



# **The Rickover Effect: How One Man Made a Difference**

*Theodore Rockwell*

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## **The Rickover Effect: How One Man Made a Difference** Theodore Rockwell

More than anyone else, Adm. Hyman G. Rickover made nuclear power a reality. Building on the scientific breakthroughs of the atomic bomb project, he created the nuclear Navy almost overnight, when nearly everyone else thought it was a pipe dream, and built the world's first commercial atomic power station. He did most of this in a single decade.

Rickover's incredible ability to get things done won his program wide public acclaim and personal honors that included presidential citations, honorary doctoral degrees, and congressional gold medals. Despite all this, Rickover was the subject of bitter controversy and was twice passed over for promotions. In 1953 he was saved from involuntary retirement only through congressional intervention. Nearly forty years later, when he was fired as a four-star admiral, all three living American ex-presidents attended his post-retirement party.

Now, for the first time, one of Rickover's close associates tells what it was like to be with this remarkable man day and night as he accomplished his miracles, and why he was bitterly opposed by so many powerful people. Theodore Rockwell, the admiral's long time technical director, takes the reader behind the "zirconium curtain" that protected the program to give an inside account of those turbulent times. Using on-the-spot anecdotes and little-known documents, he explores Rickover's methods and relationships with others to help us understand his strengths and weaknesses.

The author describes Rickover's successes beginning right after World War II in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. His account includes the first submarine voyage from Pearl Harbor to England to the North Pole, the continuously submerged round-the-world journey of the USS *Triton*, and the buildup of the U.S. nuclear fleet and the civilian nuclear power industry.

This candid, insightful portrait could only have been written by a key player. The Rickover Effect makes an important contribution to the understanding of one of this century's most elusive personalities.

## **The Rickover Effect: How One Man Made a Difference Details**

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# From Reader Review *The Rickover Effect: How One Man Made a Difference* for online ebook

## Eric says

Great inspiring book for engineers & other fields--dry though, and very subject-matter-specific. (subject matter is development of Nuclear Power technology)

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## Cameron says

I mixed feelings about this book. It is generally competently written and interesting but doesn't quite cut it as a biography, history or modern business book. HG Rickover was interesting, brilliant and influential but the story told is limited in perspective and very one sided. Because of Rickover and his tremendous quotes the succeeds almost in spite of itself.

Personally I have found the book's HG Rickover quotes extremely useful, well put lesson that I will be sticking on my wall at work - the man knew what was doing and the industrial world today would do well to follow his lessons.

However, reading between the lines, I can see that there was mean, unfunny, micromanagement streak in him that would have made life hell and require real dedication to him and the goals of his program. These negatives sides are hinted and mentioned in passing but are glossed over in general.

The perspective limited - Theodore Rockwell's experience and some input from close friends from the program. Rockwell is not as interesting as the Admiral, nor does he show any particularly great insights. At times, especially the opening section, he goes on name listing / dropping of doubtlessly talented people of little-to-no public interest. Yes they are technically part of the team, but listing them off mostly does not advance the main story of Rickover's organisational and technical management advances.

I would recommend this book to all plant, development program managers and engineers as a useful text, but caution that you have to shift through the chaff and condense the key quotes and anecdotes in to your own bullet points.

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## Michael Stumborg says

Admiral Hymen Rickover was the father of the nuclear Navy. Admiral Rickover is to technical program management what Einstein is to science, or Tesla to engineering. He is the best. Most of the books about him focus on leadership, but *The Rickover Effect*, written by one of his long-serving engineers, is about his ability to get the job done in a Big Government environment. He built an organization permeated by robust accountability and the ties that bind, in the form of an almost quasi-religious devotion of the entire organization to its leader and to its mission. Admiral Rickover is the perfect case study when it comes to the contrast between "technical" engineering and social engineering presented in *Hillary Clinton's Village*. After he retired from the Navy, Admiral Rickover sought to apply his unique program management skills to the problem of American education – a social engineering project unlike the technical engineering projects

he had always succeeded at so brilliantly. His failure at social engineering was as dismal, as his technical engineering successes were triumphant.

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## **Erica Johnson says**

Make sure you read for high level- don't feel lost in the weeds.

