



# CompanyCommand

## Building Combat-Ready Teams



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

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## Read2Lead: The Professional Reading List By and for Company-level Officers

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What is one book that has made a practical impact on your effectiveness leading a platoon or company in the Army? Picture hundreds of company commanders and platoon leaders answering that question and including a comment about a specific way the book made a difference for them. Read2Lead, a Web page launched in 2010, does just that. It is situated inside the Platoon Leader/CompanyCommand online professional forums where members can vote for and comment on books as well as recommend books that are not yet on the list. The most recommended books rise to the top of the list, making a

dynamic professional reading list that is by and for company-level officers. In just over a year, members have recommended 88 books, voted hundreds of times and posted 131 comments about how those books made a difference for them. Because Read2Lead is accessible only to members of the CompanyCommand and Platoon Leader forums, we thought it would be valuable to the broader Army profession to publish a listing of the current top 50 Read2Lead books. With the top 10 most recommended books, we include some comments from members.

### The Read2Lead Top 10—And Commentary

#### 1. *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer

*Mike Runey:* Sam Damon and Courtney Massengale are forever imprinted as leadership archetypes for our profession. In this engaging and fascinating epic of two leaders from pre-WWI through Vietnam, we see into the lives of men who are effective for entirely different reasons. Anton Myrer's novel exposes both the heroic strengths and tragic weaknesses of both officers, personally and professionally. I read this book pre-commissioning and again as a major. Both times I found the story captivating, challenging and fascinating. More importantly, I found Army leaders I respected using references to both officers, especially the hero, Sam Damon. As a young lieutenant, it became clear to me that this book is a part of Army culture.

*Dave Gohlich:* I read *Once an Eagle* just after the Infantry Officer Basic Course, and it had a big impact on how I saw my job as a PL [platoon leader]. Even though he's a fictional character, Sam's dedication to the Army, his focus on always doing the right thing, taking care of his Soldiers no matter the cost and always leading from the front have always stuck with me. I tried to ask myself, "What would Sam do?" when I was stuck in a tough spot as a young PL.

*Patrick Snyder:* I read this book as a corporal, and my copy is dog-eared, underlined and highlighted all over! I purchased copies of this monster for each of my lieutenants and

gave them 90 days to read it before we sat down to discuss its message and how to apply it to our lives. It is by far the finest book I have read, and it continues to impact how I lead.

#### 2. *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young* by Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway

*Pete Kilner:* I read this while at the Infantry Officer Advanced Course. I was struck by how Hal Moore and his commanders knew their Soldiers, by the things Moore did to create a winning culture and by how unpredictable war can be. Another big takeaway was that despite the brutality and emotions of combat, a leader must remain calm, see the big picture, and anticipate the "next steps" for his unit and the enemy.

*Tom Hiebert:* *We Were Soldiers* was published just as I was getting ready to take command. The timeless value of the book then, as it remains to me to this day, is in demonstrating to young leaders the value of setting and maintaining standards and discipline in training as these translate directly to success in combat. Also, LTG Moore compares and contrasts the effects in combat of good solid leadership (and, again, standards and discipline) with the lack thereof in the second part of his book concerning the exploits of McDade and 2-7 Cavalry at LZ [landing zone] Albany. I tried to carry these lessons with me everywhere as a company commander.

*Anthony Passero:* I read this while I was a platoon leader



CPT Anthony Passero, in Iraq while commanding a company in the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

during the invasion of Afghanistan. It pointed out several very pertinent leadership lessons, which I followed and which were successful. They seem like simple lessons from Ranger School, but they can be easily forgotten when times get really tough. The first lesson was to take the tough route when the easy one is readily available. The enemy is probably waiting for you on the easy route. The second lesson was that a leader needs to be seen as someone who is thriving under a difficult circumstance. This will inspire Soldiers to do their best because they will push themselves if they see you doing the same. As I said, easy lessons, but they need reinforcement.

### 3. *Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat* by James R. McDonough

*Corey James:* There are other books out there that pertain to our current operational environment, but not many that cover leadership like *Platoon Leader*. A relatively short book, it covers many timeless leadership principles from the perspective of a platoon leader in Vietnam. From this book I learned the basics of what it means to “take care of Sol-

diers” in combat and what Soldiers really expect from you.

*James Harbridge:* This was the single most influential book for me as a tactical leader. The lessons about the impact of the platoon leader/commander’s personal example stuck with me when I first read the book. They continue to ring true every time I reread it, and I actually thought about them while performing under fire in combat. Our guys are always watching, and what we do matters.

