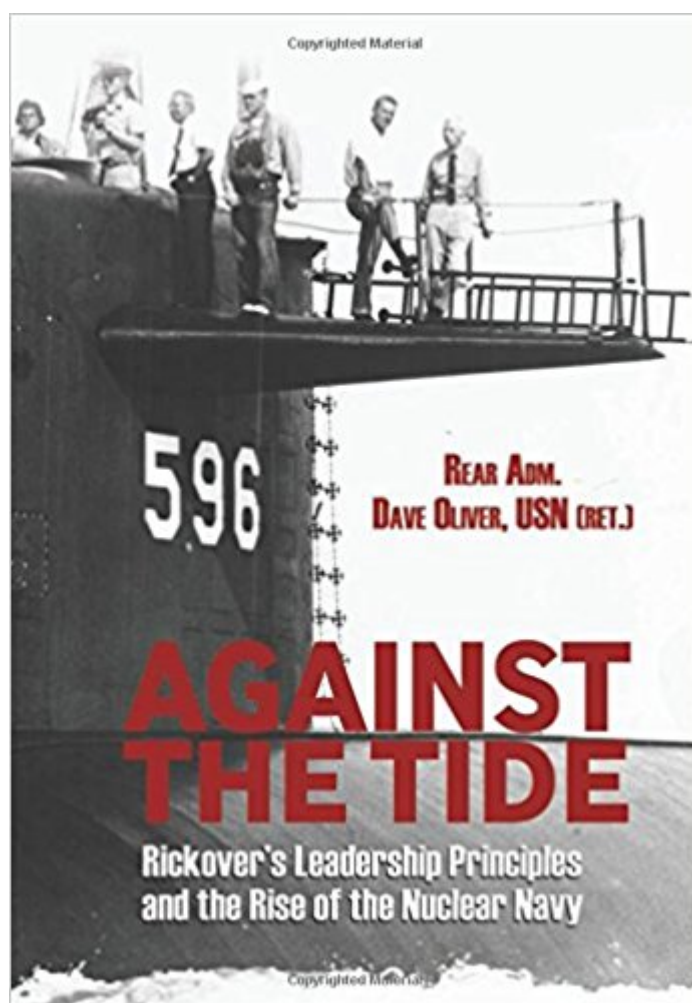


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# Against The Tide: Rickover's Leadership Principles And The Rise Of The Nuclear Navy



## Synopsis

Against the Tide is a leadership book that illustrates how Adm. Hyman Rickover made a unique impact on American and Navy culture. Dave Oliver is the first former nuclear submarine commander who sailed for the venerable admiral to write about Rickover's management techniques. Oliver draws upon a wealth of untold stories to show how one man changed American and Navy culture while altering the course of history. The driving force behind America's nuclear submarine navy, Rickover revolutionized naval warfare while concurrently proving to be a wellspring of innovation that drove American technology in the latter half of the twentieth-century. As a testament to his success, Rickover's single-minded focus on safety protected both American citizens and sailors from nuclear contamination, a record that is in stark contrast to the dozens of nuclear reactor accidents suffered by the Russians. While Rickover has been the subject of a number of biographies, little has been written about his unique management practices that changed the culture of a two-hundred-year-old institution and affected the outcome of the Cold War. Rickover's achievements have been obscured because they were largely conducted in secret and because he possessed a demanding and abrasive personality that alienated many potential supporters. Nevertheless he was an extraordinary manager with significant lessons for all those in decision-making positions. The author had the good fortune to know and to serve under Rickover during much of his thirty-year career in the Navy and is singularly qualified to demonstrate the management and leadership principles behind Rickover's success.

## Customer Reviews

To its credit, this book touches on and invites thought and discussion about more than a few attributes of senior leadership, including personal accountability. Rickover was quick to dismiss subordinates who he felt had failed his program yet the degree to which he would be willing to sacrifice his own position and power is less clear, particularly when even many of his supporters feel the admiral clung to power too long and eventually became a detriment to the program he had created. Another area involves personal and professional ethics. Oliver seems to make the point that when the stakes are high enough, the ends do justify the means and a successful outcome justifies questionable or even illegal actions. This invites a subsequent discussion involving the deepest questions of what it is to be an officer and member of the profession of arms. Naval War College Review Oliver mixes tales of the often-eccentric Rickover with genuine admiration for his leadership abilities, especially in the face of many adversities, such as the fabrication of Nautilus, building and maintaining the nuclear fleet during the

Cold and Vietnam Wars, and his conflicts with high profile officers such as Admiral Elmo Zumwalt. Along the way, Oliver relates stories from his own naval career; examples of how he applied Rickover's managerial principles. In summary, *Against the Tide*, illuminating on many levels, is a reasoned path toward understanding what made the complex Hyman Rickover such a special naval officer. *The Northern Mariner* Oliver uses successive chapters of this book to describe different aspects of Rickover's leadership style. To this end, his own experiences in senior business management after leaving the Navy lend credence to the topics he selects to discuss. At the end of each section he asks the reader various questions which might prompt them to apply Rickover's theories to their own workplace. Thus, Oliver shows how Rickover was quite ruthless with potential COs: if there were doubts about their abilities to shoulder the burden of responsibility they would be sacked. His nuclear captains had to demonstrate that they were aware of the need for continual improvement. He actively encouraged innovation and often preferred eager and thrusting young minds rather than experienced veterans. From a broader perspective, Rickover wanted the men who commanded these nuclear boats not only to accept the great responsibilities they held but also to be aware of the higher purposes they served. *Warship* 2016

Rear Admiral Dave Oliver, USN (Ret.) is a 1963 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who spent thirty-two years in the Navy, served at sea on board both diesel-electric and nuclear submarines, commanded a nuclear submarine, and served as chief of staff of the Seventh Fleet. His final military tour was as principal deputy to the civilian Navy acquisition executive. During the Clinton administration he was Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics and in the Bush administration he was the director of management and budget for the Coalition Forces in Iraq. After leaving the Navy he was the CEO of the EADS, North America Defense Company as well as an executive at Northrop Grumman and Westinghouse. He now lives in Northern Virginia.

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