Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why Read *The Marines of Montford Point: America’s First Black Marines*? -

Why is this book on the Commandant’s Professional Reading List? The CMC White Letter 4-12 states: “As we prepare ourselves for whatever is to come, the study of military history offers the inexpensive chance to learn from the hard-won experience of others, find a template for solving existing challenges, and avoid making the same mistakes twice.” The path to desegregation, both at the national level and in the United States military, highlights a way forward to meet other demanding issues that may impact our nation, and also, the U.S. military and United States Marine Corps. *The Marines of Montford Point* illustrates how national experience with desegregation paved the way for desegregation in the Marine Corps, and yet also highlights some of the difficulties, challenges, and solutions to Marine Corps desegregation. It is a collective story of men who would become Marines, serve as Marines with the expected distinction of Marines, and spend their lives as Marines. A good summation of why this book is on the CPRL (quoted from the back cover): “This book serves to recognize and to honor the men who desegregated the Marine Corps and loyally served their country in three major wars.”

For the Primary Enlisted Marine and Primary Officer of Marines, *The Marines of Montford Point* provides a context for service to our great nation. In 2014, there is little memory of the time when segregation was national policy, when desegregation was resisted within the Marine Corps by the most senior of leaders, and that when the “Montford Pointers” reached the operational forces, there was little to no acceptance of them on the fighting lines. These men, these awesome Marines, gained entry into the Corps, integrated the ranks at every level, and conclusively demonstrated their ability to fight alongside all Marines of every ethnic and racial background. Their determined battle in the Corps made possible a career in the Corps for thousands of young African American men who would follow them, rise in the ranks, and become senior leaders and commanders themselves. Their story is equally critical today, when tied to important social issues that the 21st Century Marine may resist and rail against. The story of the Montford Pointers is a “quintessentially American story, a story they can tell with unequaled authenticity, a story that still speaks to the nation about race relations in its past, and a story that holds deep significance for both the present and the future.”

As you read *The Marines of Montford Point*, ask yourself how you would respond to each scenario. Do you agree with how each of the Marines interviewed responded to their situation? Or, when placed in the same “first boots on the ground” in a cauldron of anger, dissension, and the unknown, would you have done something different? It may be easier or more difficult for you to relate, depending on your background and personal history. However, you should try to relate those circumstances to present day issues you and the Marines around you may be facing.