Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why Read This Kind of War? -

"Marine human material was not one whit better that of the human society from which it came. But it had been hammered into form in a different forge, hardened with a different fire. The Marines were the closest thing to legions the nation had. They would follow their colors from the shores of home to the seascoast of Bohemia, and fight well at either place."

- T. R. Fehrenbach

1. Why this book is on the CMC’s Reading List? T. R. Fehrenbach’s long study of the Korean War and lessons contained within this book are as relevant today as when first published in 1963. The book is organized along an anecdotal approach and introduces the reader to individual participants involved at all levels of planning and decision-making in Korea. These people include young non-commissioned officers fighting an unforgiving adversary, to the most senior civilian and military leadership making key political and campaign-related decisions. One of the major themes of the book is a focus on unpreparedness and the factors that contributed to unpreparedness and inability to fight the enemy. This Kind of War provides extensive coverage on small unit actions and centers on ground forces fighting across unforgiving terrain in relentless heat or extreme cold.

2. Why is this book important to you? The theme of unpreparedness is central to the initial stages of the Korean War. Military unpreparedness comes in many forms and This Kind of War provides ample examples. However, valuable lessons can also be learned from studying successful and prepared senior and small-unit leaders and the type of leadership required to reverse military defeat, gain the initiative, and counter and defeat the enemy. For NCO’s, the book offers a chance to consider why tough and realistic training still matters and the consequences of not having that type of training, as well as providing an opportunity to consider the challenges that fighting over rugged terrain pose. For officers, the book offers an opportunity to consider the challenges inherent to expeditionary warfare and limited wars. For all Marines, This Kind of War provides an historical look at many of the points addressed in MCDP 1, Warfighting, to include the ideas of friction, initiative, the human dimension of war, speed, focus and boldness.

3. Things to think about. As you read the book, consider the central tenants of MCDP 1, Warfighting, and how we describe the nature and character of war and how war is depicted in This Kind of War. Think about the decisions leaders at all levels were required to make, or did not make, both before and during combat. Think about what being prepared really means to us as Marines, at both the individual and unit level, in small units or larger units, and across all the elements of the MAGTF. Lessons learned from this conflict are applicable to today's Marines Corps and to both first-term Marines and career Marines and it is your responsibility and duty to consider how to apply these lessons.