the challenges of unrestricted submarine warfare and ever-mounting casualty lists from the trenches in France extinguished a generation's romantic conceptions and preoccupation with things military. But that disillusionment lay in the future. In 1908, naval parades were applauded without reservation; few fears were expressed about the battleship

cruise, and people along the route, particularly those in remote places never before visited by a great fleet, gladly surrendered themselves to the festivities.

The cruise was a highly successful exercise in national public awareness. It greatly expanded popular understanding of American foreign relations and defense considerations, particularly in regard to the Pacific Basin. In every corner of the nation the tour promoted public knowledge of, interest in, and support for the Navy. But this exposure generated increased public scrutiny of the Navy Department for most of the fourteen months the fleet was away, which brings up an important but often neglected theme related to the cruise: the sensational, often acrimonious, debates over ship design and naval organization.

Although often cited as proof of the efficiency of the Navy and its bureau system, the cruise never actually tested materiel and organizational deficiencies against which Navy reformers campaigned. Battleship design errors such as incorrectly placed armor belts and unsafe ammunition hoists, as well as the fragmented authority of the bureau system that perpetuated these errors, were left unexamined. Primarily an exercise in extended peacetime cruising and naval diplomacy, the battleship cruise tended to mask the Navy's defects and thus, at least superficially, to diminish the strength of the reform argument.

What the American public saw was the successful completion, with few apparent difficulties, of the longest fleet cruise ever undertaken by any navy. That ships of the fleet might not have been properly designed as a result of faulty organization within the Navy Department, that the Navy lacked the essential logistic support of a healthy merchant marine, and that senior officers of the fleet were too old and, despite their advanced age, too inexperienced in high command—these were fine

points often ignored in favor of the pomp and ceremony, the orations and ovations, that attended the battleships as they proceeded on their great voyage.

The world cruise of the Atlantic battleship fleet has traditionally been viewed as an outstanding example of Theodore Roosevelt's active foreign policy, a classic illustration of the "Big Stick" policy. This is a misconception, albeit one encouraged by Roosevelt himself. Rather than a textbook example of Roosevelt using the power of the U.S. Navy to awe Japan, official records of the deployment reveal a prudent President attempting to get a good measure of the abilities of his battleship fleet before the need to use it arose.

Although diplomacy naturally takes precedence over technical considerations in the interpretation of peacetime developments between nations, the wholesale application of this priority to the battleship cruise has resulted in a distorted appreciation of its significance. Often forgotten is the fact that battleships of the period were far less reliable mechanically than modern warships. Planning a cruise posed important questions about technical capabilities that could be resolved only through experience. In what material condition would the fleet be at the end of a voyage to the Pacific? Would it be ready to fight? How would inadequate and virtually untested Pacific coast facilities respond to fleet requirements? And would a lengthy cruise help or hinder training?

The need to test the fleet was imperative. This was the all-important consideration behind the decision to conduct a cruise. The tour was undertaken primarily as an exercise of naval and military plans to be carried out in the event of war with Japan. But when the fleet arrived



American bluejackets in Tokyo, Japan. *Stephen and Michiko Levine Collection.*

at Magdalena Bay, its ability to endure a lengthy voyage and arrive at its destination prepared to fight had been proven; Roosevelt had measured the strengths and limitations of his foreign policy. From this point on, he was prepared to use the fleet in pursuit of foreign policy goals.

Fortunately, by this time Roosevelt understood the situation in Japan, where growing domestic dissatisfaction over the financial burden imposed by overly ambitious postwar military and naval expansion programs was threatening the position of the Saionji Cabinet. American diplomats had provided sound analyses of the Japanese government's financial situation, and from them it could easily be concluded that that country was neither prepared nor preparing for a conflict with the United States in the near future. Indeed, Japan's pressing need for retrenchment dictated a policy of rapprochement. Therefore Roosevelt's acceptance of Japan's invitation, while it may have appeared to be a grand flourish of a Big Stick policy, was a move that involved little actual risk.

