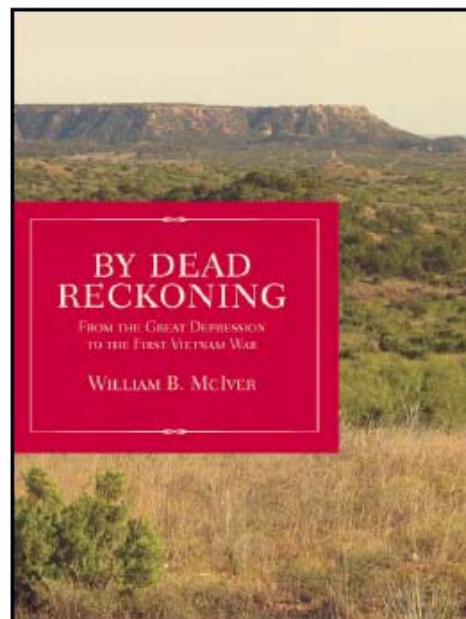
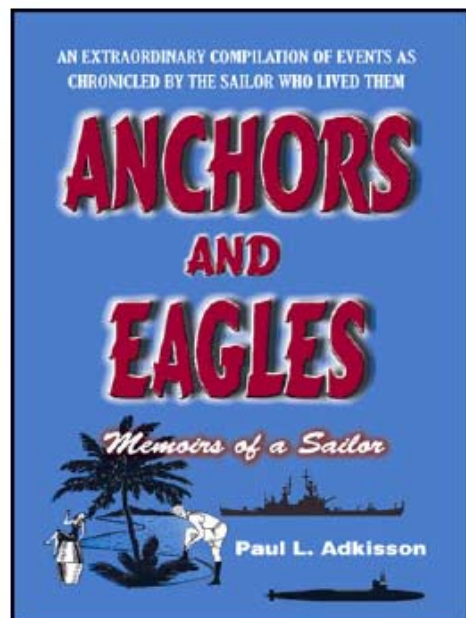
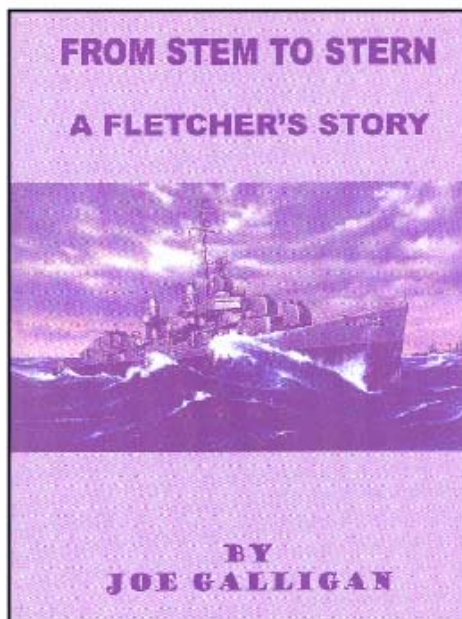
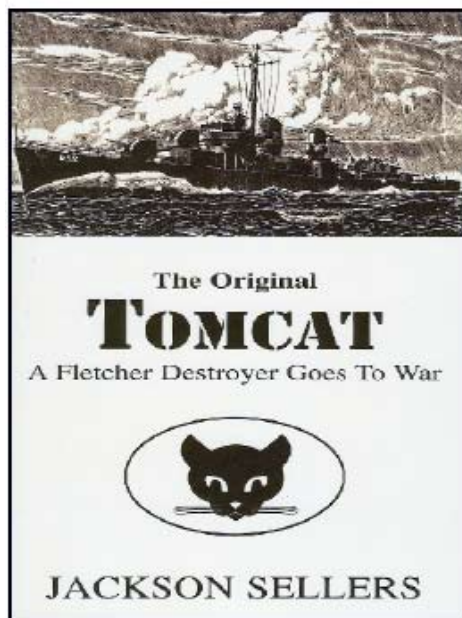


