

# **SP 20 Fighting Illini Battalion Reading List**



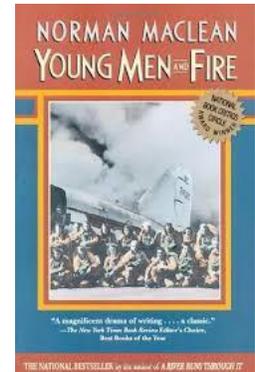
*Purpose: To encourage cadets of the FIB to develop lasting reading habits and to develop our leadership capabilities and attributes together. So, in no particular order:*

### LTC Johnson recommends

#### 1. *Young Men and Fire* by Normal Maclean

*Young Men and Fire* is a non-fiction book written by Norman Maclean. It is an account of Norman Maclean's research of the Mann Gulch fire of 1949 and the 13 men who died there. The fire occurred in Mann Gulch in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness on August 5.

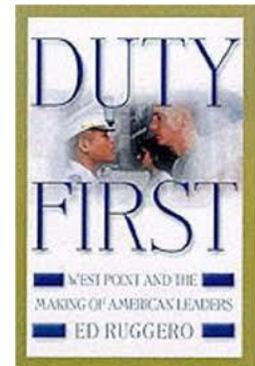
This is one of the most well-written books I have ever read, and it is written in a way that draws you in. This is a story about Smokejumpers in Montana during interwar period. Awesome read, and it explains how diligence and perseverance allows you to get to the truth.



### MAJ Soderlind recommends

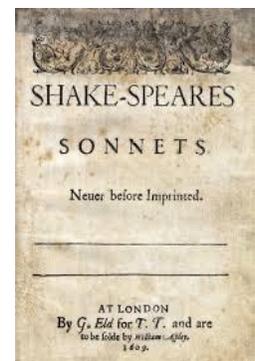
#### 1. *Duty First: West Point and the Making of American Leaders* by Ed Ruggero

I knew at age 12 I wanted to go to the Military Academy, so I read this book over and over again to better understand the mission of USMA and what it took to become an Army Officer. It gives a great overview of Cadet life, but also prepared me for the “why” of various discipline techniques to expect.



#### 2. *Shakespeare's Tragedies & Sonnets*

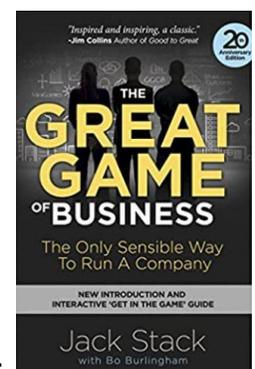
I read almost all of the tragedies (Othello, King Lear, Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth) and feel like reading and dissecting his stories increased my critical thinking and the Sonnets allowed for development of emotional intelligence.



### CPT Drabowicz recommends

#### 1. *The Great Game of Business* by Jack Stack

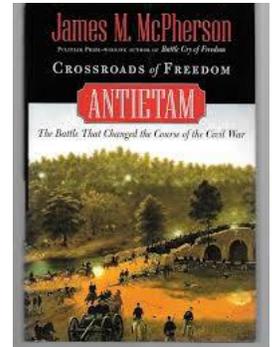
This book lays out a framework of leading organizations through active engagement of all subordinates, where incredible results are generated by your subordinates because you involve them in the purpose & details of your operations. I've personally used these practices when running wholesale ammunition operations out of six ASPs & was able to get all my civilians & Soldiers on board to improve our mission-oriented metrics. It's absolutely a high quality read with some great applicability!



**Mr. Ashworth recommends**

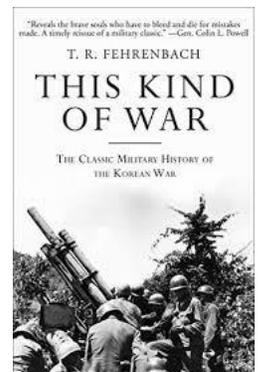
**1. *Crossroads of Freedom: The Battle that Changed the Course of the Civil War* by James McPherson**

Most Civil War readers view Gettysburg and the Surrender of Vicksburg as the turning point of the American Civil War but McPherson paints a masterful account of the Battle of Antietam (fought a year prior) and the consequences of this pivotal battle, as the point where the Confederate States of America lost the war. This book describes how Abraham Lincoln used this tactical battle into a major strategic victory and is a great read for students trying to understand how national military power can achieve major political objectives.



