

2012

Reflections on Reading

John E. Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Jackson, John E. (2012) "Reflections on Reading," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 65 : No. 3 , Article 21.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol65/iss3/21>

This Reflections on Reading is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson is the Naval War College's manager for the CNO's Navy Professional Reading Program.

It's not just *what* you know but *whom* you know. Among the great pleasures of life are the friends and characters you meet along the way. But even the most worldly and traveled individuals are limited in their ability to come to know the humble, the near-great, and the great personalities of their age. They can, however, vicariously meet personalities from today, and from history, through the power of the written word. Hundreds of colorful characters inhabit the books of the CNO's Professional Reading Program. The paragraphs that follow provide a glimpse of some of them.

In October 1918 a German corporal had been temporarily blinded by mustard gas in a British attack near Comines. While he lay in hospital in Pomerania defeat and revolutions swept over Germany. The son of an obscure Austrian customs official, he had nursed youthful dreams of becoming a great artist. Having failed to gain entry to the Academy of Art in Vienna, he had lived in poverty in that capital and later in Munich. Sometimes as a house-painter, often as a casual laborer, he suffered physical privations and bred a harsh though concealed resentment that the world had denied him success. Such were the early fortunes of Adolf Hitler.

To learn more about the factors that shaped the personality of one of the world's most destructive leaders, read *The Gathering Storm*, by Winston Churchill.

To take another example:

At twenty-four, [Porter] Halyburton was one of the younger American POWs in Vietnam. His six-foot frame, short brown hair, and wholesome good looks fit the prototype of the dashing fighter-jock whose love of danger and combat had been immortalized in film and literature. But Halyburton was also introspective and artistic, the product of a small college town that had nurtured his intellectual and creative pursuits. He wrote poems, carved wooden statues, and read widely on history and culture. He was also a family man, having married his college sweetheart. The couple's baby daughter was born four weeks before he left for Vietnam. He was lucky to be alive. On October 17, 1965, his F-4 Phantom jet was shot down forty miles

northeast of Hanoi, killing the pilot in a fiery explosion. He soon learned that the price of survival would be high.

Discover more about the courage and faith that helped this officer survive the hells of North Vietnam prisons by reading *Two Souls Indivisible*, by James S. Hirsch.

Here is another:

Not all Quakers failed to be impressed by the arguments against the peace testimony. . . . One of these renegade Quakers was a forty-two-year-old Philadelphian ship-builder named Joshua Humphreys. . . . Like many professional shipbuilders, Joshua Humphreys had never been to sea, and by his own admission he had never even seen one of the great European battleships. But he had designed, built, or repaired perhaps three hundred merchantmen in the course of his thirty-year career, and he knew far more about marine architecture than the captains who took his creations to sea. . . . Joshua Humphreys proposed, in short, to build exceptionally large, heavily armed, fast-sailing frigates.

Understand more about the architect of America's first navy by reading Ian W. Toll's *Six Frigates*.

Yet another:

When [Commander Ernest E.] Evans arrived at the Seattle-Tacoma shipyard to oversee the fitting out of the brand-new USS *Johnston*, DD-557, he impressed his crew immediately with the substance of his will. At the ship's commissioning ceremony . . . he informed his raptly attentive audience: "This is going to be a fighting ship. I intend to go in harm's way, and anyone who doesn't want to go along had better get off right now." As if to underscore the invitation, he added, "Now that I have a fighting ship, I will never retreat from an enemy force." Something in the tone of his voice told his listeners that he was deadly serious.

Reach across the decades to meet Commander Evans in James D. Hornfischer's *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*.

And finally:

Even after [Ernest] Shackleton became an explorer famous for his incredible stamina, he would speak with pride of how he made it through his difficult initiation to life on the sea and seemed always to carry some sympathy for the suffering apprentice he had been. Years of unhappy apprenticeship had hardened him and, at the same time, made him more compassionate toward those who became ill, miserable, or homesick. He learned lessons that he never forgot: that a good boss could make the burden of work seem lighter, that refusing to use the best tools available unfairly burdened workers, and that one person could change an entire work environment.

Meet Shackleton and his crew by reading Margot Morrell and S. Capparell's *Shackleton's Way*.

Fascist leaders, war heroes, ship designers, destroyer skippers, and arctic explorers are only a handful of the characters you can meet within the pages of the books in the CNO's Professional Reading Program. We invite you to get to know them all and allow them to help you see a larger world.

JOHN E. JACKSON

(with assistance from Commander Dan Dolan, USN)