



## The Last Detail

*Darryl Ponicsan*

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## **The Last Detail** Darryl Ponicsan

Unlike the other branches of the armed services, the navy draws its police force from the ranks, as temporary duty. The risk is that men on Shore Patrol might bring their humanity to the task. This accounts for the underlying tension in "The Last Detail", which takes place during the height of the Vietnam War. Billy Bad-Ass and Mule Mulhall, two career sailors in transit in Norfolk, awaiting permanent orders, are given a detail: "chaser" duty. Their assignment is to escort and deliver Larry Meadows, an 18-year-old sailor, from Norfolk to Portsmouth, N.H., where he is to serve an eight year sentence in the brig. It's good duty, on the face of it, until the two old salts realize the injustice of the sentence and are oddly affected by the true innocence of their prisoner, even though he is guilty as charged. Failure, or refusal, to carry out their duty is never a question, no matter how much they hate the detail or how wrong it seems, and yet something must be done, some gesture made in order to help their hapless prisoner survive the long ordeal he faces, and to purge their own sense of shame. "The Last Detail" was Darryl Ponicsan's first book and it catapulted him into the front rank of American novelists. It was made into the 1973 film starring Jack Nicholson, and has become a classic of the Golden Age of American cinema. This new edition of "The Last Detail" coincides with the publication of its long-awaited sequel, "Last Flag Flying", also available from The Wright Press.

## **The Last Detail Details**

Date : Published July 28th 2005 by The Wright Press (first published July 1st 1971)

ISBN : 9780976399711

Author : Darryl Ponicsan

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Genre : Fiction, Alcohol, Drinking, War, Military Fiction

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# From Reader Review The Last Detail for online ebook

## Glenn Bruce says

I read this book a very long time ago, after seeing the movie, but thoroughly enjoyed it. This is funny and tragic "guy" story filled with the harsher (as well as lighter) truths of life in America - of longing and unfulfilled dreams, prejudice and ignorance versus observation and ultimately some form of enlightenment. Hilarious at times, sorrowful at others - a short but great read.

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## Noella Allisen says

What a totally enjoyable romp. Light hearted yet poignant too. I loved the relationship between the three sailors. Thanks, Jak, for recommending it or I'd never have picked it up!

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## Paige Newman says

No surprise that this is a moving book. If you've seen the 1973 Hal Ashby film, you already know. But I was still taken off guard about how artfully Ponicsan uses these seemingly inarticulate guys to illustrate the frustration and loss of self that their navy lives have caused.

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## Doug says

I've seen the trailers for 'Last Flag Flying' and didn't realize it was a sequel until I saw the two books in the library. Out of curiosity I picked it up and read it.

It's definitely a picture of a different time and the Navy and people in it at that time. The language is as salty as the time/place - but I'd caution anyone who's easily offended.

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## Realini says

The Last Detail, based on the novel by Darryl Ponicsan  
Nine out of 10

The Last Detail has Jack Nicholson in top form leading the cast.

If it is only for that and the film is memorable and on the list of films to watch, although it strangely does not make some prestigious compilations, like The New York Times' Best 1,000 Movies Ever Made. Jack Nicholson is majestic, imperial in the role of the navy man "Bad Ass" Buddusky, who is assigned the task of taking a convicted man to prison.

He has the same mission as his colleague, “Mule” Mulhall, an African American portrayed with great skill by Otis Young.

Their superior officer explains that Meadows aka the very good Randy Quaid, nominated like Jack Nicholson for an Oscar for his role, has been sentenced to eight years in jail and they are to escort him.

What did he do...kill the old man? Jokes Buddusky when he hears the extraordinary extent of the punishment

In fact, the prisoner has tried to steal forty dollars from the charity box and since that is the principal preoccupation of the wife of his commanding officer, a donation for polio, the judgment was severe. It is evident as we move along that it was more than excessive.

When they plan their itinerary, Bad Ass is sure that they will complete it in record time and then he says that they would still cash their per diem and that of the prisoner and spend time without him. It is part of the attraction of the film to see the initial ruthless, indifferent, emotionless Buddusky and his comrade in arms become ever more sympathetic, compassionate and sorry for Meadows.

Because this young, tall man is as helpless as it is conceivable, he did not even steal the money, he was caught as he was - perhaps. - prepared to do it, had no history of criminal activity...

Except shop lifting, this individual seems to know nothing of life and he is surely unprepared to spend time together with hardened convicts for the next eight years of his life.