Colahan Books

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Jackson Sellers was disappointed in the early 1990s when he began looking into the *USS Colahan's* history. He was writing his memoirs, mostly for the edification and amusement of his college-age daughter, and the story included his three years in the Navy, specifically his time as a Reserve officer aboard the *Colahan*, the only warship he ever served on. Jackson had plenty of information about the comings and goings of himself and his ship in the peaceful half of the 1950s. His mother had saved all his lengthy Navy letters. But he knew almost nothing about the ship's hot wars – World War II in the early 1940s and the Korean War in the early 1950s. The *Colahan* had won 13 battle stars in those two wars. Nevertheless, there was a dearth of published information specific to the ship, and no books at all. Jackson would gripe: "To win a place in the history books, a warship must either do great damage to the enemy or suffer great damage to herself. The *USS Colahan* did neither. She was like the good soldier, or good sailor in this case, who goes to war, fights, survives and then comes home, with hardly a mention in the hometown news-



paper." Jackson, a professional writer and editor, had a WWII chapter to fill, and virtually nothing to put in it. Thus began several years of communications with far-

flung shipmates who had served a decade or more earlier. This was before the Internet had developed fully and made sailor-to-sailor research easier. Most of his com-



Jackson Sellers



Paul Adkisson



Joe Galligan



Bill McIver

munications were conducted by snail mail and telephones. WWII shipmates, once aware of what Jackson was doing, shared war stories and memorabilia. Ship's logs were expensive, if ordered in bulk, but Jackson purchased *Colahan* logs that related to the most dramatic events, and numerous naval history books, although seldom citing the *Colahan*, provided background information. The WWII chapter grew and grew, until eventually it became a 496-page book in its own right, separate and distinct from Jackson's personal memoirs. *The Original Tomcat* by Jackson Sellers was privately published in four editions, each revised, corrected and expanded, and then its fifth and final edition found a permanent home with Xlibris Corporation, as suggested by 1960s shipmate Bill Martin, now the editor of this newsletter. In the book, Jackson acknowledges the help of WWII shipmates – Bill Greenough, Albert Sikorski, Ted Knudson, Tom Hurrle, George Whitney, Paul Hayward, Harold Minor, Dick Jones, Bob Patch, Henry Gaffin, Murray Ballou, Frank Gardner, Peter Dingman, Jim Exchange and Leslie Anderson – and he mentions many others in telling the story of the *Colahan*'s 1944-45 adventures and misadventures from Kwajalein to Tokyo Bay. Meanwhile, Paul Adkisson was working on his Navy memoirs, which would be touted as “An Extraordinary Compilation of Events as Chronicled by the Sailor Who Lived Them.” Great stories from the Cold War fleshpots of Asia. The 681-page book starts in 1955 when Paul joined the Navy and ends in 1976 with a photograph showing Paul in the splashy dress blues of a veteran master chief. The

Colahan was his first ship, and he matured aboard her, rising chevron by chevron as a petty officer snipe. A full third of his memoirs is devoted to the *Fletcher*-class destroyer and the personalities who inhabited her from 1955 to 1958. *Anchors and Eagles* by Paul L. Adkisson was first published in 1998. A revised second edition with a redesigned cover came out in 2007 under the auspices of Trafford Publishing. Paul names many *Colahan* shipmates, of course, but it wasn't until the second edition that he revealed the true name of Machinist's Mate Merle Packett. In the first edition, Packett was assigned a pseudonym, so that Paul could feel free to make mean commentary on the *Colahan*'s meanest petty officer. Paul tossed out the pseudonym in the second edition and, with a devil-may-care attitude, let the truth hang out. “Packett, the husky first class in charge of the forward engineroom, was disliked by practically everyone subordinate to him...,” he wrote. “Puckett would lumber along, huge gorillalike hands swinging to his sides, palms facing backward instead of inward, always glaring provokingly at anyone in his path. He ruled much the same as the Exec, but with brutality along with fear and authority.” Much the same as the Exec? Yes, the executive officer of that time, Lieutenant Commander Claude DeBuhr, was roundly hated, and Paul despised him in both editions of his book, refusing to even name him. DeBuhr, he wrote, was “unworthy of the respect the uniform and devices he wore received. The man himself deserved no respect whatever. Words cannot adequately describe the contempt held by nearly all of the men on board