*A.J. Rooney:* I read it as a cadet and it helped me see that the fundamentals we were learning applied in real-life scenarios. Specifically, *Platoon Leader* reinforced the principles of a defense and the principles of patrolling. The book taught me that the most effective way to ensure your security in a defense is to constantly patrol the surrounding areas.

*Matthew Pritchett:* I read this right before my deployment to Iraq and drew a lot of great parallels throughout the deployment. The front changes and the mission changes, but the face of battle (which happens to be the title of another good book) remains the same.

### 4. *Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level* by Nate Allen and Tony Burgess

*Jared Nichols:* *Taking the Guidon* is a must-read for those preparing for command. No matter how ready you think you are for command, there is always something to learn before the first day you step in front of your formation. *Taking the Guidon* helped me to get my head in the right direction and to get up to speed on things I needed to take into consideration before I took command, while I was in command and when I was preparing to leave command. I valued the strategies to develop my command philosophy, prepare for my change-of-command inventories, plan a vision and apply that vision to my training calendar. This book helped me get the most out of my unit. (It is available as a free PDF file in the MilSpace Library.)

*Dave Gohlich:* I read *Taking the Guidon* my first week as a PL. As a young lieutenant I knew very little about how training schedules worked, but after reading the book I understood enough to get started. The “Big Rocks” idea really hit home, and I tried to get key training events up early on the training calendar and to defend them at all costs against the little ankle-biter requirements that always came up at the last minute.

*Fran Murphy:* I read it as a cadet, and revisited it as a lieutenant and captain and found it to be the definitive how-to book to be a dynamic company commander. The core ideas of the book—Big Rocks, Company Vision, 90-Day Plan (to name a few)—were so important to my success as a company commander. I read *Guidon* one more time late in command with my lieutenants and I continue to refer back to it.

### 5. *Black Hearts: One Platoon’s Descent into Madness in Iraq’s Triangle of Death* by Jim Frederick

*Scott Horrigan:* Read this book from the perspective of a leader in the book and ask yourself, “What could I have done differently?” This is a book that every leader in the military should read. It will change how you look at your or-



ganization and how you look at the role of leadership. It is a painful and truthful account of one of the darkest events to occur at the tactical level in contemporary military history.

*Jim Craig:* I consider this book a must-read for any deploying platoon leader. It is blunt and fair, and accurately describes the importance of leadership in the lives of our Soldiers and our units. This book is now required reading in my upper division ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] classes.

#### **6. *Small Unit Leadership: A Commonsense Approach* by Dandridge M. Malone**

*Darrell Fawley:* Throughout my commissioning process, combat leadership and tactics accounted for the overwhelming majority of my training. As a platoon leader, however, I needed to be able to do myriad other things like counseling wayward Soldiers and implementing training. I needed an answer to the question of what a PL does when he is not leading an operation, and this book served as an incredible guide for doing all the tasks I was called to do early and often as a platoon leader, such as train, counsel and develop. Now that I'm a captain, the book and my four pages of notes remain an invaluable reference.

*Brian Kime:* This book gets into the details about running a company, counseling troops, holding meetings, and setting goals as well as basic leadership. Malone intersperses the lessons with vignettes from Vietnam (where he was a battalion commander). I value it enough to have brought it with me to Afghanistan.

#### **7. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* by Dave Grossman**

*Pete Kilner:* This book opened my eyes to the psychological, physical and even moral impacts of killing another human being. As professionals of arms, we recruit, equip, train and order our Soldiers to kill. *On Killing* gave me a

much deeper appreciation for what it's like to kill, as well as how I can help my Soldiers prepare for and make sense of killing in war.

*C.J. Douglas:* I read this book with my company leadership—officers and SNCOs [senior non-commissioned officers]—prior to deploying to Iraq each time. It served as a discussion primer for the company to talk about the human factors in combat.

#### **8. *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest* by Stephen E. Ambrose**

*George Coleman:* A great book about leading Soldiers in combat and the art of building a team under fire. It also has a case study on how not to lead. MAJ Richard (Dick) D. Winters recently passed away and is an iconic company commander that any junior leader can look up to for guidance and wisdom in leading Soldiers in combat. I'm currently in Afghanistan and in my most challenging deployment yet, but I take pause in knowing that it pales in comparison to the challenges and threats faced by Easy Company.

*Brandon Scaturro:* In his assault on Brecourt Manor, which is a textbook assault on a fixed position, MAJ Winters showed me how invaluable it is to delegate to my NCOs the key tasks (support by fire, assault and demolitions) and that I need to develop them as leaders and give them the chance to prove themselves. Winters, furthermore, is a role model to me when it comes to leading from the front, not only in combat but also in garrison. In the early days at Camp Toccoa, Ga., as LT Winters, he showed what it means to be in top physical condition as an officer, because it is the foundation and root of mental conditioning and toughness.

