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## Reflections on Reading

John E. Jackson

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## REFLECTIONS ON READING

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

**A**s the Navy Professional Reading Program (NPRP) manager, I was recently interviewed for a very informative Web log (or “blog”) known as *Navy Reads*. The blog, written by Bill Doughty, provides excellent book reviews and commentary. It can be found at [www.navyreads.blogspot.com](http://www.navyreads.blogspot.com). Among the questions and answers in the interview are:

*Do you have any anecdotes or stories about how the NPRP has helped individuals? Have senior Navy leaders told you the program is helpful?*

In 2007, a survey was conducted by the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology organization. Seventy-five percent of the senior leaders surveyed said that “the NPRP will make the Navy of tomorrow better than the Navy of today.” Aboard USS *Vella Gulf* (CG 72), the CO established a “Heritage and History Leadership Essay” contest where sailors could win cash awards for writing about books from the NPRP. The skipper of USS *Stockdale* (DDG 106) asked for an NPRP library during the ship’s precommissioning workup, since he felt these books would help shape his crew into the cohesive fighting unit it is destined to become. We happily hand-delivered an NPRP library to the ship in Bath, Maine, before it began sea trials.

*Who is recommending additional titles as the program evolves? Would you accept recommendations from sailors and Navy civilians?*

The program office at the Naval War College receives e-mails and letters nearly every day with book suggestions. Our Advisory Group also exchanges messages about new books, and we get suggestions from faculty members at the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, and the U.S. Naval Academy. Suggestions can be forwarded to us at [navyreading@nwc.navy.mil](mailto:navyreading@nwc.navy.mil).

*What’s on the horizon for the NPRP?*

We are experimenting with e-book readers, such as Kindle, to see if this technology is a good way to get our books in the hands of our readers. We have

purchased Playaway-brand audiobooks for patients in Navy hospitals who cannot read or hold a book but still want to participate in the NPRP. We also continue to provide downloadable e-books and audiobooks from Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). We are hoping to sponsor author book signings with our partners at the Navy Exchanges, and we continue to make our website, [www.navyreading.navy.mil](http://www.navyreading.navy.mil), as interesting and functional as possible.

*You've said you encourage people to renew their fighting spirit through the power of professional reading. Why is reading important for our Navy and our nation?*

Reading is important because it allows people to benefit from the lessons learned by others, going back literally thousands of years. An old sage once said, "You can never live long enough to make all the mistakes yourself." Good books entertain, illustrate, and educate. They open a door to the past, they explain what is happening today, and they project what may happen in the future. You need only to read about the actions of the men and women in Navy blue who went before you to understand that we are all part of an organization much bigger than ourselves and with a tremendous legacy on which we can build. Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "I cannot live without books." Every avid reader feels the same way.

*What brand-new titles would you recommend as good Navy reads?*

*Six Frigates*, by Ian Toll (fairly new, reviewed in the Winter 2008 issue of this journal)—about the founding of the U.S. Navy; *Leave No Man Behind*, by George Galdorisi and Thomas Phillips, about combat search and rescue; *Shattered Sword*, by Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, on the battle of Midway; and *Lincoln and His Admirals*, by Craig Symonds, on President Lincoln's relationship with his naval commanders during the Civil War. We also recommend *Wired for War*, by P. W. Singer (the robotics revolution, reviewed in this issue), and *Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortensen (promoting peace through education).

NPRP books: You can read them in hard-copy—you can read them as e-books—you can listen to them as audiobooks. The Navy Professional Reading Program is accessible to everyone who wants to participate—and as the program's motto says, it will "Accelerate your Mind."

JOHN E. JACKSON