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Main content

Article Preview :

Naval illustrator and author (John) Frederick Thomas Jane (Aug. 6, 1865-Mar. 8, 1916) had worked for several years at the end of the nineteenth century on an illustrated book of warships. Its working title was "Ironclads of the World," but it was finally published in 1898 as *All the World's fighting Ships* (Marston, reprinted: David and Charles Reprints, 1969). There were more than a thousand pen-and-ink drawings, as at that time these could be printed more clearly than photographs. Jane devised a notation system that took into account various factors of each ship and assigned it a numerical value to aid comparisons among ships. Warfare, however, provided too many uncontrollable variables to allow such a rating system to work effectively, and so it was not continued. The text was printed in the languages of the world's greatest navies of that period, English, French, Italian, and German. Since English has become the world standard for military, aviation, scientific, and technical communication, all other languages have been dropped.

The reviewer of the original edition for the *London Times* wrote that the book "would be found more attractive by the intelligent landsman desirous of studying the evolution of the modern warship and the broad characteristics of its leading types than by the practical seaman," as the latter would want more technical detail and precision ("Books of the Week," *London Times*, Feb. 10, 1898, p. 7). These qualitative improvements were subsequently made in the series. In addition to continuing his work on ships, Jane went on to establish a similar reference series for aircraft (*Jane's All the World's Airships*, Marston, 1909, reprinted: David and Charles Reprints, 1969; now known as *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, 1995-96 ed., ed. by Paul Jackson [Jane's Information Group, 1996] many one-to-two series' volumes for the world war years have been reprinted as well).

The series quickly evolved into one of the premier military reference titles in existence and expanded in both size and price. (The 1977-78 edition had 829 pages for \$72.50). It is used for intelligence purposes and a ship-recognition tool by all navies. In the early years Jane's had extra value by offering a collection of original contributed papers (somewhat similar to a naval annual), but this section has gone by the wayside as the number of professional journals to publish in has expanded dramatically. In addition, more illustrations and technical data were gathered for the main portion of the book, leaving less space for articles. Now the series has a lengthy introduction surveying the state of the world's navies and potential trouble spots.

This new edition covers more than eight thousand ships from more than 150 nations. The volume is arranged alphabetically by country name. At the beginning of each section is information regarding the naval strength, personnel, organizational structure, and deployments for each nation. For each class of ship one can find data about the speed, builders, displacement, armament, dimensions, former names, main electronic systems, aircraft, construction and modernization programs, operational highlights, and an occasional...

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