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REFLECTIONS ON READING

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In October 2006, on the occasion of the 231st anniversary of the U.S. Navy, the service gave itself a birthday present, in the form of the Navy Professional Reading Program (NPRP). This multifaceted program replaced what had commonly been known as the “Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Reading List” and the “Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Reading List.” The CNO did not want a reading *list*, he wanted a reading *program*—the difference being a Navy commitment to making the books readily available in shipboard, squadron, and base libraries, as opposed to simply identifying them for consideration. Ultimately, over sixty-five thousand books were purchased and distributed to nine hundred activities throughout the Navy.

The present CNO, Admiral Gary Roughead, has noted, “Reading, discussing, and understanding the concepts found in these books will improve our ability to think critically and fight smarter. They give us a much greater appreciation of the world and its diverse cultures, a better understanding of our naval heritage, and a clearer sense of what it means to be a sailor. Reading makes us better leaders.”

The identification of books of interest to U.S. Navy mariners can be traced back to the 1820s, when Secretary of the Navy Samuel Southard ordered that every ship be provided with thirty-seven books on subjects ranging from mathematics to philosophy. The complete library for the modern Reading Program consists of sixty books, arranged by subject matter and stratified by the experience levels of readers. The subject-matter categories were selected to match the skills and abilities that sailors must master to serve effectively in the twenty-first-century Navy: critical thinking, joint and combined warfare, regional and cultural awareness, leadership, naval and military heritage, and management and strategic planning.

The NPRP offers suggestions as to books that should be read based upon a sailor's experience level. The titles are divided into five collections, each collection consisting of twelve books. The collections are:

- Junior Enlisted, suggested for seamen recruits through third-class petty officers
- Leading Petty Officer, suggested for second- and first-class petty officers
- Division Leaders, suggested for chief petty officers and officers in the grades of ensign through lieutenant
- Department/Command Leaders, suggested for senior and master chief petty officers and lieutenant commanders and commanders
- Senior Leaders, suggested for command master chiefs, captains, and flag officers.

Every book has value, and sailors are encouraged to read any book that interests them. Reading at a pace of only two books per year will complete a whole collection in six years, at which point sailors should be preparing for promotion and can commence reading the next full collection. Completion of all the books in a given collection is a measurable goal, achievable with reasonable effort. NPRP is a voluntary program, and no one will be penalized for nonparticipation. Sailors who *do* take advantage of the NPRP, however, will benefit from increased knowledge, greater understanding of issues important to Navy leaders, and a general enrichment of their lives as professionals and as citizens. More information on the program can be found at www.navyreading.navy.mil.

The books in the initial NPRP were recommended by a Navy Professional Reading Program Advisory Group; for every title approved by CNO, a half-dozen others were considered. The Advisory Group continually evaluates new books for inclusion in the program. The group's philosophy is to maintain as much stability in the list as possible (in order to enable readers to read systematically a specific series of books), yet to embrace the degree of incremental change necessary to reflect the thinking embodied in new works.

The first revision to the program since its inception, "Navy Reading 2.0," was implemented in October 2008. In it the classic novel about personal relationships in colonial India, *A Passage to India*, by E. M. Forster, was replaced by *The Elephant and the Dragon*, by Robyn Meredith, about the economic and political growth of India and China. *Leadership*, by Rudy Giuliani, a book about political and business leadership, was replaced by *Aircraft Carriers at War*, in which a former Chief of Naval Operations, James Holloway, examines over four decades of Navy leadership in war and peace. *Recognizing Islam*, by Michael Gilsenan, the program's second title on the subject of Islam, was replaced by *Forgotten Continent*, by Michael Reid, focusing on Latin America. *Not a Good Day to Die*, by Sean Naylor, which reports on Operation ANACONDA, was replaced by Marcus Luttrell's *Lone Survivor*, an inspirational book about teamwork and dedication

within a SEAL team in Afghanistan. Finally, a classic novel about seamen in the age of sail, Herman Melville's *White Jacket*, was replaced by Ian Toll's *Six Frigates*, an award-winning book on the founding of the U.S. Navy.

These changes make the NPRP even more relevant, and should further increase participation in a program that helps create twenty-first-century leaders—one book at a time!

JOHN E. JACKSON