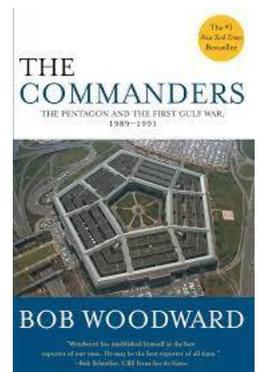
**2. *This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness* by T.R. Fehrenbach**

This is a great book for junior military leaders to read as peace tends to lull the American population into a false sense of security which then leads to a lack of preparedness of our military forces. This unpreparedness is later paid by the blood of our young who are typically the first to combat future threats to the United States. Fehrenbach served as an Army officer during the Korean War and decided to write on how the United States fought the initial battles of that war. His ideas are genuine from the perspective of the Soldiers fighting on the ground in a war that was fought only five years after the end of World War II. How we became so unprepared in such a short amount of time should provide us concern for decisions about our military capabilities in the future.



**3. *The Commanders* by Bob Woodward**

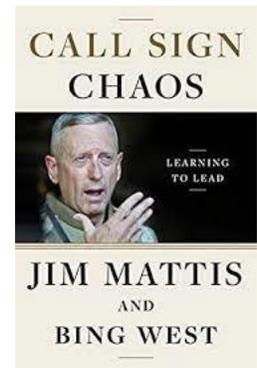
This is written from the perspective of the National Security Council during the First Persian Gulf War. The United States was recovering from the consequences of the Vietnam War and was facing the battle-tested Iraqi Army of Saddam Hussein. The book provides accounts of the council's debates that formed the decisions made in preparing and executing that war. This book provides a junior military leader a great understanding on how American Foreign Policy is created and how the military supports this policy. Today, the First Persian Gulf War is looked upon as an easy coalition victory, but this book provides a perspective that gives the reader an insight that the victory wasn't a sure thing.



## *c/Tim Wallace recommends*

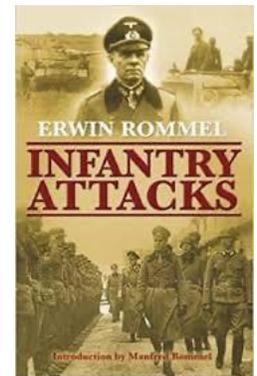
### **1. *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* by Jim Mattis**

Former Secretary of Defense and Commander of US Central Command Jim Mattis walks the reader through lessons he learned about leadership throughout his 30-year career in the Marine Corps. Mattis is an officer that is legendary for his focus on his troops. He was not afraid to rustle some feathers to accomplish the mission and it shows in his book.



### **2. *Infantry Attacks* by Erwin Rommel**

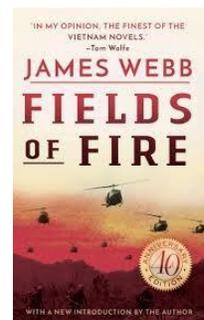
Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox, is mostly known for his legendary victories as a German Field Marshal in the Second World War. His famous book, *Infantry Attacks*, recounts his experiences as a platoon leader and company commander on the Western Front in the First World War. The book is mostly tactically focused, and it is surprising to see how the lessons they learned during WW1 still permeate into the infantry tactics we use today. Rommel will recount and experience and then follow it up with an explanation of all the lessons he learned during that experience. It is a must read for a military officer, infantry or not, preparing to take charge at a company level and below.



## *c/Thomas Jackson recommends*

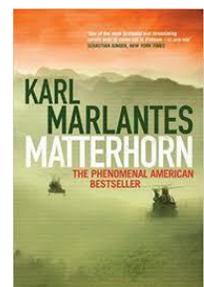
### **1. *Fields of Fire* by James Webb**

This one follows a Marine Lieutenant in Vietnam, as he assesses what it means to be a leader. I especially like this one because it dives into the personalities of his platoon. I feel that this is beneficial for future officers because it drives home the concept that enlisted soldiers have diverse backgrounds and more often than not offer more to a platoon than their leadership realizes. I think the main lessons from this book are rooted in organization and building interpersonal tact. On top of this it's an easy and interesting read.