The threatening and indiscreet behavior of Germany's kaiser in 1908 and continuing German naval expansion were significant factors leading to American rapprochement with Japan. Roosevelt's growing conviction that Wilhelm might plunge Europe into war gave added emphasis to the need for an arrangement permitting continued concentration of the American battleship fleet in the Atlantic.¹⁴ By November 1909, the Navy General Board had concluded that, as a result of accelerated dreadnought construction programs, Germany had displaced the United States as the world's second naval power. And although undecided as to whether Germany or Japan was the most probable enemy, the board was unanimous in labeling the former "the most formidable antagonist."¹⁵

While Americans following the cruise once again fixed their attention on Germany, Australians and New Zealanders chose to highlight the apparent similarity of American and regional concerns over defense in the Pacific. The main regional fear remained the presumed expansionist intentions of Japan.¹⁶ The presence of the American battleship fleet in the Pacific, however temporary, led regional powers to conclude that American naval strength would provide some of the protection no longer readily available from the British fleet. Debate over Australian defense, heightened by the fleet visit, also strengthened the desire for an Australian navy that would "more or less inevitably" be useful for protecting Australia from Japanese hostile intentions.¹⁷

After the visits to Australia and New Zealand, those nations settled back into their more familiar and comfortable relationship with Great Britain.¹⁸ Their defense concerns, expressed as a result of the American war scare and the fleet visits, eventually translated into a promise that the mother country would establish an imperial squadron in the Pacific with HMS *New Zealand*, the battle cruiser *New Zealand* donated to imperial defense in 1909, as flagship.

An intangible aspect of the cruise, difficult to assess, is the influence of personal contact—the importance of impressions made by the fleet as it visited various ports. State Department records show that American diplomats were uniformly delighted with the port visits.

The *New York Times* concluded that the "high class of the enlisted personnel" was a factor in "advertising the formidability of the fleet abroad."¹⁹ But more important, as *Outlook* magazine suggested, personal contacts established by the men did "more than years of civil diplomacy . . . to cement international friendships with this country." This was not just the friendship of comrades in arms because fleet

personnel were “representative American citizens” and treated as such by citizens of the cities they visited.²⁰

Their success may be judged by Japanese acclaim. In an article entitled “Banzai to the American Fleet,” Tokyo’s *Asahi Shimbun* reported that the Japanese people felt special friendship for the open-hearted, kind Americans. Their “irreproachable conduct” during the fleet visit had “considerably enhanced” their reputation.²¹ That Japan should also derive some benefit from the visit was suggested in the newspaper *Jiji Shimpō*, which noted that the men of the returned battleship fleet appreciated better than most Americans the “goodwill of the Japanese people toward America.”²²

Citizens both of the countries visited and of America recognized the educational value of the cruise. The American public avidly followed the fleet’s progress, and in newspapers and magazines tens of millions read detailed reports about the nations being visited. New Zealanders appropriately referred to the phenomenon as the advertising of New Zealand. For a nation like the United States, long accustomed to looking inward, long preoccupied with developing the vast resources and capabilities within its borders, the world cruise opened new vistas. No earlier episode in American history had so thoroughly stirred and sustained popular interest in international events or so convincingly identified the United States as a major actor on the world stage.

The cruise occurred at a time of unprecedented naval expansion throughout the world. Suggestions that it provided the impetus



U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* leads the Atlantic Fleet out of Hampton Roads, Virginia, at the start of the Great White Fleet’s cruise around the world, December 1907. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

or quickened the pace of this expansion imply a level of influence on global events not achieved until later decades. During the period examined here one primary consideration drove the naval arms race: the Anglo-German naval confrontation in the North Sea. Of secondary considerations the world cruise was but one, and certainly not the most significant. Regional antagonisms in South America and the Mediterranean generated naval construction programs that predated and were entirely unrelated to the American cruise. Japan’s naval program, a five-year plan incorporated in the 1906 budget, also predated it. Similarly, Australia’s desire to develop an independent navy had first



U.S. Battleship *Minnesota* in a storm while steaming from the Philippines to Yokohama, Japan, in October 1908. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

been officially mooted in 1902. All of these programs, it seems certain, would have gone ahead with or without the cruise.

