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Reflections on Reading

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson of the Naval War College is the Program Manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

In each article in this series, we have attempted to encourage sailors at all levels to develop a habit of reading books related to their profession as maritime warriors and related to their greater role as informed citizens of our great republic. The CNO's Professional Reading Program identifies over 140 great titles to consider. Reading any one of them will enrich your life.

We also would like to commend to you a “one-stop” menu of books: *The Leader's Bookshelf*, published in 2017 by the U.S. Naval Institute. It can serve as a gateway to over fifty superb volumes that can help make each reader a better leader. On its website (www.usni.org), the publisher describes the book as follows:

Adm. James Stavridis and his co-author, R. Manning Ancell, have surveyed over two hundred active and retired four-star military officers about their reading habits and favorite books, asking each for a list of titles that strongly influenced their leadership skills and provided them with special insights that helped propel them to success in spite of the many demanding challenges they faced. *The Leader's Bookshelf* synthesizes their responses to identify the top fifty that can help virtually anyone become a better leader. Each of the works—novels, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, management publications—are summarized and the key leadership lessons extracted and presented. Whether individuals work their way through the entire list and read each book cover to cover, or read the summaries provided to determine which appeal to them most, *The Leader's Bookshelf* will provide a roadmap to better leadership.

Highlighting the value of reading in both a philosophical and a practical sense, *The Leader's Bookshelf* provides sound advice on how to build an extensive library, lists other books worth reading to improve leadership skills, and analyzes how leaders use what they read to achieve their goals. An efficient way to sample some of literature's greatest works and to determine which ones can help individuals climb the ladder of success, *The Leader's Bookshelf* is for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to lead—whether in family life, professional endeavors, or within society and civic organizations.

This book is a true treasure. I hope it will kindle a thirst for reading, writing, and learning that will be unquenchable. It includes an interview with former Marine Corps general James Mattis (now the Secretary of Defense), in which he discusses his personal library of over six thousand volumes and how they traveled with him from duty station to duty station during his active-duty career (p. 249). He advises as follows:

So as you think through how to put together a personal library, remember that it is an intensely personal adventure. You may be entranced with the ability to hold a book in your hands, scribble in the margins, show the volume to friends who are visiting. Or you may want an entirely electronic library that resides remotely in the Cloud, available in a moment over your smart phone, tablet, or home computer.

Your personal library may be seven books you deeply value or seven thousand, and it may be beautifully organized and alphabetized or simply arranged by the color of the book's cover. What matters is that it is *your* library, invested with your intellectual capital, and serves as a garden of the mind to which you can return again and again.

No matter how busy you may be, finding time to read will pay great dividends.

JOHN E. JACKSON