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## **Jared says**

(review is incomplete)

I picked this book off a library shelf on a whim, since I had heard of Rickover as being someone important but knew very little about him. This book is not very well-written nor comprehensive, but it is a relatively quick read for its length, and it gives a vivid if uneven description of what Rickover was like to work for during the years when he had his greatest impact. It is written by a civilian engineer who was one of Rickover's chief assistants at the Navy bureau of ships.

Rickover deserves great credit for advancing the development of nuclear-reactor propulsion for naval ships, particularly submarines. A submarine's most serious vulnerability is its need to surface; submarine technology up til WWII always required the boat to surface daily or nearly daily to run its engines and recharge its batteries. Thus a nuclear powerplant offered a revolutionary improvement in submarine capability by permitting the submarine to operate almost indefinitely without surfacing. Rickover, while not the first person to recognize this opportunity, was the first person with any authority or power to do so, and to recognize that it was technically and budgetarily feasible. He recognized the value to the country (not to mention his career) to develop this weapon, and thus embarked on a nearly decade-long quest to get it done. Starting as only a mid-level officer (a colonel) in 1945, he accomplished this project by sheer force of energy and determination, battling the bureaucracy for the staff and resources he needed, cajoling major corporations like Westinghouse and General Electric to develop prototypes for him, and personally overseeing the engineering with great technical skill. He went on to lead the Navy's nuclear propulsion effort for nearly another forty years. His work, or at least the early part of it, is an inspirational story of successful technical leadership.

interviewing and selecting people

reading assignments for staff

thoroughness and technical quality

commitment to joint civilian control and absolutely rigorous safety procedures

crew quizzes and inspections

story of initial prototyping and launch and sea trials and polar navigations, very compelling

commitment to following rules yet broke them when needed

rickover's involvement in the three mile island inquiry

started to do important things while in his late 40s. encouraging to think about

almost ascetic lifestyle

ferocious temper and abusive style of intimidating his underlings. insistence on seeing carbon copies

book short changes other aspects of the engineering dictated by combat requirements such as speed which may have motivated the liquid-metal-coolant designs

says almost nothing about the russians and the effect of their submarine development on US plans (which lagged the americans overall but later overtook them in some areas such as titanium hull construction)

commitment to safety, yet no mention of what would happen to the reactor of a submarine if it was damaged in combat - or even any mention that the engineers considered this possibility, although it is hard to believe they didn't.

very little discussion of the way the ICBM-equipped submarines affected the global nuclear deterrent balance

A keen advocate of basic science for yet disdainful of letting pure scientists set research priorities

cameo appearances by edward teller and jimmy carter

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### **Jason Bellamy says**

Great book on a subject, nuclear submarine history, there is just not a lot of. Beginning to end it is full of very interesting facts on the history. However, it more a biography of Thomas Rockwell's association with Rickover. The 2nd half reads strictly as Rockwell's experiences. Which is fine just a little misleading. Still a must read.

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### **Gable Roth says**

There were a lot of really good stories in here that really gave me a better idea of the kind of man that Admiral Rickover was. The funny thing is that he is not as mean and rough as I thought he was. He was also a very kind man in many ways. There were times when the stories were more technical in nature and were a little slower but they still provided great information. All in all it was a great read.

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### **David Eden says**

Admiral Rickover and his team pulled off an amazing feat of engineering. They started almost from scratch in 1949 and by 1955 the first nuclear powered submarine was commissioned. The basic reactor design, the pressurized water reactor, also became the worldwide dominant design in the civilian nuclear power

industry. This is an under rated story and deserves to be recognized along with the other great achievements of 20th century science and engineering.

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**James Christensen says**

Story of Admiral Hyman G. Rickover's development of the US Navy's nuclear fleet & his transformation of how industry operates, the "Rickover Effect"

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**Dave Mac says**

If you have anything to do with the Navy Nuclear Program, you need to read this!

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**MIL says**

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**Ushan says**

Admiral Hyman Rickover was the father of the American nuclear Navy. He worked with Westinghouse Electric to build the reactor for the world's first nuclear submarine, USS Nautilus, which was the world's first

pressurized-water reactor. Building a nuclear reactor in the 1950s was difficult enough, but how do you do it in the confined space of a submarine hull, which can lean 45 degrees and experience the shock of depth charges? It was tested in the Idaho desert inside a mock hull surrounded by mock ocean water. The reactor needed zirconium cladding for the fuel elements and hafnium control rods; there was no zirconium or hafnium industry in the United States, so Rickover launched them. There were many engineering problems with the new technology, but the nuclear Navy under Rickover's command overcame them all.