Nevertheless, the cruise did add further popular appeal to battleships and navies in general. Certainly the arrival of sixteen first-class battleships in a foreign port—a display Rear Admiral Sperry called “our greatest show on earth”—made a strong impression on the local populace and may well have given naval expansion a better name than it already enjoyed.²³ But added popularity contributed to the naval arms race only where the desire for expansion—spurred by technical developments, regional antagonisms, and other factors—already existed.

Although the cruise exerted little long-term influence on international relations and was but a minor factor in the naval arms race, its

effect on the American Navy itself was great. Enforced absence from navy yards had thrown full responsibility for maintenance and repair on ships’ crews. As the cruise progressed they became more efficient and the fleet experienced fewer breakdowns. Confidence and a marked increase in mechanical reliability were the inevitable results.

Rigorous fuel economy measures were initiated after the desperate shortage en route to Rio de Janeiro. Rear Admiral Sperry was immensely proud of the fleet’s achievement in this respect. “Efficiency has increased 25 per cent by economy of coal consumption,” he told the Confederate Club in Richmond one day after the fleet returned, “due to hard work and faithful men below decks.”²⁴ The steaming competition had boosted the military value of the battleships, which gained more efficient engineering crews and increased steaming radii.²⁵

The prolonged period of formation steaming with daily tactical drills added immensely to the skill of commanding and watch-keeping officers. When the fleet left Rio de Janeiro, Sperry was reporting confidently on officers’ station-keeping abilities.²⁶ This reaffirmed the oft-repeated adage that a Sailor belongs on a ship and the ship belongs at sea. As Harry Yarnell wrote, “It is only on the bridge of the ship in fleet that the requisite skill and confidence necessary to perform evolutions successfully can be obtained.”²⁷

The gunnery practice, daily range-finding exercises, annual record target practice at Magdalena Bay, and annual battle exercises at Manila Bay paid off as well. “We made great improvement in the accuracy of our gun-fire,” Rear Admiral Sperry told an appreciative audience at the Lambs Club in New York. “When we left San Francisco we put 23 per cent of our shots through a target one-third the size of a battleship. When we reached home we could make 50 per cent of hits.”²⁸

The highest-scoring ships of the fleet, *Vermont* and *Illinois*, had achieved thirteen hits out of sixteen shots with their main battery guns, attaining an impressive battle practice grade of 81.26 percent.²⁹ This improvement made a considerable difference—doubling gunnery efficiency doubled a nation’s naval power at no additional cost—and it was an important consideration in 1909, when many countries’ naval appropriations were placing heavy burdens on their taxpayers.³⁰

The cruise provided a rare opportunity for the bureaus of the Navy Department to estimate the fleet’s coal and provisions requirements; to call for bids and let contracts for those supplies; and to arrange for their transportation to the locations—at great distances from home ports—where they would be required. The failure of the Bureau of Equipment to allow sufficient lead time for coal deliveries in East Asia and the Pacific Rim was the one major logistic-support problem during the cruise. Rear Admiral Sperry, noting that foreign colliers failed to deliver twenty-five thousand tons of coal while the fleet was in East Asia and the Pacific Rim, wrote, “If we cannot have a suitable commercial marine of our own, then the government should own sufficient colliers.”³¹

The weakness implied in American reliance on foreign-flag colliers was one of the most important technical lessons of the cruise. The strategic implications were inescapable. Had war broken out while the fleet was in distant waters, it would have been immobilized by lack of logistic support. “Undoubtedly,” *Scientific American* concluded, “the greatest need of the Navy to-day is a fleet of large and fairly fast colliers, built expressly for naval purposes.”³² This glaring deficiency was partially addressed in the 1909 naval program, which authorized construction of five naval colliers in addition to the two then under construction. These seven units constituted the entire modern collier force before World

War I. The problem of fuel support was not effectively solved until liquid fuels replaced coal as the fleet’s main source of energy.

