Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- “Why Rifleman Dodd?” -

“...[A]n adventure calling for as much courage and resolution and initiative as any that the regimental history could boast.”

- C. S. Forester, Rifleman Dodd, pg 150.

Reading Rifleman Dodd is an excellent way for our young Marines to begin the journey of self-education. Rifleman Dodd is a short, action-packed novel that is enjoyable to read; the typical Marine can easily see themselves in Rifleman Dodd’s shoes. This book demonstrates the importance of laying the right foundations in training, the challenges inherent in combat, and how to overcome those challenges. Rifleman Dodd provides clear examples on why individual actions matter. The Marine Corps’ success on the battlefield is contingent on the ability and effort of each and every Marine, and executing maneuver warfare doctrine requires broad knowledge of the nature of war. Young Marines must know more about their profession than those from the past because operations are becoming increasingly distributed across the battlefield.

Marines reading this book will gain insights into the nature of war and better understand why preparation in mind and body are required to thrive in a complex combat environment. Rifleman Dodd’s predicament still rings true. He was a private in an expeditionary force, fighting a complex war, involving coalition and partisan forces, using conventional and irregular warfare, fought over varying terrain. For Dodd, nothing went according to plan. Yet having built the right foundations from his training and combat experiences, Dodd continuously adapts to dynamic circumstances and ultimately contributes to British victory by using his initiative and adhering to his values. Dodd also turned out to be a leader and an innovator. Dodd – with esprit, commitment, and courage – personifies the traits every Marine should seek, and this story is an indirect testimony for the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy. Rifleman Dodd reminds each of us we must always prepare for combat, ready to seize opportunities that may present themselves, often in unpredictable ways.

There are many points Marines reading Rifleman Dodd should think about. They should think about whether or not they could measure up to Dodd’s performance and how they might better prepare for combat. They should also think about the values and traits Dodd possessed and how they helped him navigate through the challenges he faced. Other areas for contemplation revolve around the nature and character of the war in which Dodd fought. Is it that different from what Marines experienced in Iraq or Afghanistan? Is there anything we can learn about planning? Finally, Dodd was a member of an expeditionary force supplied mostly from the sea, while the French forces he faced had to live off the land. Think about how the French approach “doomed them” from the start and helped set them up for failure, and think about the inherent advantages of expeditionary forces.