

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book reviews/recommendations are designed to complement the education and training that are vital to developing the essential competencies and skills required of the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal (ARJ)* will contain one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on the *Defense ARJ* website.

We encourage *Defense ARJ* readers to submit reviews of books they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The reviews should be 400 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevance to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the Managing Editor, *Defense Acquisition Research Journal*: Norene.Fagan-Blanch@dau.mil.

Featured Book

**Book Reviewed:**

*Building the Trident Network:
A Study of the Enrollment of
People, Knowledge, and Machines*

Author(s):

Maggie Mort

Publisher:

Cambridge, MIT Press

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Hardcover: 217 pages

Reviewed by:

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Review:

With painstaking detail and an eye for the “road not taken,” Maggie Mort explores the history of Britain’s Trident submarine program, one of the more complex defense acquisition efforts undertaken by the UK. Initiated in the waning days of the Cold War, the Trident program breathed new life into the shipbuilding community of Barrow, but short- and long-term decisions made by the shipyard’s parent company, combined with political jockeying by union leadership and the Barrow Alternative Employment Committee (BAEC), resulted in the slow decline of both the shipyard and the surrounding community.

At the heart of Mort’s exploration of the Trident is the concept of “enrollment”: the bureaucratic and ideological work of pulling together labor, management, and machines to create a complex network to build submarines. She examines the decisions of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd (VSEL) between the late 1980s and 1998, which included a transition from diverse manufacturing activities to a focus on the defense sector as a “core business.” As VSEL was taking these steps, the BAEC—a collective of anti-nuclear and community activists who joined forces with union employees of VSEL—was pushing to broaden the work of the shipyard and refocus workers’ energies away from the defense business. Mort adopts the employees’ point of view in exploring why BAEC ultimately lost out in its struggles, despite compelling economic arguments in favor of diversification that were supported by key actors in the regional government.

What the employees feared, and what VSEL had to manage as the Trident program proceeded, was “disenrollment”—the flip side of the enrollment coin. Disenrollment takes the form of labor retrenchment, broken ties with supply chain vendors, and management decisions that have the effect of shaping future business opportunities—actions that appeared, from the standpoint of VSEL and elements of the shipyard tradesmen, to make perfect sense. The power struggles that took place in and around Barrow were not simply “public versus private” or “establishment versus activist” confrontations; Mort’s nuanced analysis of the Trident program shows how allegiances can change; decisions about technology can shape a workforce; and local politics—and the insecurities expressed by a working community—can derail otherwise rational economic development initiatives.

The acquisition professional will find this case study interesting for a number of reasons. The overarching theme of the book—uncertainty—deserves consideration. The Trident program was marked by uncertainty, and that sense of uncertainty colored the interactions of the BAEC, VSEL, and various union and community leaders. As the Department of Defense faces a wave of reductions in the early 2010s, DoD acquisition professionals can take this book as evidence that acquisition decisions are not made in a vacuum; ultimately, just like politics, all programs are local.