Reflections on Reading

John E. Jackson
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Reflections on Reading,” a regular feature of the Review, serves to promote the reading of important works by sailors of all ranks within the Navy. It normally features books from within the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP). Past articles have also encouraged readers to reach beyond the eighteen books in the formal program, to find other books of significance to maritime professionals. One such book is *Nimitz*, by E. B. Potter. First published in 1976, it is still widely available and read today. It has long been considered the definitive book on the life and career of the late fleet admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN. He commanded all the Pacific Ocean Areas (including that of the Pacific Fleet, as CINCPACFLT) during World War II and later served as Chief of Naval Operations. It is the story of a sailor from Texas who joined the Navy to serve his country, overcoming significant challenges (including a court-martial!) to rise to the highest levels of Navy leadership. While this book provides many details about his conduct of the Pacific War, a recent initiative at the Naval War College has provided historians, and even the casual reader, a remarkable opportunity to read about the day-to-day activity that took place in CINCPACFLT headquarters from the attack on Pearl Harbor to the signing of the Japanese surrender on the deck of *USS Missouri* nearly four years later.

On 24 February 2014, the 129th anniversary of the birth of Fleet Admiral Nimitz (Naval War College class of 1923), the College formally unveiled the digital *Nimitz Graybook*. This effort created a high-definition digital version of the four thousand pages of the day-by-day history of World War II in the Pacific maintained by Fleet Admiral Nimitz’s headquarters, a collection commonly referred to as the “Graybook,” for the color of the covers that originally bound the pages. This historic treasure was hidden from the public for nearly seventy years, first by its classification level, then because it was available only to researchers who could see it in person at the Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington, D.C. It is now available to the public at large, worldwide, on the
Naval War College Historical Collection site at www.usnwc.edu/Graybook. This project is in keeping with the Naval War College's long-term commitment to preserving and sharing the full range of historical resources to the widest possible audience. Seven volumes are arranged chronologically, which allows readers to follow the course of action as it occurred seven decades ago. An eighth volume focuses exclusively on the battle of Midway. Captain Henry Hendrix, the director of the Naval History and Heritage Command, has noted, "I’ve seen the collection, and it is really a national treasure. The documents clearly reveal what Nimitz thought was important, which gives the reader a great deal of insight into how his experiences both operationally and at the Naval War College informed and influenced his prosecution of the war. I am eager to see the collection discussed and demonstrate the continued relevance of leveraging history in the decision making process.”

While the CNO-PRP encourages reading, no one expects you to read every word on all four thousand pages! But once you start reviewing the pages, with handwritten notes and initials in the margins of many pages, you may become enthralled. Thankfully, the Digital Graybook is also searchable by keywords, which enables readers to jump directly to areas of specific interest.

The availability of the Nimitz-related material discussed above is an excellent example of how technology can enrich the reader’s experience. The information available from a hard-copy book can be amplified by simple topic searches using online search engines, and by accessing websites that provide resources such as the Nimitz Graybook.

The CNO-PRP books that have been distributed around the fleet are kernels of information—they have great value in themselves but can also lead a reader to discover much more. The key is to turn the first page, and see where it leads!

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