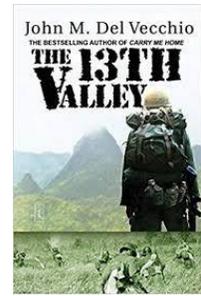
### **2. *Matterhorn* by Karl Marlantes**

In contrast to "Fields of Fire" this book is a slightly harder read but is well known for its applicability to military leaders. Marlantes takes a slightly less aggressive stance on the War in Vietnam. Instead his focus is on what it means to be a leader, and how leadership can frequently get derailed. I believe the value in this story lies in its assessment of what it means to be right or wrong, and when it's the correct time to take a stand.



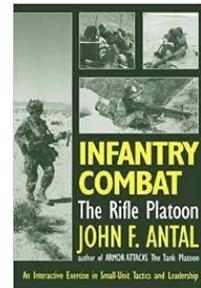
### 3. *The 13th Valley* by John Del Vecchio

This is on the 101st Airborne near the end of the war and is pretty negative but is a pretty solid historical account. The book is super long and kind of windy, so I'd say it's not that great of an option, but it's Army focused.



### 4. *Infantry Combat: The Rifle Platoon* by John F. Antal

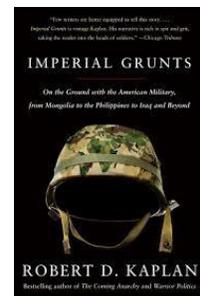
It's a scenario/decision making book that places you in the Middle East as an infantry platoon leader. The book gives you a situation and forces you to make your own decisions, allowing you to test your knowledge. I found it valuable but it's kind of like a game so it's probably not for everyone.



## c/Harry Taylor recommends

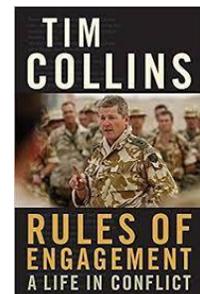
### 1. *Imperial Grunts* by Robert D Kaplan

It's a journalist piece on the range of American deployments across the world from the perspective of the average Joe. Ranges from backing up local forces in SOCOM in Colombia, to deployments in the Middle East and Africa.



### 2. *Rules of Engagement* by Colonel Tim Collins

This is an autobiography of the battalion commander of 1st Battalion the Royal Irish Regiment and particularly his experiences in the invasion of Iraq as a battalion commander. Particular emphasis on the problems with dealing with an insurgency, civilian populace, and defending himself and his unit from false accusations of war crimes.



## c/Jacob Fuss recommends

### 1. *The Jocko Willink Podcast* by Jocko Willink

I've been listening to the Jocko Willink podcast. It's a great podcast and gives many examples of how to develop yourself as a leader both in combat and the civilian world. He is an ex-navy seal and he shares amazing stories and is very inspirational.



## c/Macy Nanda recommends

### 1. *Into Thin Air*, by Jon Krakauer

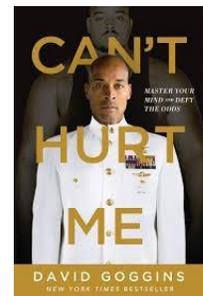
It's not explicitly about the military, but it does a great job dealing with leadership and specifically the ramifications of bad leadership. Jon Krakauer was a journalist tasked with writing an article for a magazine about reaching Everest base camp. He decided, however, that he wanted to climb the entire mountain with the expedition group he was assigned to because it was a childhood dream of his. The expedition team wasn't great at planning and their climb went really badly. I don't know how to explain how this connects with military leadership without giving away certain details, but there had been advisories that warned against climbing that expedition leadership chose to ignore, resulting in an ill-fated climb. Not only did the leadership in this situation not listen to higher authority, but they clearly didn't take into account the abilities of their subordinates seeing as they had a relatively inexperienced journalist with them. Additionally, 8 people died on this expedition, several of which were in leadership positions. This meant that lower level people had to make decisions above their pay grade. This plays into understanding the mission two levels up and chain of command. Anyways these are just a few examples of why I think this book would be good for the reading list. Also, for people that don't have enough time to read a whole book the movie Everest is based on and is very true to the book.



## c/Andreas Ocon recommends

### 1. *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins

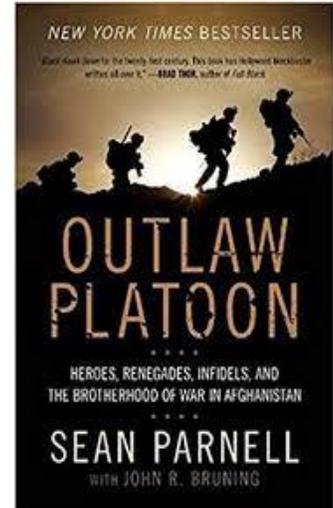
A book that encouraged me to step up and do ROTC and to eventually enlist was the book *Can't Hurt Me* by retired Navy Seal David Goggins. The book details his earlier life and his rise to the role of Navy Seal. From going from 300 pounds to breaking the World Record for most consecutive pull ups, *Can't Hurt Me* is everything a cadet needs to get inspired about fitness and the mentality of a warrior. He does use harsh language in the book, I would advise a caution for those not looking for something like that. There is an audiobook available for those interested.