#### **9. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath**

*Jason Anderson:* This is not a military book, but it taught me how to use a single event to make a point, or how to make something stick (in your head or that of your Soldiers, to be more precise). Find out how the Heath brothers demonstrate how a concrete example of one event can drive global change. Well worth the read!

*Mike Eliassen:* Getting your point across, the first time. The concepts are excellent and arranged to be immediately understood. Anyone who talks to people (which is each of us) will identify with "sticky" ideas.



*Then-1LT A.J. Rooney meets with two members of the Iraqi Security Forces on an August 2010 patrol in Abu Dalef, Iraq.*



Then-1LT Fran Murphy briefs A/1-77 AR in advance of a 2004 cordon-and-search operation north of Samarra, Iraq.

#### 10. *Infantry Attacks* by Erwin Rommel

**George Runkle:** I found this book to be useful to me as a PL for three reasons: (1) It provided a real, practical example of why Ranger School is a lot of walking on very few calories; (2) That careful reflection on your own previous experiences sets you and your Soldiers up for later success; (3) Understanding that even famous combat leaders suffer battlefield exhaustion and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. There were several times that Rommel needed a “break” and was sent “for rest” to various places far back from the lines, sometimes for several months at a time. This book reminds me that every combat leader, even Rommel, will suffer from the emotional strain of combat.

**Mike Eliassen:** Classic. I have often found that Rommel’s diagrams and detailed accounts of mission orders are the standard I have tried to make for my units. He understood tactics the way I would want to in the small-unit fight.

**Tony Burgess:** This is a classic story of a company-level leader in action in World War I. I read it as a platoon leader and own a copy of the 1979 Athena Press *Infantry Attacks* translation that is exceptional. The sketches of battles along with his narrative and observations are filled with relevant tactical and leadership insights. One consistent theme is his view that tough training and preparation for battle are the best way to take care of your Soldiers. It’s all the more interesting

when you consider that the book was written by a leader who would go on to become legendary in World War II.

#### Recommended Books 1–50

*Note: These are in order, but some are tied—with the same number of votes. A dash rather than a number indicates that book is currently tied. Tied books are listed in alphabetical order.*

1. *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer
2. *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* by Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway
3. *Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat* by James R. McDonough
4. *Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level* by Nate Allen and Tony Burgess
5. *Black Hearts: One Platoon’s Descent into Madness in Iraq’s Triangle of Death* by Jim Frederick
6. *Small Unit Leadership: A Commonsense Approach* by Dandridge M. Malone
7. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* by Dave Grossman
8. *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest* by Stephen E. Ambrose
9. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath
10. *Infantry Attacks* by Erwin Rommel
11. *A Message to Garcia* by Elbert Hubbard
12. *NIV Study Bible*
13. *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli
14. *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* by Dave Grossman
15. *The Good Soldiers* by David Finkel
16. *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* by Steven Pressfield
17. *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* by David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman
- The Leadership Lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today’s Leaders* by Bob Briner and Ray Pritchard
- Principle-Centered Leadership* by Stephen R. Covey
20. *The Defence of Duffer’s Drift* by E. D. Swinton
- The Heights of Courage: A Tank Leader’s War on the Golan* by Avigdor Kahalani
- How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
23. *Team Yankee* by Harold Coyle
24. *The Forgotten Soldier* by Guy Sajer
25. *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout In Korea, 1950* by Roy E. Appleman
- Leadership and Training for the Fight: A Few Thoughts on Leadership and Training from a Former Special Operations Soldier* by Paul R. Howe
- The Places In Between* by Rory Stewart
- Steel My Soldiers’ Hearts: The Hopeless to Hardcore Transformation of 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, United States Army, Vietnam* by David H. Hackworth and Eilhys England

- Street Without Joy* by Bernard B. Fall
30. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* by Jim Collins
- The Village* by Bing West
32. *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman
- Passion of Command: The Moral Imperative of Leadership* by Bryan McCoy
34. *Company Commander: The Classic Infantry Memoir of World War II* by Charles B. MacDonald
35. *Leadership: The Warrior's Art* by Christopher D. Kolenda
36. *Company Command: The Bottom Line* by John G. Meyer
37. *Beyond Band of Brothers: The War Memoirs of Major Dick Winters* by Richard (Dick) D. Winters and Cole C. Kingseed
- The Defense of Jisr al-Doreaa* by Michael L. Burgoyne and Albert J. Marckwardt
- Infantry in Battle* U.S. Infantry School
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey
- Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* by Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell
- Words for Warriors: A Professional Soldier's Notebook* by Ralph Puckett
43. *The Arab Mind* by Raphael Patai
- Cigars, Whiskey and Winning: Leadership Lessons*