Noteworthy improvements in engineering reliability and fuel conservation, with the concomitant increase in steaming radius and the fleet’s now proven ability to maintain itself in a high state of combat readiness for an extended cruise, led to a strategic reassessment by the Navy Department. Before the battleship cruise, it was assumed that the fleet would need to call at the Philippine base for repairs and maintenance before meeting the Japanese fleet in battle. The cruise had demonstrated that the battleship fleet could steam to the Far East and arrive there combat ready. Based on this experience and data collected during the cruise, naval planners cut their estimates of time required to mount naval operations against Japan from 120 days to 90 days. Furthermore, the Navy General Board felt less dependent on a base in the Far East—a change of attitude that conveniently supported the decision to develop America’s main Pacific naval base at Pearl Harbor.³³

“Nothing is more conducive to good administration and efficiency in any branch of public service,” Harry Yarnell wrote, “than a widespread knowledge of its intimate details, and consequent criticism by the press.”³⁴ The great battleship-design debates that attended the progress of the fleet undoubtedly spread knowledge of details about naval administration. But interpretation of the significance of those details remained sharply divided along partisan lines. The Navy Department lost a lot of credibility when its indignant denials of all criticism, regardless of merit, came under sustained public examination. Concerning one initial significant complaint, that American battleships were overdraft, with the tops of their armor belts often submerged when at full load, Admiral of

the Navy George Dewey and Rear Admirals Caspar Goodrich, Charles Sperry, Seaton Schroeder, and Richard Wainwright—the latter three senior officers of the battleship fleet when it was returning to the United States—had officially expressed their concurrence.

As the fleet conducted its return voyage from Manila, Rear Admiral Sperry completed a detailed list in order of priority of alterations and repairs necessary to “maintain cruising and battle efficiency.”³⁵ When carried out, four of the first five jobs significantly reduced ships’ weights and therefore tended to reduce overdraft. Two of the five top-priority jobs—removal of all upper bridges fore and aft, and of all lower aft bridges and emergency cabins on nonflagships—were performed exclusively for weight reduction, and weight reduction was a secondary effect of two other top-priority measures. However belatedly, steps were being taken to alleviate the overdraft problem that Rear Admiral George Converse, President of the Board on Construction, and Chief Constructor Washington L. Capps, Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, insisted did not exist.

But paradoxically, the overwhelming success of the cruise tended to diminish the importance of battleship-design criticism and of the changes that had been wrought. Although debate at home raged, *American Review of Reviews* reported, “It must be acknowledged that the fairest and most conclusive test of a naval system is the actual results produced.”³⁶ Even as Rear Admirals Schroeder’s and Wainwright’s scathing appraisals of the defects in the ships they commanded were on their way to Washington, the London *Spectator* reported that the “prompt arrival” of the American fleet at Auckland “must have convinced all onlookers . . . that the rumors of grave defects . . . were quite unfounded.”³⁷ And at the end of the cruise *Scientific American* disingen-

uously interpreted the successful completion of the cruise as a “sharp rebuke” to critics of the Navy.³⁸

In effect, civilian observers watching the fleet’s virtually incident-free voyage spanning fourteen months and more than 43,000 miles concluded that the ships were sound. This was a valid conclusion. The ships had proven they could keep the sea, had proven the reliability of their engineering plants. The quality of their crews had been demonstrated. But no critic had suggested the ships were incapable of conducting a peacetime cruise. Defendants overlooked the fact that the cruise had only tested fleet units as ships, not as *battleships*. The critics—and the fleet’s admirals—held that what needed improvement was battle qualities. Faulty turret design could not be tested by 100,000 miles of peacetime steaming. That, and improper location of belt armor, could only be tested in actual combat. These, perhaps, were the considerations behind Secretary of the Navy Truman H. Newberry’s remarkably guarded evaluation of the cruise in his annual report for 1908: “Whatever may be said in technical criticism of the Navy, the American people . . . know . . . at least, that the vessels will float; that their officers and men can handle them; and, so far as actual tests in time of peace can show, that the ships and the men are fit in every particular for any duty.”³⁹

Although the cruise of the American battleship fleet presented a colorful international spectacle at a time when the world “was in an extremely belligerent mood,” its impact on global events was minimal.⁴⁰ It touched on many American foreign relations issues of the day, but a tendency then and in subsequent times to attribute diplomatic successes to the cruise generally disregards underlying reasons. The cruise

might be seen more validly as a catalyst for certain developments in American foreign relations.