*c/Steven Irace recommends*

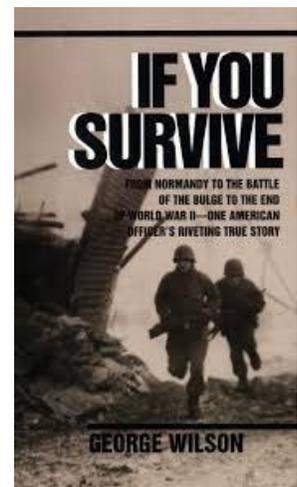
**1. *Outlaw Platoon: Heroes, Renegades, Infidels, and the Brotherhood of War in Afghanistan* by John Bruning and Sean Parnell.**

This book is about 1st Lieutenant Sean Parnell's personal account as a platoon leader in the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan. A true story of ups and downs, Parnell serves as the commander of Outlaw Platoon, a unique group of misfits, as they learn how to survive long patrols in the mountains and valleys of eastern Afghanistan. This novel is extremely relatable to the modern complexities as a junior officer, with Parnell describing his experiences from commissioning through ROTC to becoming a deployed platoon leader with little to no experience and only a few weeks to bond with his new unit. Parnell describes the difficulties of being a modern platoon leader with problems ranging from politics to learning to work with his unit and earn the trust of his NCOs while dealing to mask his own emotions in order to lead his men. I highly recommend this book for people who want to know what life is like as a modern, deployed platoon leader and for people who want to develop their leadership style.



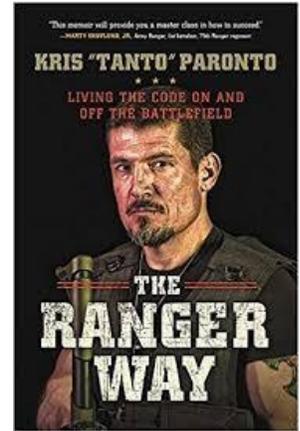
**2. *If You Survive: From Normandy to the Battle of the Bulge to the End of World War II, One American Officer's Riveting True Story* by George Wilson.**

This is a novel based on the true accounts of 1st Lieutenant George Wilson during the Second World War. Of all the men and officers who started out in F Company of the 4th Infantry Division with him, Wilson was the only one who finished. Wilson commissioned through OCS and his story begins when he crosses the English Channel as a replacement officer for the 4th Infantry Division after the landings at D-Day. He surmounts tremendous odds as another platoon leader who learns through baptism by fire against a stubborn and experienced enemy. Through his experiences, Wilson shows us how he motivates his troops in seemingly suicidal missions and how to lead by example in a time where officers did not live very long on the front line. As officers in the unit were wounded or killed in action, Wilson played the role of company commander and later as the BN S2 for his unit before returning as a platoon leader during the penetration of the Siegfried Line and the Nazis' last desperate charge in the Battle of the Bulge. I highly recommend this book for people who are interested in military history and the origin of the role of modern platoon leaders.



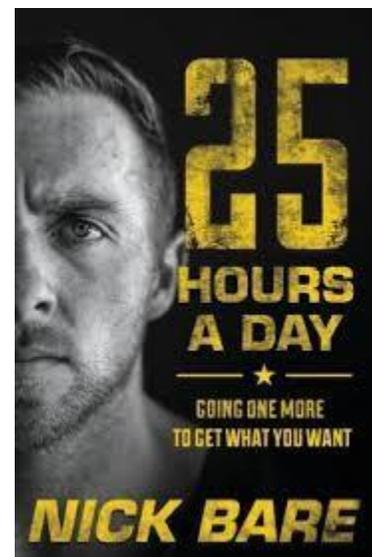
### **3. *The Ranger Way: Living the Code On and Off the Battlefield* by Kris "Tanto" Paronto**