Bad Ass tries to put a smile on his face and insists that just as he walks in, two years would be reduced automatically, for good behavior, so there are only six years left already.

Then they abandon the initial plan to put the prisoner away as quickly as possible and then enjoy themselves without him and decide to try to give him as a good a time as possible on the way in.

First, they get a motel room, they get seriously drunk, and Buddusky is confounded by the lack of anger that he sees in the man who has suffered such a blow, for a small misdemeanor.

Meadows is a weak man, resigned to his awful fate and Bad Ass starts kicking the walls and expressing fury on his behalf.

The two navy lifers teach the poor convict some lessons that may help him in prison – if anything could – starting with voicing his opinions, standing up for himself in a diner and then in general.

When a waiter brings Meadows something other than he had ordered, Buddusky is again mesmerized by the lack of reaction and calls the waiter and has the order respected.

Later, in a restaurant car in the train, the prisoner himself insists his eggs are not over easy as he had asked and makes the server bring what he had wanted and then shows off...lesson learned.

The trio visits a worshipping place where they chant what looks like Tibetan mantras, people in there speak about happiness, and then they join a party, where a woman states that Meadows should run away.

It is impossible, they are my best friends retorts the loyal man

Always concerned with the wellbeing of their new friend, Bad Ass and Mule take the naïve companion to a whorehouse in Boston – what we would have to call today a sex workers outfit, probably.

They pay for a young attractive sex worker to be with him and the innocent Meadows comes out thinking the girl likes him, only to be taken down somewhat by the blasé Buddusky.

The latter thinks they should go and see Meadows’ mother before surrendering him to the proper authorities

and they do not find her at home, becoming alerted for a minute, thinking that maybe the prisoner has escaped.

Eventually, he tries that, but let us not reveal what happens and if he succeeds.

The main thing is that this is an admirable, wondrous film that is not as known as it should be.

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### **James Murphy says**

First off, this is an amazing, incredible, and thoroughly entertaining book. The story of two veteran Navy sailors being detailed to act as Shore Patrol and escort a seaman recruit prisoner to the Naval brig in Portsmouth, New Hampshire may not seem very interesting. Yet the power of Darryl Ponicsan's prose reveals a story of camaraderie and friendship as the two veterans take pity on their young charge and, regulations be damned, decide to indulge in various and sundry adventures in the process of getting him to Portsmouth. This is a novel that is definitely worth seeking out.

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### **Donna Bijas says**

2 Career naval soldiers get ashore Patrol duty transporting a young man of 18 to the brig in Massachusetts for an 8 year sentence for stealing \$40. What transpires is at times sad, but mostly hilarious as the 2 men decide to show the young man all the things he needs to do/see for the next 8 years. Between booze and hookers, they become friends and after the drop off in MA, the 2 decide not to go back to base. This is a 1970 novel that was made into a movie with Jack Nicholson and Randy Quaid. I need to find it. 4 stars.

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### **Carol says**

We see into the minds of two career sailors, Billy and Mule, as they transport an 18-year old sailor (Larry) to serve an 8-year sentence in navy prison for stealing \$40. The injustice is in the sentence. Larry is a self-confessed kleptomaniac, but he did not receive adequate representation at his trial, so this was not known by those who sentenced him.

Billy and Mule do not know each other until they are thrown together to complete their assignment: to transport Larry to prison in New Hampshire. They begin to like Larry, and take him under their wing. They throw regulation to the wind and decide to show him a good time in the 5 days they are given to complete the transfer.

The book successfully explores the growing friendship between the three guys and successfully portrays their growing awareness of the injustice which they are unwittingly required to carry out. The conversations are believable and as graphic. The author paints a vivid picture of these hard-living Navy guys....and effectively paints the contrast their naïve charge.

This book is funny, sweet, poignant, and sad. It is short and can be read in one evening. Definitely worth your time.

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## Jay says

I haven't seen the movie, but I was familiar with the plot of this book, and with a sequel recently released, I decided to give this one a try. I found the book met my expectations but it didn't exceed them. I guess I had some high expectations. The journey and the occurrences seemed quite familiar in comparison to recent books, but I can understand this was quite a different book when published. I expected to get totally different characters to lead the detail, and a totally different, needy, unworldly sailor to be the subject of the detail. I expected the trip to include learning, growing empathy, and revisiting personal history. I expected the delivery would be to a place similar to Hell. And I expected the payoff would be in the learning of the sailors. I got all of that. It was an enjoyable trip in the literary sense. My best endorsement would be that I after reading this, I plan on seeing the movie and reading the sequel.

