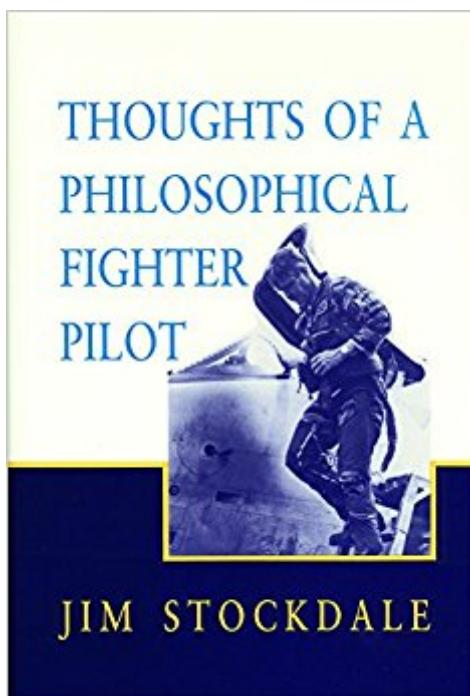


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# Thoughts Of A Philosophical Fighter Pilot (Reprint Ed.)



## **Synopsis**

Thoughts on issues of character, leadership, integrity, personal and public virtue, and ethics, the selections in this volume converge around the central theme of how man can rise with dignity to prevail in the face of adversity; lessons just as valid for the challenges of present-day life as they were for the author's Vietnam experience.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"No fair-minded reader can depart these pages without deep admirations for Stockdale and for the stoic philosophy he propounds...This is a book to be read, pondered, and cherished." "It is difficult to do justice to this important, informative, and well-documented book. It is a monument to scholarship."

Vice Admiral James Stockdale, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution, served in the navy from 1947 to 1979, beginning as a test pilot and instructor at Patuxent River, Maryland, and spending two years as a graduate student at Stanford University. He became a fighter pilot and was shot down on his second combat tour over North Vietnam, becoming a prisoner of war for eight years, four in solitary confinement. The highest-ranking naval officer held during the Vietnam War, he was tortured fifteen times and put in leg irons for two years. His books include *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (1995, Hoover Institution Press) and *In Love and War* (second revised

and updated edition, 1990, U.S. Naval Institute Press), coauthored with his wife, Sybil. In early 1987, a dramatic presentation of *In Love and War* was viewed by more than 45 million viewers on NBC television.

Great

Stockdale mixes philosophy with his hard-earned wisdom as a POW in this incredible, honest inspiring book. Better than 99% of all self-help books. Read it, live it.

Very insightful and an eclectic collage of speeches and musings. Many stories are repeated and his writing jumps around a bit before he gets to his point. An amazing man with even more amazing perspective - you just need your waders.

If you find stories about living with great Truths help you grasp those Truths, you will love, read and reread, and treasure this book. Academic analysis can develop complex implications of simple concepts, but I find the stories of the man who has "been there and done that" far more valuable. This book ranks with the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius in its practical application of Stoical concepts to real living with honor in the face of the tribulations of Job. Adversity comes to us all. *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* offers strength and resilience when (not if) we too are tried in the fire and must confront feelings that threaten to destroy us.

A study in courage, commitment and dignity. Epictetus saved his a.. 2000 years after his death through the writings of his students. Cmdr Stockdale stumbled across his works while at Stanford. Alas, for the untold thousands who did not have such wisdom to help them through the shaming and terrorizing experience of POW life in SEA. I have since learned it is hardly only the Vietnamese who practice such tactics on prisoners. Many in America are treated likewise "cruel and unusual" criteria being ignored. And his principles are highly useful in the competitive and dehumanizing affairs many people face every day who are NOT in a formal prison but are prisoners of the "system".

I give this book five stars for two reasons. First, Stockdale was there at the Gulf of Tonkin and illuminated the truth behind the falsehoods perpetrated by the Johnson administration. This was never taught in any of my history classes even though the information is well known. Looking back on the 1991 Gulf War and the 2002 Iraq war makes it clear that the American people, me included,

never learned the lesson of starting a war without a formal war declaration. And, we continue this failed policy doctrine unto this day. Second, and more importantly, Stockdale's life is a real-world application of Stoic principles and philosophy. He lived it and Stoicism helped him survive during the worst possible circumstances. Those of us who live in comfort should follow his example because we never know when our fragile lives will be interrupted. Those that live in hardship can follow Stockdale's example of a virtuous life.

I do not waste my time reviewing marginal books. I thought long and hard before writing this review. It is presumptuous to comment on the life and thoughts of this man. But it is also compelling to encourage its readership by the broadest possible audience....especially our young people. It is especially relevant today, circa early 2008, as America decides on a President. This is perhaps the most intellectually and emotionally charged book I have read. And yet Admiral Stockdale was a quiet, humble man. As previous reviewers have commented, there is a wealth of material: ethics, history, drama...but I focus on the introspection he demands of America, especially in choosing leaders that send our young men and women into harms was...and, at times, into 7 and-a-half years of constant torture. Do not presume to think you know the substance of this book. I assure you, you will be proven wrong. The book is brutal. Yes, it does describe the torture and underground resistance - the ordeal and triumph American POWs. And that is more than useful for several generations of Americans who came to maturity when we, as a Nation, preferred to ignore a government's duplicity and, in many instances, stupidity in the conduct of war and national affairs. The book is critical of the government. What? A Vice Admiral and holder of the Medal of Honor being critical of the government? Damn right! So pay attention. This is not a criticism based on emotion or a "why didn't you help me" cry. It's a demand...nothing less...that elected officials exhibit character. Character is unambiguous. You want an example...it is simple: It is not what you believe in. It is how you act. On page 30, Stockdale recounts a conversation as I quote: "I think that in an important way, the television news industry is doing the whole country a continuing disservice. We constantly reinforce a bad idea that we helped invent - the idea that the key to being a good citizen, a discerning voter, is to know where all the candidates stand on all the issues. The issues are given center stage and the politician is cast as their suitor. We have made the expression 'so much for philosophy, lets get down to issues' a maxim of conventional wisdom. And at news time every evening, all networks project scenes of harassed men and women being nailed down by stubborn interviewers who insist on quick answers on where their victims stand on gun control, abortion, and so on....."....what's important is not the person's current views on transient issues, but

his character."And this, from Lester Crystal, then the President of NBC News!Character. How does a man or woman of character act? They do not quibble. They do not lie. They do not debate "What 'is' is?"On many levels, Stockdale defines the term.

for every military officer, SF personnel or any serious student. The viewpoint and descriptions of what it takes to walk thru the fire, survive and win against 7/8years of daily torture, oppression, interrogation, isolation. Ultimately it came down to holding out for the guys you're in with so you can look them in the face...not compromising one's principals and the prisons code. A man may scream or do some things he may not hope to, but then there are things a man of principal can hold out and never be forced to do even with the threat of death or worse. There are things one can control - ones code, and interpretation and things one cannot. The true stoics focus on the internal desires vs external wants. My biggest take away was never compromise your principals for any amount of luxury or relief as that is what kills mens souls.

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