This book is based on the life experiences of Kris "Tanto" Paronto, a former U.S. Army Ranger and CIA security contractor. He is best known for his role during the 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stephens, and the CIA compound in Benghazi. Kris Paronto served four years as an Army Ranger in the 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, followed by four years in the National Guard, reaching the rank of Sergeant before receiving his commission. Following his military career, he joined the CIA as a private security contractor in Libya and Yemen after the Benghazi attack. Kris Paronto attributes his ability to survive the 13-hour attack in Benghazi, Libya, to his experience as an Army Ranger and how he continues to live his life from his experiences in the Rangers. These experiences include overcoming a bad marriage in his early adult years, going through Army basic training and the Ranger Indoctrination Program (RIP), the modern-day Ranger Assessment and Selection Program (RASP), twice each, and eventually attending and passing Ranger School. Kris Paronto preaches in his book that living the way of an Army Ranger, through constant self-improvement through self-discipline and motivation, you will find success and peace in life. I highly recommend this book for people interested in the Army Rangers and/or how to live a life of constant self-improvement.



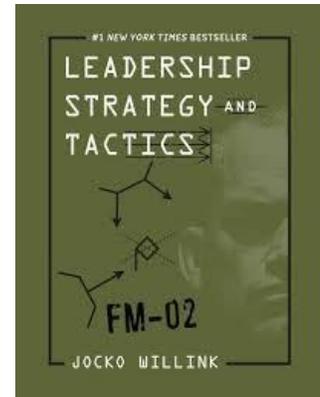
### **4. *25 Hours a Day: Going One More to Get What You Want, and The Bare Performance Podcast* by Nick Bare**

Nick Bare is a former Army infantry officer with the 1st Cavalry Division stationed out of Fort Hood, Texas. 1LT Bare was an airborne, air assault, and ranger school qualified officer, serving as a platoon leader for his unit stationed overseas in Korea for most of his career. He is an ROTC commissioned officer from a small Western Pennsylvania college and during his time in ROTC, founded Bare Performance Nutrition, a fitness supplements company that he grew while serving active duty and overseas. Nick Bare served from 2013 to 2017, eventually leaving the Army to pursue entrepreneurship full-time and now owning a multimillion-dollar company and competes in a variety of athletic competitions. In his book and podcasts, Nick Bare talks about his experiences in the army, entrepreneurship, leadership strategies, and self-discipline in order to push yourself further. I highly recommend this book for people who are looking to pursue a career after the Army, people wanting to explore entrepreneurship, and/or people interested in improving their leadership and self-discipline skills



## 5. ***Leadership Strategy and Tactics: Field Manual*, and *Jocko Podcast* by Jocko Willink**

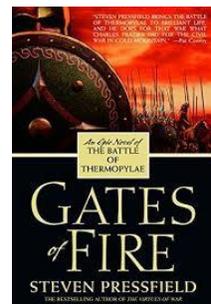
John Gretton "Jocko" Willink is a retired officer from the United States Navy, serving amongst the Navy SEAL teams during the Iraq War, specifically the Battle of Ramadi, and the War in Afghanistan. He would hold the command of SEAL Team 3 which included Marc Alan Lee, Michael Monsoor, Johnny Kim, Kevin Lacz, and Chris Kyle. After serving as a Navy SEAL instructor, he retired a Lieutenant Commander (O-4) with a Silver Star and Bronze Star with Combat V. Jocko Willink now owns his own gym in San Diego where he practices Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu as a black belt, manages Echelon Front, a management consulting firm, and owns his own nutrition supplement company. In his many books and podcasts, he teaches various leadership strategies and self-discipline tactics based on his 20 years of experience through being enlisted in the Navy and eventually commissioning through OCS. I recommend his books and podcast for people who plan on making a career out of the military and for people looking to develop their self-discipline.



### **c/Cullen O'Connor recommends**

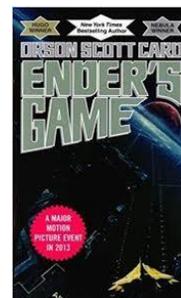
#### 1. ***Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* by Steven Pressfield.**

This is an action-packed historical fiction that paints a story of how 300 select Spartans were able to stand up against a force of 2 million invading Persians and Persian allies. It tells the story of Spartan life and explains the Spartan mindset that forged children into professional warriors. The movie *300* only scrapes the surface of who they really were - the book is a must-read.



