Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why Read *Black Hearts* by Jim Frederick? -

“And when the formal chain of command breaks down, the informal command steps up and then you are entering dangerous territory, because nobody has any idea where the informal leaders will take the group.”

- SGT John Diem

*Black Hearts* highlights essential aspects of leadership, effective command and control and mutual trust discussed in MCDP 6, *Command and Control*. It covers the spectrum of effective and ineffective leadership in a casualty-plagued company, the U.S. Army’s 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, conducting hazardous missions in a year-long deployment, and the tragic events that led up to the Mahmudiyah killings near Baghdad, Iraq in March 2006. *Black Hearts* also illustrates the central concepts covered in Chapter 1, MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, “Nature of War.” The human dimension of war, violence and danger, friction, uncertainty and disorder are described through first-hand, detailed accounts of soldiers in the battalion during their deployment to Iraq’s Triangle of Death. The book describes how, faced with an increasingly hostile Iraqi population and resulting ethical dilemmas, soldiers, made critical errors in judgment. The author focuses on the wide range of leadership styles employed from the squad to battalion level while overlaying the harsh realities of war and shows that the result of questionable leadership combined with a lack of respect and mutual trust was a descent into poor discipline, brutality and, ultimately, atrocity.

While recounting the events that led up to the Mahmudiyah killings, the author provides a balanced view of events with different perspectives of the causality and fault from squad rifleman to battalion commander. The central themes of leadership, effective command and control and the nature of war are timeless fundamentals applicable to all ranks and in all services, but especially valuable for career level officers.

Marines should use this book to consider approaches to fostering an effective command climate under harsh, sustained combat operations and developing subordinates personally, professionally, and ethically. Finally, the author is particularly adept at providing first-hand accounts of the mental state, living conditions, and morale of the soldiers involved and the impact on their mission. Marines should use these accounts to correlate the human factors of health, morale, and self-confidence on unit effectiveness.