Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why *Attacks*? -

1. **Why this book is on the CMC’s Reading List?** There are few foreign commanders more familiar to American readers than Erwin Rommel. English language biographies of him are numerous, and he has been immortalized in various movies by various actors and works of historical fiction. Rommel himself was also a writer and his book *Infanterie Greift An!*, or *Infantry Attacks!* emerged as a classic work from the inter-war period. The volume was re-printed in 1979 simply as *Attacks*, and that is the version that has been included on the Commandant of the Marine Corps’ reading list.

2. **Why is this book important to you?** Germany produced a number of major literary works after 1918. The one most familiar to American students is Erich Maria Remarque’s anti-war masterpiece *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Less well known in English, but much more popular in inter-war Germany is the powerful work by Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, in which Jünger portrays war as an ennobling experience. Rommel’s work, while just as celebratory of German soldiers and youth as Jünger’s, is very different from *Storm of Steel*. While Jünger spends the entirety of *Storm of Steel* recounting his experience as an officer on the western front and frankly detailing how enjoyable combat in World War I was, Rommel’s approach is coolly analytical. There are lessons to be learned from each vignette in the book. It is precisely that analytical approach that makes *Attacks* valuable for the company grade officer and NCO today.

   While a great many German officers spent their service in World War I on only one front, Rommel served with distinction on three fronts. His introduction to combat came in the mobile campaign in France in 1914. His career then took him into the Württemberg Mountain Battalion, and to combat in the Vosges Mountains in 1916. Later that year Rommel saw combat in Romania, in the Transylvanian Alps, a tour that lasted into 1917. Finally, Rommel and his unit went to the Italian front, where both played a critical part in the Austro-German victory at Caporetto. Rommel fought in a variety of environments, theaters, terrain, and against a wide variety of enemies, each with their own challenges. The examples of leadership at the tactical level discussed in the book provide a rich field of study for the junior officers and NCOs alike.

3. **Things to think about.** The vignettes presented by Rommel offer the enterprising officer or senior NCO the opportunity to develop a tactical decision game for his or her subordinates. *Attacks* is a great vehicle to bring Marines together to talk about The Decision, and understanding the great push to aggressively do something in the face of the enemy, and to think. This book should motivate the reader to look at the problem sets given in their jobs – operational or garrison, training or combat – and assume the responsibility to decide and act and win.