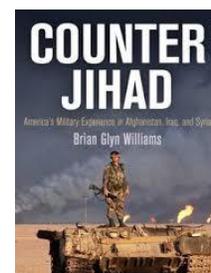
#### 2. ***Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card.**

*Ender's game* is a science-fiction novel set in the future, and it tells the story of how a genius child prodigy, Ender Wiggins, was able to overcome insurmountable odds against an alien force. If you're into sci-fi and want to switch it up a bit, this one's for you. It has a lot of great leadership tips, and it gives you a lot of great ideas on how to command. Ender tells us that power through excellence is always more effective than power through manipulation.



#### 3. ***Counter Jihad: America's Military Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria* by Brian Glyn Williams**

If you're into military history, but you're behind in events that have happened during our lifetime, this book will catch you up to speed. The book explains exactly how and why 9/11, the Invasion of Iraq, and the rise of Islamic State happened. It doesn't go too far into specific details

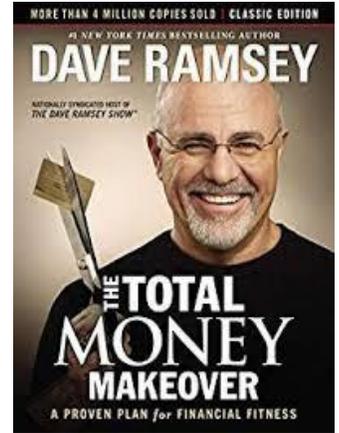


and it does a really nice job explaining the big picture.

### **c/Nathan Ruxlow recommends**

#### **1. *The Total Money Makeover* by Dave Ramsey**

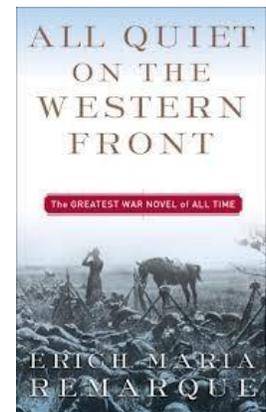
This is a great introduction in how to manage and plan finances, especially when you may be coming out of college with some debt built up. It presents strategies to pay off that debt, avoiding making unwise purchases, building a budget, and how to build wealth for your future retirement. Once commissioning as an officer in the United States Army, you are going to start making some real money - real money that, if not budgeted well, will seem to disappear month in and month out without much to show for it. This book offers a beginner's guide to controlling that flow of money. The skills learned are simple enough to also assist subordinates who may be struggling with bills of their own. With a bit of financial knowledge from books like this, you could be that leader that helps guide them in the right direction to become financially stable - but to talk the talk, you also have to walk the walk and be working on your financial stability as well! If this book interests you, there is also a daily podcast called The Dave Ramsey Show that features call-ins from real people asking real questions about finances that are answered by experts in the subject.



### **c/Sean Palmer recommends**

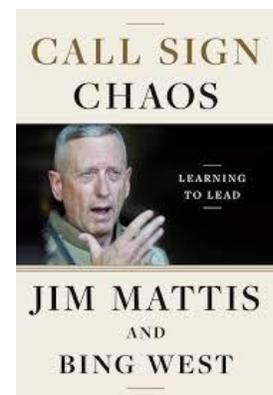
#### **1. *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque**

Dealing with World War 1, this novel is a striking and powerful reminder of the realities of war. It centers around Paul Bäumer, a German soldier, and his platoon. The constants of death and needless destruction are balanced out with the comradery of the soldiers. Really, it is a startling critique of the First World War and all of the deaths that followed because of it. If you plan on being an Army officer, you must remember that you will always be a soldier first. This book does exactly that.



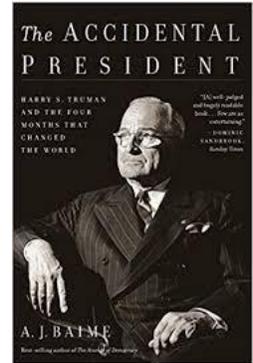
#### **2. *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* by General Jim Mattis**

General Jim Mattis is a revered figure in the military today and is already considered a legendary general. This book is a detailed account of his life in the Marine Corps. General Mattis talks about his successes, and how he got to reach those successes, but he also talks about his failures, and how he learned from them to be better. For me, what was most striking was how intelligent and understanding Mattis was, he was always quick to praise those he deserved it and shift credit away from himself and onto his subordinates. Mattis is also kind enough to put an EXTENSIVE personal reading list in this book, he makes it clear that books were key to his own success. It would behoove ALL of the FIB to read this book.



