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American Military Experience

Reading List

Compiled from the US Army Chief of Staff's 2017 professional reading list
and
U S Army Center for Military History Recommended Reading Lists for
Cadets, Soldiers and Junior NCOs
Company Grade Officers & NCOs, WO1-CW3

1776

David McCullough, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005

This is a brisk narrative of the Revolutionary War from the summer of 1775 to George Washington's stunning twin victories at Trenton and Princeton in late 1776. McCullough shows that remarkable endurance, fierce dedication to the American cause, and Washington's singular leadership were all essential. Together, these factors propelled a minuscule and ill-equipped American army to overcome severe hardships and defeats and saved the American Revolution from collapse during the war's first, and most tumultuous, year.

The American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783–1900

Robert Wooster, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009

Wooster looks at the U.S. Army on the American frontier from the end of the Revolution to 1900. As the new nation expanded beyond the Appalachian Mountains, the Army was at the forefront of the advance, tasked with defending the nation's interests against Spain, Great Britain, France, Mexico, the Confederacy, and Indians. This study examines the importance of military affairs to social, economic, and political life throughout the borderlands and western frontiers.

America's First Battles, 1776–1965

Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986

A benchmark work in American military history for three decades, these eleven essays focus on the transition of the U.S. Army from the peacetime parade ground to wartime battleground in nine wars. Through careful analysis of the organization, training, and doctrine, each essay seeks to illustrate the root strengths and weaknesses evidenced in the first significant engagement or campaign of the war. While this volume is focused on operational history, it gives readers a deeper understanding of the underlying "rhythm" of American military traditions.

An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942–1943 Rick Atkinson, New York: Henry Holt, 2002

The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944 New York: Henry Holt, 2007

The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944–1945 New York: Picador, 2013

The Liberation Trilogy draws the reader into the U.S. Army's monumental struggle to defeat Nazi Germany, with the Army transforming into a coherent and capable force over three years and three bloody campaigns. *An Army at Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, masterfully tells the story of the North Africa Campaign, as Americans struggled to adapt to the intensity of modern warfare. *The Day of Battle* follows the campaign in the Mediterranean, where the elimination of Italy as a member of the Axis was perhaps less important than gaining the experience needed to fight Germany and win. *The Guns at Last Light* moves from the bloody landings at Normandy to the final defeat of Adolf Hitler's empire.

Blitzkrieg to Desert storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare

Robert M. Citino, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004

Beginning with Germany's blitzkrieg invasion of France in 1940, numerous military commanders have sought to emulate this rapid victory through maneuvers of armored vehicles and motorized troops. Despite this clear template, most commanders have been unable to achieve comparable victories. Citino describes multiple cases, including Korea, the Arab-Israeli wars, Vietnam, and Desert Storm, to appreciate modern operational warfare and assesses the respective roles of firepower, training, doctrine, and command and control mechanisms. He shows that technical superiority is no guarantee of victory and that understanding past campaigns is essential to anyone who wishes to grasp, and survive, modern warfare.

Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power

Victor Davis Hanson, New York: Doubleday, 2001

Though technology and superior weapons have played a part in Western military dominance, Hanson argues that cultural distinctions are decisive. Studying nine major battles from Salamis to Tet, he contends that Western powers leveraged personal freedom, self-imposed discipline, and civic organization to become "marching democracies." In contrast, non-Western nations were often hindered by hierarchical governments and intolerance of debate. In one example, Greek armies, who elected their own generals and openly debated strategy, were able to win wars despite being massively outnumbered and far from home, with only their comrades in arms for support.

Combat Ready? The Eighth U.S. Army on the Eve of the Korean War

Thomas E. Hanson, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010

In the decades since the "forgotten war" in Korea, conventional wisdom has castigated the Eighth Army as consisting largely of poorly trained and undisciplined troops who were easily brushed aside by North Korean troops in 1950. Hanson's careful study of combat preparedness in the Eighth Army in 1949 and 1950 concedes that soldiers sent to Korea suffered gaps in their instruction, but after a year of progressive, focused, and developmental collective training these soldiers expected to defeat the Communist enemy.

Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941–1942

Ian W. Toll, New York: W. W. Norton, 2012

The years 1941–1942 were crucial in the war to defeat Japan in the Pacific theater. The decisions and, in the case of Japan, strategic missteps made during this time would have consequences once the United States and its Allies could mobilize on a scale never before seen. Toll draws on primary source material to put the reader on board the ships and in the offices and conference rooms where the foundations for victory were laid.

The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942–1945

Ian W. Toll, New York: W. W. Norton, 2015

Toll's sequel to his earlier book on the war in the Pacific is as grand and sweeping as the ocean upon which it was fought. These were the years in which the Japanese offensive in the Pacific was driven back with increasing speed and destruction. The reader is confronted with just how massive this theater was but is still able to connect to the individuals who fought in it due to the author's heavy reliance on firsthand accounts and other primary source material.

Death of the Wehrmacht: The German Campaigns of 1942

Robert M. Citino, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007

The year 1942 was a key turning point of World War II, as a bloodied but still lethal Wehrmacht was unable to replicate its brilliant victories and huge territorial gains against increasingly capable opponents. In this major reevaluation of that crucial time, Citino shows that the German Army's addiction to the "war of movement" and Adolf Hitler's flawed management of the war slowly sapped military effectiveness as the initiative shifted to the Allies.

Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917–1945

David E. Johnson, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013

In 1941, the U.S. Army entered World War II unprepared for Germany's combined use of armor and airpower. Limited funding and public apathy during the 1930s were a factor, but Johnson persuasively argues that the principal failures were internal to the military. Army culture and bureaucracy, shaped by conservative officers in the powerful infantry and cavalry branches, hindered the incorporation of tanks into ground forces. In addition, aircraft development was distorted by strategic bombing advocates, neglecting the mission of close air support for ground troops.

The First World War

Hew Strachan, New York: Penguin, 2005

Strachan's work is a broad study of the First World War aimed at the general reader. He examines the political, economic, and social factors that set the conditions for war before delving into general analysis of how the war was conducted at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The reader will gain an appreciation for the challenges faced in bringing the war to a satisfactory conclusion. The author closes with a look at why the peace that was settled in 1919 could not last and what this meant for Europe long term.

The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich

Robert M. Citino, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005

In his study of over 350 years of German military history, Citino reveals a recurrent pattern of rapid movement, surprise attacks, and assaults on enemy flanks, which made it possible for generations of German leaders to fight and win against larger armies and more powerful nations. Through battlefield victories and grim determination to carry out its distinctive style of warfare, German military culture influenced the history of Europe and later the world through its singular approach to warfare.

The Guns of August: The Outbreak of World War I

Barbara W. Tuchman, New York: Random House, 1962

In this 1963 Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the coming of the Great War in Europe, Tuchman re-creates the month leading up to World War I and the first month of the conflict: thirty dramatic days in the summer of 1914 when the continent erupted in fighting. Beginning with the funeral of England's King Edward VII, the author traces each step that led to the clash and the subsequent outbreak of battle. She also highlights the numerous misconceptions, miscalculations, and mistakes that resulted in the tragedy of trench warfare.

Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies

Jared Diamond, New York: W. W. Norton, 1999

Diamond, a professor of geography and physiology, attempts to explain why Eurasian and North African civilizations have survived and prospered more than others. He argues that the gaps in power and technology between human societies originated primarily in environmental differences, which are amplified by various positive feedback loops. When cultural or genetic differences occur, such as written languages or the development of resistance to endemic diseases, he asserts that these advantages occurred because of the influence of geography on societies and cultures.