- from *General Ulysses S. Grant* by Al Kaltman
- It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* by D. Michael Abrashoff
- Muddy Boots Leadership: Real Life Stories and Personal Examples of Good, Bad, and Unexpected Results* by John Chapman
- The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* by Samuel P. Huntington
- This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* by T. R. Fehrenbach
- The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization* by John C. Maxwell
50. *The Mission, the Men, and Me: Lessons from a Former Delta Force Commander* by Pete Blaber

### Pro-Reading Challenge

See “The Pro-Reading Challenge—One Achievable Step for Army Leader Development,” in the February 2011 issue of ARMY Magazine for more about the PRC. The basic concept of the Pro-Reading Challenge is for teams of leaders to read and talk about developmental books with each other. We invite company commanders to take the challenge, and we give them the resources to do it. Commanders select a book, and we send them free copies to read with their lieutenants. We then establish a space in the online forum for them to talk about the book.

Company Commanders: Would you like to develop your platoon leaders? Sign up for the Pro-Reading Challenge by emailing Corey James ([corey.james@us.army.mil](mailto:corey.james@us.army.mil)).

### Call to Action

Company commanders and platoon leaders: Log in to <http://read2lead.army.mil> and recommend a book that has helped you be a more effective leader. If you are not yet a member of the <http://PL.army.mil> or <http://CC.army.mil> forum, you will need to join your forum first. In closing, we would like to thank the 151 officers who have stepped up to contribute to the Read2Lead list:

Felipe Albino, Mohammed Amin, Jason Anderson, Justin Anderson, Tony Arredondo, John Bannister, Brad Barron, Robert Beale, Keith Bishop, Logan Blank, Greg Brannon, Heidi Bredlow, Heath Brown, Tony Burgess, Michael Burgoyne, Joseph Byrnes, Joe Chincuanco, Marina Codraro, George Coleman, Justin Coody, Tijuana Cookston, Jim Craig, Jonathan Cunningham, Matt Dalton, Marion Davis, Casey Dean, Anthony Del Vecchio, Steven Delvaux, Robert DiFilippo, Joseph Doty, Christopher Douglas, Eric Duckworth, Michael Eliassen, James Enos, Denis Fajardo, Darrell Fawley, William Ferguson, Jed Fisher, Kyle Fonay, Joseph Foust, Mark Franzen, Jonathan Freeman, Daniel Galloway, Christopher Gannon, Richard Gibson, David Gohlich, James Golby, Agustin Gonzalez, Russell Gordon, Jeb Graydon, Edward Guelfi, Anthony Hammon, Tom Handy, James Harbridge, Alexander Hernandez, Tom Hiebert, John Hollein, Scott Horri-gan, Nicholas Howard, Timothy Hudson, Andrew Huntsman,

Steven Jackowski, G. Scott Jackson, Wendell Jackson, Corey James, Kelly Jones, Nicholas Jones, Pete Kilner, Mindy Kimball, Ray Kimball, Brian Kime, Troy Kirby, Jason Kruck, Matthew Krupski, Scott Kuhn, David Lee, Denis Lombardo, Tommy Loux, Ari Martyn, David Matters, Paul Maxwell, Anthony Mayne, Matthew McBride, Brian McCarthy, Timothy McDonald, Michael Melancon, Christopher Mercado, John Miller, Matthew Miller, Steven Miller, Walter Mitchell, Peter Molin, Gamble Monney, Scott Morley, Michael Moyers, Fran Murphy, Michael Naylor, Lou Nemec, Jared Nichols, Emily O'Hara, Christopher Padgett, Gene Palka, Kassondra Palmer, William Parsons, Anthony Passero, Jason Patterson, Andrew Pfluger, Jeffrey Pickler, Matthew Pritchett, Michael Richardson, Dana Riegel, Jeremy Riegel, Nathan Rimpf, Jose Robledo Trujillo, A.J. Rooney, Adam Ropelewski, Mark Ross, Mandi Rowell, Mike Runey, George Runkle, Alama Rush, Cory Scanlon, Brandon Scaturro, Michael Schmidt, Todd Schultz, Jason Scott, Scott Shaw, Benjamin Shean, Jonathan Silk, Niel Smith, Patrick Snyder, Brandon Soltwisch, Bevan Stansbury, Michael Stanski, Mark Symonds, John Terhaar, John Thaler, Jon Walatkiewicz, Ben Weakley, Wyatt Welch, Paul Wenzel, Robert White, Nathan Wike, Bryan Williams, Austin Wilson, Cecil Wolberton, Shai-Lin Ynacay, Samuel Yoo, Peter Zaffina, Eric Zellers, John Zillhardt.