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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SPORTS & RECREATION

Into the Fire: A Season of Navy Football, Fortitude and Faith

John Owen
iUniverse (November 2008)
Softcover $14.95 (148pp)
978-1-4401-0522-7

During the 2007 US Naval Academy's football season Presbyterian minister John Owen served as the team's chaplain—a position he sometimes found ambiguous and challenging but always memorable and rewarding. His concisely written book *Into the Fire: A Season of Navy Football Fortitude and Faith* records the thirteen inspirational messages he delivered to the team at the pre-game meals that year. Each of his "devotions" is introduced by a page or two of relevant comments concerning the games or the courage of individual players and is followed by a Game Wrap summary of the day's highlights. It's a winning combination of heartwarming emotion and daily inspiration that ripples far beyond the playing fields of the Academy. It's also a must-read for readers interested in learning about the integrity of naval trainees tackling adversity and overwhelming odds both on and off the field.

Owen is adept at structuring a story; this is demonstrated in his post-game summaries as well as his adaptations of Biblical parables used to illustrate his themes. He also knows how to tug at the heartstrings with anecdotes about players overcoming personal problems. He admits to his concerns about keeping his messages clear of Head Coach Paul Johnson's role and not intruding upon the religious convictions of the players. For a man who lacks a clear-cut job description Owen does an excellent job of scoring his points about life and leadership as he describes the trials of Moses "the guy who had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt" and illustrates how there's "a lot we can learn from Roosevelt and Jacob and Jim Lovell" the Commander of Apollo 13. Particularly intriguing are his accounts of the Navy games against arch rivals Army and Air Force. These games allowed Navy to capture its fifth consecutive Commander in Chief's Trophy. Owen's description of Navy's 46-44 triple overtime squeaker over Notre Dame in "the eighty-first meeting between the two schools" also contains a side-splitting story about one coach snuffing out another's candles at the Notre Dame Chapel of the Grotto in an attempt to get an additional game-winning edge.

Owen concludes that the team's weekly foray "into the fire" of its football games has helped forge the academy's graduates "as leaders of Sailors and Marines and as citizens of character and integrity." "Our country" he says "is in good hands." This book proves his point.

M. WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (February 12, 2009)

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