

# INTRODUCTION

This is a factual account of the first twenty-one years of my life with the emphasis on my four-year “Kid’s Cruise” in the U.S. Navy during World War II. The Navy termed my “hitch” a Minority Enlistment because I had just turned seventeen and needed parental consent in order to enlist. I also had to agree to serve in the regular Navy — as opposed to the reserves — until I was twenty-one. Rumor has it, some salty old bosun tagged such enlistments a “Kid’s Cruise.”

This book, three plus years in the making, is both a labor of love and a test of perseverance and commitment. It began as one thing, then seemed to take on a life of its own and became something else, then — thanks to a very talented and patient editor — was changed into two works in progress. What you are about to read is usually classified as a memoir. (My next book, *The Amohibians Are Coming*, is the first in a three-volume series on amphibious operations in the South Pacific in WW II.)

This book can be divided into three parts: Chapters 1 and 2 provide an eyewitness account of growing up in Montana in the depths of the so-called Great Depression followed by two restless years on the road until I turned seventeen and joined the Navy in October 1942.

Chapters 3-15 depict the full range of maritime adventures and mishaps from boot camp through Naval Armed Guard duty on four merchantmen during the war, starting with my first trip to the Solomons in 1943 — and the ill-fated voyage of Task Unit 32.4.4. All are told from an enlisted man's perspective. In this part, the story of the forgotten men of the U.S. Naval Armed Guard and Merchant Marine who manned the freighters, tankers, and troopships to deliver everything from food, clothing, and medicine to combat troops, fuel, and ammunition to the Pacific battlefronts is chronicled.

I made every effort to convey the reality of shipboard life ranging from long, tedious weeks at sea to endless waiting while riding the “hook” off hot and steamy Pacific islands. From the heart-stopping encounters with the enemy, to storms at sea, to the battle of wills between a tyrannical old master and the gun crew over the use of the liberty boat, to the donnybrooks, tattoo parlors and brothels experienced by bluejackets who “wanted to do it all,” the complete story is told.

In Chapters 16-19, I describe my peacetime Fleet duty on the heavy cruiser, *Fall River*, flagship for Commander Naval Task Group 1.2, for the first full-scale tests of the Atomic bomb at Bikini, Marshall Islands, in 1946. Following her maiden voyage through the Panama Canal to Hawaii, then on to the Marshalls, we undergo weeks of pretest preparation and training. Finally come the “Able” and “Baker” tests, with the assistance of Bikini participants I interviewed.

Contributing writers Jonathan Weisgall, adjunct professor of law, and Dr. Oscar Rosen, Ph.D., former National Commander of the National Association of Atomic Veterans, document the dangers of radiation inherent in nuclear weapons research in Chapter 18 and explain how macho military men and careless and/or subservient scientists ignored common-sense precautions in their headlong pursuit of nuclear superiority.