Inferno: The World at War, 1939–1945

Max Hastings, New York: Knopf, 2011

World War II involved tens of millions of soldiers and cost sixty million lives, and Hastings, a distinguished historian who has researched and written about the war for over thirty years, provides a richly detailed single-volume history of the entire war. Through his stories of everyday people, ranging from soldiers, sailors, and airmen to housewives, civilians under attack, and even Japanese suicide pilots, he offers an intimate portrait of the most epic and destructive war in human history.

The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War

Robert B. Strassler, ed., New York: Touchstone, 1998

Thucydides is recognized as a pioneer in the writing of military history. His study of the protracted Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta in the fifth century BC is the definitive work, but it has been relatively inaccessible to the student of military history who does not possess a Greek classicist background. Strassler's book opens the world of ancient military campaigns and battles, and the valuable political, military, and moral lessons it holds, to the general public.

The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920–1939

Robert M. Citino, Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2007

In 1939, the German Army shocked the world with a highly mobile and aggressive style of warfare. Twenty years earlier, that army had lain in ruins, unsuccessful on the battlefield and constrained by the Treaty of Versailles. Citino shows how German officers of the Weimar Republic transformed their doctrine and built the institutional capability for Germany's rapid rearmament. Using largely unpublished materials from U.S. and German archives, he centers his analysis on critical maneuvers conducted by the German Army in the 1930s that provided the critical skills for future victories.

The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000

William H. McNeill, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982

The relationship between power and military, technological, and social history is explored by McNeill in this sweeping narrative of "hard power" since the year 1000. The author traces the development of new ideas from the crossbow to the intercontinental ballistic missile to argue that the commercial transformation of society and advances in technology have continually upset balances of power and established new political structures.

The Regulars: The American Army, 1898–1941

Edward M. Coffman, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004

In a lively and brisk social history, Coffman details the transformation of the U.S. Army between the War with Spain and the beginning of World War II. In 1898, America's army was a small constabulary engaging in skirmishes on a vanishing frontier and dealing with protesting workers, completely isolated from broader American social, political, and cultural currents. Within four decades, it emerged reborn as a large modern army drawn from all corners of America to fight a global war against highly skilled opponents.

A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War

Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016

As a new military history of the Civil War, this book distinguishes itself by its expansive vision and scope. Built around a core argument that the American Civil War began an enduring style of "modern warfare," the narrative moves from the first shots at Fort Sumter to the surrender of Robert E. Lee's army at Appomattox. Murray and Hsieh highlight the powerful historical forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution's impact on military culture, leaders, and decision making.

This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness

T. R. Fehrenbach, New York: Macmillan, 1963

Fehrenbach's dramatic account of the Korean War in all its horror and bravery is written from the perspective of those who fought in it. Using unit records and personal journals, the author provides compelling individual narratives of the small-unit commanders and their troops. Sixty years later, understanding the struggles of the "forgotten war," through the voices of those who battled over the rocky Korean hills, both commemorates the past and offers vital lessons for the future.

The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943

Robert M. Citino, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012

Throughout 1943, the German Army, a force that perfected relentless offensive operations, was ground down by strategic overreach and the demands of twentieth century industrialized warfare. Citino draws on German language sources to offer a fresh and vivid analysis of key campaigns as Germany shifted to a desperate defensive campaign against increasingly skilled military opponents. From the Allied landings in North Africa and the German counterattack at Kasserine Pass to the titanic battle of Kursk, he reveals how a German military establishment struggled to react when the tables were turned.

The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power

Max Boot, New York: Basic Books, 2002.

A survey of American "small wars," this work focuses on Navy and Marine Corps actions in the 18th and 19th Centuries, broadening to include Army operations with the Philippine Insurrection of 1899 to 1902. Although there is little on the Army's role as a frontier constabulary, this is a well-written and thoughtfully reasoned account focusing on expeditionary warfare and the best available book on the subject.

The Face of Battle.

