

2014

Reflections On Reading

John E. Jackson

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Recommended Citation

Jackson, John E. (2014) "Reflections On Reading," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 67 : No. 4 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol67/iss4/19>

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson is the Naval War College's program manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

The concept of identifying books of value that should be read by men and women seeking to improve their professional skills is certainly not a new idea in the U.S. Navy. The Secretary of the Navy issued the service's first reading list in 1828. The tradition carries through to modern times, and in May 2014 the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Jonathan Greenert, announced an update to his Professional Reading Program (PRP)—see the Spring 2014 *Naval War College Review*. Shipments of these books were recently completed to every major ship, squadron, and activity of the Navy. The CNO's list of eighteen titles offers a variety of excellent books from which a reader can choose, but great books can also be found on other military-oriented professional reading lists. These books are great reads in themselves, and many are aligned with the CNO's three warfighting tenets of "Warfighting First," "Operate Forward," and "Be Ready." For example:

- The U.S. Army Chief of Staff's Professional Reading List includes *On China*, by Henry A. Kissinger. Its publisher describes it in this way: "In this sweeping and insightful history, Henry Kissinger turns for the first time at book length to a country he has known intimately for decades and whose modern relations with the West he helped shape. *On China* illuminates the inner workings of Chinese diplomacy during such pivotal events as the initial encounters between China and tight line modern European powers, the formation and breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the Korean War, and Richard Nixon's historic trip to Beijing. With a new final chapter on the emerging superpower's twenty-first-century role in global politics and economics, *On China* provides historical perspective on Chinese foreign affairs from one of the premier statesmen of our time." This book is an excellent resource for considering issues related to the strategic "re-balancing" toward Asia-Pacific directed by the president in 2012. It also aligns effectively with the notion that the Navy must be prepared to "Operate Forward."

- The Air Force Chief of Staff Reading List for 2014 includes *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath. The publisher has written, “In a compelling, story-driven narrative, the Heaths bring together decades of counterintuitive research in psychology, sociology, and other fields to shed new light on how we can effect transformative change. *Switch* shows that successful changes follow a pattern, a pattern you can use to make the changes that matter to you, whether your interest is in changing the world or changing your waistline.” The ideas brought forward in this book will help Navy readers “Be Ready” for the future.
- The Marine Corps Commandant’s Professional Reading List includes the *New York Times* number-one bestseller *Unbroken: A WWII Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*, by Laura Hillenbrand. The publisher notes, “On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a face appeared. It was that of a young lieutenant, the plane’s bombardier, who was struggling to a life raft and pulling himself aboard. So began one of the most extraordinary odysseys of the Second World War. The lieutenant’s name was Louis Zamperini. . . . Ahead of him lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater. Driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor; brutality with rebellion. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will. . . . Telling an unforgettable story of a man’s journey into extremity, *Unbroken* is a testament to the resilience of the human mind, body, and spirit.” Zamperini’s recent death in July 2014 at age ninety-seven marks the loss of one more veteran from the “Greatest Generation,” whose stories help illustrate the concept that military professionals must always be prepared to engage in “Warfighting First.”

According to a recent estimate there are 129,000,000 different books in print, with thousands more being published every day. Readers have plenty to choose from, and the CNO-PRP exists to encourage every sailor to develop a habit of reading books of consequence. The wisdom of the ages can be found in the libraries of the world. We endorse the concept put forward in the Marine Corps reading program, that of “a thirty-year-old body and a five-thousand-year-old mind.”

JOHN E. JACKSON