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## Mark says

I've seen the film version of "The Last Detail" numerous times and count it among my favorite movies. But up until now, I had not read the book it was based on.

They both have the same spirit and camaraderie, but there were significant changes when it was translated to film, and a very different ending.

I like them both, however having seen the movie so many times, I still think of that as the definitive version. I imagine if I had read the book back in 1970, I would be complaining about the changes that were made to it for the silver screen. Oh well...

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## Michael says

This is a tale about Sailors; men in the Navy. I was in the Marines, but every part of this tale was familiar to me. You don't need a lot of details about the detail. A detail is often busy work, but a detail can also be important work. In this story two lifers...career servicemen...have to escort another sailor to another base with a jail facility....a brig. Usually, a detail is assigned to single men living in a barracks. As a young corporal, I had to lead a detail into the enlisted base housing to clean a young Marine's brains off the wall in his living room. He was cleaning his weapon and forgot about the round in the chamber.....boom....dead Marine.

I could recount several stories, but not here....not now. I'm not the type who wants to relive the experiences of a time now past. Those days were unique to that war at that time. Most of the lifers were drunk and most of the snuffies were high on an assortment of substances. All I will say about that is....ya just had to be there to understand...stateside and in Southeast Asia....Michael

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## **Skyler says**

AudioBook. Narrator: Bronson Pinchot

When two seasoned sailors get Shore Patrolled to escort a young naive sailor to Prison for petty theft -- a boring temporary duty turns into drunken wisdom, life pondering, and hilarity.

Billy "Baddass" and Mulehall have 5 days to transport, young sailor Meadows to prison. Shortly after the journey begins, the old sailors take a liking to Meadows and decide to show him the "time of his life" before he gets locked up for 8 years, after stealing \$40.00 from the PX.

While thinking this is just going to be another boring detail, the two sailors take a liking to the young sailor and the injustice served to Meadows makes Muller and Billy ponder their own lives surrounding the only thing they have every know for the last 15 years -- the navy.

I really enjoyed this book. It was very Salty and hilarious. There were no holds in the language of this book and the narrator did a great job portraying the characters. Set in during Vietnam, I found the book true to the era and thought it was absolutely hilarious and so politically incorrect but in a good way. You don't have to have a military background to enjoy this story. Not only was it amusing and witty, it also shows the struggles of the three soldiers and their detail and the friendship and bond that was created between the three of them.

3.5 stars -- I am listening to the 2nd book now that was released some 30 years later; The Last Flag Flying. Then off to watch the movie.

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## **Jack says**

Excellent book. When it comes to military antiheroes in literature, U.S. Navy Signalman 1st Class Billy Buddusky (the character played by Jack Nicholson in the film adaptation of the book) rates right up there with U.S. Army Private Robert E. Lee Prewitt, the main character in James Jones' epic \*From Here to Eternity\*. Buddusky is just an amazing guy, and Ponicsan draws him with a lot of color and depth. This is the Navy, of course, so be prepared for all kinds of profanity, crudeness, and attitude problems!

For me, this is definitely one of those "better than the movie" books. Can't figure out exactly why, but the book left a much stronger impression on me than the film. And if you've ever wondered about the significance of the title -- that is, if you've never been able to understand exactly what "the last detail" means -- the book will explain it to you. That's all I'm gonna say, because I don't want to give away any spoilers...

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## **Victoria Delgado says**

Una novela divertida y nostalgica a la vez.

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## **Jakky says**

I enjoyed the read. Throughout the book, I could easily picture this unlikely, perfect trio: Salty, crusty, wizened Bad-Ass Billy; Cool, barely-contained, tightly-coiled Mule; and heartbreakingly young, untouched, guileless, guilty Larry Meadows. I kept thinking that if this hadn't already been made into a movie, it oughta' be. The dialog is believable - at least, it's as I imagine sailors on shore-leave, temporarily out from under the strict control and command of the US Navy would talk and behave in the racially fraught late 60s. I was entertained and I rooted for the underdog... all three of them.

I didn't enjoy the present tense narration. It's just weird and feels a bit theatrical. Maybe that's the intention. But I would recommend the read and I will definitely seek out the movie, and the sequel, Last Flag Flying.

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