Theodore Rockwell was Rickover's associate for many years. He portrays the admiral as a domineering workaholic micromanager, which was probably the only way someone could get done what Rickover got done. Rickover was famous for interviewing all prospective officers of nuclear ships, including the future President Jimmy Carter. The interviews were designed to put the interviewee into a stressful situation, so Rickover could see how he behaves under stress: panics, gives up, or does the right thing; only the latter were deemed fit to be officers of nuclear ships. Rickover also wanted to reform the American education system, but he failed in this effort probably because schools cannot choose their students like Rickover chose his naval officers.

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### **Tolga Uzuner says**

Allens book appears more objective but its difficult to judge. Both need to be read for a full perspective.

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### **Nick Black says**

<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/ai...>

Rickover was awesome. He invented the high-stress engineering interview, for which we all might be thankful when we cross a bridge. Nothing like a good engineering interview to get the blood flowing:

#### **Hire the Best**

There is little disagreement that successful organizations must have adequate leadership. Yet, the Naval Reactors experience strongly suggests that followers are just as important to organizational effectiveness--a fact that did not escape Rickover. He stated, "The only thing I've done is to hire people smarter than me." In this regard, Rickover went to extreme, and some would say, bizarre ends to ensure that Naval Reactors got only those with the "right stuff" from both the U.S. Naval Academy and civilian universities. The selection process began with a long interview (perhaps several hours), conducted by Rickover's senior staff, in which the candidate was quizzed about his technical knowledge, intellect, and character. A report of the interview was then sent to Rickover. Eventually, the candidate was led into the admiral's office. Generally speaking, Rickover's interviews lasted a few minutes to perhaps one-half hour, and his techniques soon became legendary within the Navy. Some called them cruel, others inane, but most candidates never forgot their few minutes with the admiral. His purpose was to put the candidate under stress. "I've got to shake them up," Rickover told his senior staff. Thus, he often asked questions that were unexpected. For instance, he would ask a midshipman about his marriage plans. After hearing the response, Rickover might ask if the candidate would be willing to postpone his wedding for the sake of Naval Reactors. Or, he might ask why a candidate's class rank was not higher, and why they had not done better. Such a question even prompted a future president (Jimmy Carter) to name his autobiography after a question Rickover had posed to him--"Why Not



The Best?" There usually were no right or wrong answers. What Rickover hoped to discern was a person's motivation, strengths and weaknesses, along with their reactions under fire.

Jimmy relates his Rickover interview: "I had applied for the nuclear submarine program, and Admiral Rickover was interviewing me for the job. It was the first time I met Admiral Rickover, and we sat in a large room by ourselves for more than two hours, and he let me choose any subjects I wished to discuss. Very carefully, I chose those about which I knew most at the time--current events, seamanship, music, literature, naval tactics, electronics, gunnery--and he began to ask me a series of questions of increasing difficulty. In each instance, he soon proved that I knew relatively little about the subject I had chosen. He always looked right into my eyes, and he never smiled. I was saturated with cold sweat. Finally he asked a question and I thought I could redeem myself. He said, "How did you stand in your class at the Naval Academy?" Since I had completed my sophomore year at Georgia Tech before entering Annapolis as a plebe, I had done very well, and I swelled my chest with pride and answered, "Sir, I stood fifty-ninth in a class of 820!" I sat back to wait for the congratulations--which never came. Instead, the question: "Did you do your best?" I started to say, "Yes, sir," but I remembered who this was and recalled several of the many times at the Academy when I could have learned more about our allies, our enemies, weapons, strategy, and so forth. I was just human. I finally gulped and said, "No, sir, I didn't always do my best." He looked at me for a long time, and then turned his chair around to end the interview. He asked one final question, which I have never been able to forget--or to answer. He said, "Why not?" I sat there for a while, shaken, and then slowly left the room."

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## **David Pretola says**

An outstanding description of Admiral Rickover and the effect he had on the Navy and industry. The book chronicles Rickover's career from the point of view of Rockwell. The insight into what Rickover accomplished and his personality are great reading.

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