Similarly, the naval arms race of the first decade of the century grew not out of the cruise but out of rapid industrialization on the part of European continental powers, the appearance of HMS *Dreadnought*, and the failure of the Second Hague Conference in 1907. The battleship cruise was a manifestation, a result, of that arms race, not one of its major causes.

The significance of the battleship fleet cruise, therefore, must be understood in the context of a developing American Navy. It was the first effective test of the New Navy's sea legs, of its ability to respond to defense requirements in the Pacific. And the experience it provided paved the way for a reappraisal of America's Pacific defense capabilities. Unprecedented publicity encouraged critical examination of battleship design and navy organization. Both were found wanting. That examination is an integral, often overlooked, part of the story of the fleet cruise, and perhaps equally important, it illuminates the story of the Navy's often painful process of modernization. The fleet that returned from the world cruise was a fleet that through long and sustained practice had been welded into a single, highly professional unit. The combined effect of cruise and debate was to set the American Navy firmly on the road toward more rational, efficient, and professional development.

Adapted from the preface and the fifteenth chapter of James R. Reckner, Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988), with the kind permission of the author and the United States Naval Institute.



Cartoon by Clifford Berryman, celebrating the completion of the world cruise on George Washington's birthday. Berryman, an editorial cartoonist for the *Washington Post*, created the image of the teddy bear in 1902 in honor of Theodore Roosevelt. *Navy Department Library, Great White Fleet Scrapbook.*



President Theodore Roosevelt speaks to Sailors on board U.S. Battleship *Connecticut* on their return from the historic cruise. *Naval Historical Center, Photographic Collection.*

THE FINAL WORD

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GREAT WHITE FLEET

The fleet completed its 14-month, 43,000-mile voyage on February 22, 1909—George Washington’s birthday—and President Roosevelt was present at Hampton Roads to welcome them home. Speaking from the deck of the fleet flagship *Connecticut*, the President summarized his, and the nation’s, pride in the fleet’s achievement:

Over a year has passed since you steamed out of this harbor, and over the world's rim, and this morning the hearts of all who saw you thrilled with pride as the hulls of the mighty warships lifted above the horizon. . . . [Y]ou have steamed through all the great oceans; you have touched the coast of every continent. Ever your general course has been westward; and now you come back to the port from which you set sail. This is the first battle fleet that has ever circumnavigated the globe. Those who perform the feat again can but follow in your footsteps.⁴¹

Illustration Credits

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Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to the authors who contributed to this work:

Robert J. Cressman of the Naval Historical Center's Ships History Branch; JO2 Mike McKinley, formerly of *All Hands* magazine; and James R. Reckner, of Texas Tech University. Dr. Reckner also reviewed the text and made valuable recommendations to improve accuracy and style. The courtesy of Dr. Stephen J. and Michiko Levine of River Edge, New Jersey, and William Stewart of Seattle, Washington, made it possible to supplement the center's collections with images of photographs, postcards, and artifacts from their private collections.

Rear Admiral Paul E. Tobin Jr., USN (Ret.), the center's former director, and Dr. Edward J. Marolda, the current acting director, gave enthusiastic backing to the enterprise from its inception. Center staff, including Davis Elliot of the Navy Department Library, Edwin Finney and Robert Hanshew of the Photographic Section, J. Allen Knechtmann of the Operational Archives, and Gale Munro and Karin Haubold of the Navy Art Collection provided access to the collections in their care and assisted in various other ways. Sandra Doyle, the center's senior editor,

improved the text's form and content with cheer and efficiency.

E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, Charles E. Brodine Jr., Dennis M. Conrad, and Christine F. Hughes, the staff of the Early History Branch, performed historical research, electronically scanned images, and proofread text. The final design of the book is owing to the talents of Maureen Nugent of the U.S. Government Printing Office.

Finally, without the direction and support of the Honorable Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy, this book would not have been published. Direct assistance was provided by the Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy's office—specifically Jodi Greene, LeeAnn Borman, and Kweilen Kimmelman—who ensured this publication came to fruition during the 100th anniversary of the sailing of the Great White Fleet.

Responsibility for the choice of illustrations, the captions, and the final wording of the text is mine.

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