Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- “Why Gates of Fire?” -

“The hardship of the exercises is intended less to strengthen the back than to toughen the mind. The Spartans say that any army may win while it still has its legs under it; the real test comes when all strength is fled and the men must produce victory on will alone.”

Gates of Fire is a testament to the bonds of brotherhood that are formed through the hardships and sufferings faced during training and combat. When vastly outnumbered and facing a certain death, the Spartans, which numbered 300 men, were able to stand tall and hold their ground under the relentless attack of the Persian Army. The book entails a story written not from one of the Spartan’s perspective, but from a lowly slave, or “helot”, who was an assistant to one of the Spartan leaders. His tale of the Spartans will captivate Marines and ignite the warrior ethos that are instilled in every Marine during their initial training phases as it exemplifies how all elite warfighters have similar institutional values, ethics, esprit de corps and determination.

When Marines initially enter recruit training or officer candidate school, they must undergo rigorous training that simulates the hardships of battle. Similar to the Spartans training at Lake Daemon, young Marines must first learn to trust in their fellow comrades during their training, and ultimately in combat. Gates of Fire reinforces to young leaders that the bond that is formed through harsh and realistic training contributes not only to the instant obedience to orders, but also to selfless sacrifices for their brothers/sisters in arms regardless of the situation. Additionally, Marines will be able to identify the hardships faced by the Spartans and relate those hardships to their own similar experiences.

There are many points Marines reading Gates of Fire should think about. They should think about how elite fighting forces like Spartans and Marines have some basic fundamentals that must be followed in order to succeed:

There is a code of ethics established and reinforced into new Marines when they commence basic training, similar to the Spartans. This set of ethics guides Marines in their daily lives and in the heat of battle.

Warfighters must rely on additional supporting elements in order to successfully accomplish any mission. During Gates of Fire, the reader will learn that even the greatest of warfighters require a myriad of support, on or off the battlefield.

Marines, like the Spartan king, the Spartan warriors, and the Spartan people, must understand the importance of the relationship between the warfighters and the citizens they represent and defend. They must understand the cause of their sacrifice, the cost and the consequences.