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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson is the Naval War College's manager for the Chief of Naval Operations' Professional Reading Program. This article was adapted from the October 2012 Navy Administrative (NAVADMIN) message that announced the new program.

Nearly two centuries ago, Samuel Southard, the Secretary of the Navy, ordered that every ship in the fledgling U.S. Navy be provided with a professional library of thirty-seven books on topics including mathematics, history, and philosophy. It was recognized in the earliest days of our Navy that a robust reading program could greatly improve the quality of the force. This is no less true today. In October 2012, in conjunction with the Navy's 237th birthday, the Navy launched the new Chief of Naval Operations' Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP). This program represents the evolution of the Navy Professional Reading Program, which has been in the fleet since 2006. The popular program has been significantly revised to serve today's sailors better and to reflect the changing world and growing challenges faced by modern mariners. The purpose of the new CNO-PRP mirrors that of the earlier program—to facilitate the professional development of all sailors throughout the fleet.

The CNO's Professional Reading Program is a great deal more than a suggested reading list. The books have been carefully selected and will be widely distributed around the fleet to serve as tools to help extend the personal and professional growth of all sailors beyond their day-to-day duties. One key to maintaining the strength of the Navy is continually increasing the knowledge base of the men and women in uniform.

To this end, Navy Reading

- Develops a greater appreciation of the views of others and helps all hands better understand the changing world
- Enhances professionalism and improves critical thinking
- Fosters a deep appreciation for naval and military heritage

- Increases knowledge of joint warfare and strengthens the ability of sailors at all levels to make sound judgments
- Stimulates discussion about the maritime profession and the ever-evolving role of sea power.

The structure of the program has been revised to make the books more accessible to sailors at all levels. Specific changes include movement away from rank-based recommendations to a simplified division of books into two main categories. Eighteen books, categorized as “Essential Reading,” will be distributed during the last quarter of calendar year 2012 in hard-copy format to most ships, squadrons, and stations. Commands with existing reading-program libraries will integrate the new titles into their collections. Most of the additional twenty-four books, categorized as “Recommended Reading,” are available as electronic books (e-books), and many can be downloaded at no cost through the Navy General Library Program site on the Navy Knowledge Online (NKO) portal. The program now focuses on the three tenets outlined in the CNO’s Sailing Directions: (concentrate on) Warfighting First, (prepare to) Operate Forward, and (improve your skills to) Be Ready. The forty-two books in the CNO-PRP have been selected for their relevance to these tenets, and the lessons learned from reading them will help all sailors meet future challenges.

The CNO-PRP has been streamlined to make our Navy’s Reading Program more interactive, affordable, and wherever possible, electronically accessible. To that end, first, CNO-PRP book sets will be distributed directly to commands throughout the Navy in the final months of calendar year 2102. Internal control procedures are expected to be put into place that will strike the appropriate balance between maintaining accountability for the books and making them available on a loan basis to as many sailors as possible. Second, a number of the forty-two CNO-PRP titles will be available for free loan in e-book or digital audio format from the Navy Library e-content link within the NKO portal, at www.nko.navy.mil. Efforts are under way to procure additional titles as publishers make them available in compatible formats. This NKO site also provides authorized users with access to thousands of other free books, magazines, and periodicals. Security restrictions preclude downloading CNO-PRP books and other general reading books via Navy-owned computers, so downloading them to personally owned devices will be required. Finally, for sailors who prefer to purchase their own copies of these books, the Navy Exchange Service Command will stock these books for sale, most at substantial discounts, in its retail stores and through the uniform-sales section of its online sales system, at www.mynavyexchange.com.

Reading, discussing, and understanding the ideas found in the CNO-PRP will not only improve critical thinking skills but help everyone in the Navy to become better sailors, better citizens, and most importantly, better leaders. The CNO expects every sailor to strive to read at least two titles from the CNO-PRP each year. This list is not intended to limit professional reading in any way but merely to provide easy access to a few of the many titles that will benefit the naval service. The American patriot Thomas Jefferson once said, “I cannot live without books.” He clearly understood the benefits gained by studying the words of the great minds of the past and present. The motto of the CNO-PRP is “Read to Be Ready,” and all hands are encouraged to use reading as another way to prepare for service with honor, courage, and commitment.

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