Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- No Bended Knee Discussion Guide -

This guide is intended to help the readers synthesize the purpose, perspective, wisdom – “goodness” – of the book No Bended Knee with their own perspectives on warfighting, and come out of this session or sessions of small group PME with a better sense of history, identity, and purpose.

**Prep Work:** Be prepared to discuss the following selected reading from the book:

- Chapter 5, Sour Success
- Chapter 9, Abandoned Mission
- Chapter 13, A Way You’ll Never Be

**Discussion Questions:** All answers/ responses during discussion should be embraced as relevant, and open for further discussion.

1. In the book, what was the significance of ensuring that the landing force and all of its equipment was ready for battle on Guadalcanal? Have you had any experience working with a unit that was not properly prepared for battle?

Key Take-Away: Preparation in your Marines’ training and having the proper equipment to fight a battle will ensure that your unit is successful in any situation that it may encounter. Twining wrote, “Admiral Turner was shocked at the poor condition of the boats and the performance of their crews. His immediate and forceful steps to correct these deficiencies resulted in our D-day personnel landings on Guadalcanal being the smoothest and best executed of any such operations I have ever participated in before or since, war or peace” (p. 42-43).

2. Did Admiral Fletcher feel that his unit was ready for any task? How important is it to understand your unit’s capabilities and would you put your unit at risk if tasked with executing a mission that was not within your unit’s capability?

Key Take-Away: There is nothing more important than knowing your Marines and what they are capable of. Marines will always accept any challenge and they will strive to accomplish the mission. Twining wrote, “Fletcher insisted on regarding the operation as an amphibious raid rather than the seizure of a permanent foothold. He doubted that it could succeed in any event and would not agree to expose his forces for more than forty-eight hours” (p. 45).

3. How devastating was the attack on Transport Group Xray? How do you recover your unit’s morale after a devastating engagement?

Key Take-Away: You must accept that there will be uncertainty when facing an enemy that wants kill you. Twining wrote, “There were no survivors. This attack proved demoralizing to Transport Group Xray” (p. 57). Marines will look to their leadership for guidance and moral when no one else is there for them. Ensuring that your Marines are in good spirits even in the worst of times will benefit the entire unit.
4. What were some of the defensive tactics employed during the battle of Guadalcanal and what can be learned from using tactics from previous wars?

Key Take-Away: Everyone has heard the phrase history tends to repeat itself. There are times when you must look into the past to see what works best. There are situations that present themselves that look similar to the past. Twining wrote, “The ancient cordon defense affords initial resistance in its strongest form of enemy assault. It consists essentially of a single line of men and weapons able to bring to bear a sudden and overwhelming fire of all infantry weapons on an approaching force at close range” (p.105).

5. How did LtCol. Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller become the legendary leader that he is today? Do you know a Marine in your unit that has done something memorable?

Key Take-Away: Marines are always doing great things, but there are very few Marines that are remembered for special moments. Chesty is remembered for his actions and fighting spirit. Twining wrote, “While Puller was slogging through the mud, a round hit within a few feet of him, but it failed to activate in the soft ground. Had it exploded it would have killed him. ‘Goddamned dud,’ Puller remarked contemptuously. Always the ultimate Marine, he was disgusted with any professional lapse, even on the part of the enemy” (p.109)

6. What was the significance of 1st Battalion 7th Marine during the battle of Guadalcanal? Do you know the history of your unit and the significant roles your unit has had in support of other major operations? How do you ensure that the Marines that you are responsible for know your unit’s history?

Key Take-Away: Marines take pride in being part of a unit with a great legacy. They want to carry on the traditions established by all former Marines from that unit. By understanding your unit’s involvement in combat operations Marines have a better understanding of what they are part of.

7. What do you do when a disease that is making your men sick and unable to perform at their best has affected almost 90% of your unit? Is there something that you can do to prevent this from happening? Have you experienced such an event with your unit?

Key Take-Away: In most cases, battles are going to be fought on foreign soil. Marines will be exposed to diseases and many other things that could affect their health. Twining wrote, “At least 90% of the original force to land on Guadalcanal were suffering from malaria, suppressed but not prevented or cured by the Atabrine administered on a daily basis as a substitute for quinine” (p.147).

8. How do you keep the moral of a unit high when they are living in less than favorable conditions? Should Marines complain of the living conditions when there is nothing that can be done? How much effort should be put in providing your Marines adequate living conditions?

Key Take-Away: Fighting will not always be a battle that needs to be won. Your Marines who have spent days fighting in the trenches will want to spend some time recovering. They will want to spend that time in as much comfort as possible. Twining wrote, “The priorities of war had to be served – stocks of aviation gasoline (avgas), ammunition, defensive materials, medicine, and supplies took precedence in ships or planes over such things as tents, cots, and other organizational property, which were limited to occasional driblets” (p.148).

9. Are there similarities in the moral and mental deterioration that Marines experienced in Guadalcanal compared to the Marines of today?
Key Take-Away: It is no surprise that when you are exposed to the rigorous experience of war for long periods of time it changes your moral and mental state. Some Marines, unfortunately, never properly recover from the mental trauma of war. You must recognize when your Marines are in trouble and intervene when possible.

10. What has been the most significant event in Twining’s memoir that you will remember? Are there any correlations between this book and others that you have read?

Key Take-Away: History is important to understanding the past. By remembering a significant event and finding a connection with other readings or books will increase the likelihood that this memoir could provide insightful information later down the road.

_No Bended Knee_ Discussion Key Take-Aways

1. Understanding your unit’s capabilities and proper training will ensure your unit’s success.
2. It is critical to keep your unit’s morale and mental state high.
3. This memoir provides you with historical events that can be tied to current events.

To the Discussion Leader:

Encourage the Marine to read, from this book and other books. Encourage them to think and challenge and debate, and arrive at a common understanding. Encourage them to consider the ideas of others (authors and peers) and to push themselves intellectually.

This guide does NOT support a lecture with mile-deep detail on every possible issue and scenario in the book _No Bended Knee_.

No Bended Knee, by General Merrill B. Twining

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