Colahan for this poor excuse of a naval officer. His name is not worth the ink it would take to disclose.” Inspired by the books by Jackson and Paul, Joe Galligan took a scholarly approach and produced the most comprehensive *USS Colahan* history that will ever be written. Incredibly, Joe accumulated deck logs and war diaries for every day of the warship's 23-year life, from her commissioning in August 1943 to her final decommissioning in the mid-1960s. Official reports and publications constituted his preferred sources of information. He did not trust sea stories, figuring they were unreliable, so the narrative of his 656-page book mentions few if any shipmates below *Colahan* commanding officers. But if one wants to know the precise latitude and longitude where the *Colahan* was sunk as a target ship in 1966, only Joe's book will provide it. *From Stem to Stern* by Joe Galligan was published in 2003 by 1st Books Library, now Author House. The foreword was written by retired Commander Terry Sutherland, a shipmate of Joe's aboard the *Colahan* in the mid-1950s. “This story of *USS Colahan (DD658)* is much more than just a detailed historical account...,” Terry wrote. “During the ship's mid-life, Joe Galligan served her weapons, stood on the weather deck in the sea spume during underway replenishment, struck below her stores during working parties, shared meals and sea stories in her crew's mess, and stood for captain's inspection in his best uniform. Through his eyes, the story is a testimonial to all seamen who served in destroyers.” Joe, surely the *Colahan*'s most dedicated fan, was the founder of this newsletter.

He designed the format and solicited shipmate subscribers. When Joe died in 2005, Bill Martin took over as editor and publisher the following year. The first story in Bill's first issue, dated March 2006, was Jackson Sellers's appreciation of Joe Galligan. Most recently, just this year, Bill McIver added his memoirs to the *Colahan* bookshelf. Roughly half of the handsome 573-page book is devoted to his family's cotton-picking years in West Texas, during the Great Depression and beyond, but then young Bill escaped into the Navy at the time the Korean War was going on and the Vietnam War was heating up. He served on a couple of warships in the Pacific before joining the *Colahan* as an engineroom snipe. At last, gung-ho Bill was in the "real Navy." *By Dead Reckoning* by William B. McIver was published this year by SeaStack Publishing, Bill's own company. In Bill's book, just as in Paul's, *Machinist's Mate 1/c Merle Packett* raises his ugly head, but *Machinist's Mate 3/c Bill McIver*, over a period of time, manages to establish an uneasy peace with him. A series of *By Dead Reckoning* excerpts ran recently in this newsletter. Fifteen years ago, there were no books at all about the *Colahan*. Now there are four. Jackson is no longer disappointed. Naval historians of the 22nd century, doing research on the old 20th century *Fletcher*-class destroyers, will find the *Colahan* books in the Library of Congress. They may even conclude that this warship wasn't obscure at all. Oh, we shouldn't forget *Fire & Ice* by the late Commander Hank Brantingham, published in 1995 by San Diego's ProMotion Publishing, which is apparently out of business now.

Hank was captain of the *Colahan* from 1954 to 1956. In the slim volume, only two pages are focused on the destroyer he commanded. The skipper, whose WWII career brought him in dramatic contact with both General Douglas MacArthur and LTJG John F. Kennedy, was self-deprecatingly honest in writing about a late-1954 incident that ruined him. He was conning the *Colahan* while getting underway in San Diego. A water barge came along. "Lacking the dash and élan which I might have attained with more experience," Hank wrote, "I rested the bow of the ship against a mooring buoy until the water barge passed." Unfortunately, the buoy banged against the *Colahan* and smashed a

hole in the hull, flooding a powder magazine. The rank of Navy captain was forever denied him.

In general, any published book can be ordered at brick-and-mortar bookstores such as Borders and Barnes & Noble. Also, in general, any book can be ordered from Amazon.com or other Internet retailers. Publisher's websites may or may not be advantageous in terms of price and speed of delivery:

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