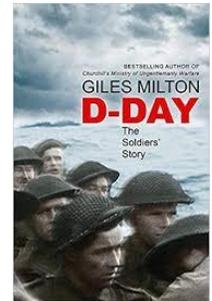
### 3. ***The Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and the Four Months that Changed the World* by A. J. Baime**

At one of the most pivotal times in American history, after President Franklin D. Roosevelt died only a few months after starting his fourth term, VP Truman had to take the responsibilities of being president in the most brutal war in the history of the world. Truman was not FDR's original Vice President; it was his first term in the role. As such, the responsibilities were even more intense. This book follows the first four months of Truman's term, covering V-E Day, to the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan, resulting in V-J Day. Understanding political history and the decisions made by the president which the military carried out is necessary to developing a more refined world view of today.



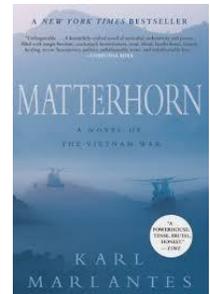
### 4. ***D-Day: The Soldier's Story* by Giles Milton**

As the title suggests, this is about the soldier of D-Day. Not the generals planning it, or the politicians watching over it. The soldiers are the focus. The greatest amphibious assault in history took place, yet there is a fundamental lack of understanding of what actually happened on June 6<sup>th</sup>, this book seems to right that wrong. Milton humanizes the soldiers, turning numbers into real people. Read the book.



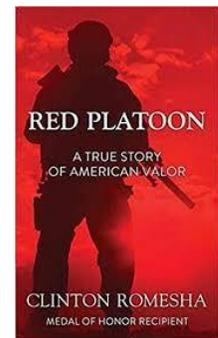
### 5. ***Matterhorn* by Karl Marlantes**

Matterhorn follows Marine Lieutenant Waino Mellas and his company in Vietnam. The novel centers around Matterhorn, a mountain surrounded by the dense Vietnamese jungle. As a young LT, Mellas must deal with leading his troops to victory while also dealing with the many problems associated with Vietnam, from enemy troops, to wildlife, to weather, to domestic issues, such as racism. This book is a powerful and engaging read that is sure to teach a few lessons.



### 6. ***Red Platoon* by Clinton Romesha**

Clinton Romesha is a Medal of Honor recipient. This is not just his story, it is his platoon's story and the Battle of COP Keating. That is all I need to say about this book. Read it.



## 7. *Medal of Honor* (Netflix Series)

Lastly, Netflix has a series called *Medal of Honor*, which documents 8 MOH recipients and their stories. They are impactful, they are powerful, and they are respectful. If you have the time, watch some of the stories.



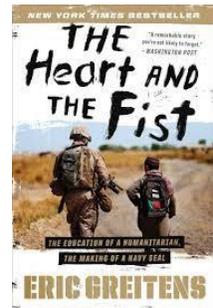
## c/Roy Kim recommends

### 1. *Jocko Podcast* by Jocko Willink

Retired Navy Seal Jocko Willink and Echo Charles speak upon a variety of topics ranging with a focus upon leadership in warfare, discipline, and business.

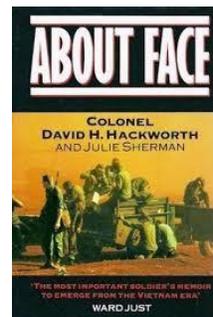
### 2. *The Heart and the Fist* by Eric Greitens

“The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL” is an autobiographical account by Eric Greitens of his early life and time as a Navy SEAL around the world in pursuit of defending America and helping others.



### 3. *About Face* by Colonel David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman

This is the story of Hackworth's years in the United States Army. During his Army career, he served in both Korea and Vietnam and he felt the United States never adequately adapted its training techniques to the jungles of Vietnam. This book goes over how to bring about change in an organization from one path to another.



## c/ Edward Michael Thomas recommends

### 1. *The Twilight Saga* by Stephenie Meyer

Although I have read this saga more than twenty-three maybe forty times, I have to admit that it gets better after every read. Stephenie Meyer really knows how to get me on the edge of my seat wanting more every time. This isn't really military related (like at all), but the adventures of Bella and Edward draw out lessons that will last a lifetime! Grab a blanket, sit in front of a crackling fire on a rainy Sunday afternoon, and take off those Birkenstocks before the saga blows them right off!! You're in for one hell of a ride!