John Keegan, New York: Penguin Books, 1985.

One of the classics of modern military history, *The Face of Battle* brings to life three major battles: Agincourt (1415), Waterloo (1815), and the First Battle of the Somme (1916). The author describes the sights, sounds, and smells of battle, providing a compelling look at what it means to be a soldier and how hard it is to describe realistically the dynamics of combat.

American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam.

Peter S. Kindsvatter, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

Historian Pete Kindsvatter, a combat veteran himself, uses the letters, memoirs, and novels written by other soldiers, along with official reports and studies, to detail the experience of soldiers from entry into military service through ground combat and its aftermath. Thoughtful discussions of leadership, the physical and emotional stresses of the battlefield, and the various ways soldiers try to cope with these stresses make this a valuable book for all those preparing to lead American soldiers in ground combat.

For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War.

James M. McPherson, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

This inspiring book by a Pulitzer Prize winning historian argues, contrary to many scholars, that Civil War soldiers overcame their fear by remaining dedicated to the ideals that had motivated them to enlist: duty, honor, patriotism, and love of liberty. In reaching his conclusions, he draws on roughly 25,000 letters and 249 diaries written by 1,076 Union and Confederate soldiers, thus wisely allowing the soldiers to tell much of the story in their own words.

We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young.

Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 2004.

A gripping firsthand account of the November 1965 Battle of the Ia Drang by the commander of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. The Ia Drang was the first major combat test of the airmobile concept and the first major battle between U.S. forces and the North Vietnamese Army

East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950.

Roy E. Appleman, College Station, TX.: Texas A&M University Press, 1987.

This book tells the riveting story of 3,000 soldiers of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division who fought in a four-day and five-night battle on the east side of the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir in November and December 1950 during the initial Communist Chinese intervention in the Korean War. During this brief battle, Task Force MacLean/Faith endured misery, frigid cold, privation, and exhaustion, before meeting with disaster. Although facing overwhelming odds does much to explain the complete annihilation of this army unit, the author clearly shows that eight factors, including a lack of experience, poor training, inadequate supply, and non-existent communications, combined with less than astute leadership and unwise troop deployments, doomed the men of the 31st Regimental Combat Team, most of whom did not survive. Although not as well known as other tactical disasters in Korea, such as the earlier Task Force Smith, this book says a great deal about the overall poor condition of the U.S. Army during the early days of the war.

Washington's Crossing.

David Hackett Fischer, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

This Pulitzer Prize winning book details the "darkest hour" of the American Revolution in 1776, from the defeats of Washington's army around New York City, through the miserable retreat across New Jersey, to the cold, wretched camps of eastern Pennsylvania, as the British seemed poised to crush the cause of independence in its first year. Yet Washington quickly achieved two stunning successes at Trenton and Princeton through boldness, perseverance and personal example. Fischer emphasizes the unpredictable role of contingency in military operations, and shows that the remarkable victories of Washington and his men saved the faltering American Revolution.

Company Commander.

Charles B. MacDonald, Springfield, N.J.: Burford Books, 1999. Original edition, 1947.

Published repeatedly for decades, this classic is an exciting memoir of a young company commander in the Battle of the Bulge and an unforgiving tale of American infantrymen in combat. Written shortly after the war, his account gives a vivid sense of the awesome responsibility of command from the perspective of a small unit commander and a keen sense of what it was like for an inexperienced officer to be thrown into battle. Highlighted are the personal leadership skills needed for survival and the intangibles that held small units together in the face of danger and deprivation. This is a book that should be read by every junior leader about to face the test of leadership in war.

Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton. Martin

Van Creveld, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Surveying four centuries of military history, the noted historian Martin Van Creveld points out clearly the reasons why "amateurs study tactics; professionals study logistics." Most battlefield results would not have been possible without the careful organization and allocation of logistical resources. Leaders who fail to consider logistics in all of their plans and operations will do so at their peril.