

# USAFAS Reading List

As of Sep 2019

Because our Army operates in an ever-changing complex strategic environment, we must continually improve our knowledge of not only military affairs, but economics, politics, and international affairs. Just as we are charged with training our units and strengthening our bodies, we must all improve our minds through reading and critical thinking. I challenge each of you to read these books and to discuss, debate, and think critically about the ideas they contain.

*The problem with being too busy to read is that you learn by experience (or by your men's experience), i.e. the hard way. By reading, you learn through others' experiences, generally a better way to do business, especially in our line of work where the consequences of incompetence are so final for young men. – GEN Mattis*

**Dr. Grenier is the USAFAS Historian and can be contacted about any of the books below.**

## Required Reading

The Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address are documents that explain what it means to be an American Citizen, an American Soldier, and an American Citizen-Soldier.

## American and American Military History

*Crucible of War* by Fred Anderson is a grand narrative and a sweeping argument about the unintended consequence of victory in imperial ventures. Officers and NCOs must be able to read a "big book" and distill the argument from it, and not depend solely on others' summaries and Cliff's Notes. This book is a good place to start to learn that vital skill.

*1776* is David McCullough's magisterial account of the year of our nation's birth, a year of terrible defeats for the Continental Army on the battlefield, yet one that also saw the Declaration of Independence. *1776* might suggest, to the discerning reader, that wars are not won or lost on the battlefield, but rather in the hearts, minds, and souls of men and women.

*The Echo of Battle* by Dr. Brian McAllister Linn argues that the concepts of war that have shaped the American military experience are less the result of combat than of ideas that developed during long periods of peace. Little known "military intellectuals"—many of them Soldiers—have played a more important role in establishing an American way of war than practitioners of war such as Grant or MacArthur. Compare this to *The First Way of War* by FA Historian Dr. John Grenier. Both Dr Linn and Dr. Grenier wrote in reaction to Russell Weigley's 1973 masterpiece, *The American Way of War*, which

shaped the writing on US military history for two generations. Your senior leaders read Weigley when they were MAJs and LTCs/COLs.

*The First Way of War* by Dr. John Grenier explores the evolution of Americans' first ways of making war.

*Presidents of War* by Michael Beschloss (whom you will often see as a news commentator/analyst) looks at how presidents have handled each of the US's nine major conflicts between the War of 1812 and Vietnam. Some presidents are better at making war than others. Party affiliation and previous military service does not correlate to success.

### **Indian Wars on the Southern Plains (Ft. Sill)**

*Empire of the Summer Moon* by journalist S. C. Gwynne describes the forty-year battle between the Comanches and Anglo-Mexican-Tejano settlers for control of the Southern Great Plains and Texas. Quanah Parker's life is Gwynne's vehicle for telling that story, and Ft. Sill figures prominently.

*The Earth is Weeping* by Peter Cozzens discusses the Great Plains Indian Wars of the three decades after the American Civil War. Cozzens focuses on the complexities of the military problems the Soldiers—many of whom operated from Ft. Sill—faced and the intertribal strife over whether to fight or make peace.

### **General Military History**

*Napoleon: A Life* by Andrew Roberts is the definitive concise biography of Napoleon and, as one reviewer described it, “a thrilling tale of military and political genius.”

*The Reason Why* is Cecil Woodham-Smith masterpiece of narrative history on the Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimea War that puts the line from Tennyson's poem—“Ours is not to reason why/Ours is but to do or die”—in context. She explains the reason why the Light Brigade rode into “The Valley of Death” at Balaklava: profoundly incompetent leaders who owed their positions to privilege and connections rather than merit; the inability to write a simple and direct order; and monumental egos that trumped all.

### **Biographies, Autobiographies, Memoirs**

*Walden* is Henry David Thoreau's account of the two years, two months, and two days in which he built his cabin near Walden Pond, raised his own food, and lived a life of simplicity. *Walden* is a reflection on self-reliance, a personal declaration of independence, a voyage of spiritual discovery, and a satire on modern life.

*Quartered Safe Out Here*—from the second line of Kipling’s *Gunga Din*—by George MacDonald Fraser is a memoir of a young soldier who found himself “stuck” on the forgotten front (the China-Burma-India Theater) of WW2. It offers a “case study in leadership” at the squad level, and it explains brilliantly both the positive and negative effects of combat on the human psyche.

*The Simple Faith of Mr. Rogers* by Amy Hollingsworth is a biography of Fred Rogers, the “friendly neighbor.” The radical, but gentle, faith of caring for others, and reaching them through the medium of TV, made Mr. Rogers one of the most influential Americans of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He profoundly shaped the worldview of millions of Americans. And no, he was never a SF Soldier in Vietnam, and his trademark cardigan sweater did not cover sleeve tattoos. Instead, he was a psychologist, child therapist, and ordained Presbyterian minister whose lifework focused on serving humanity in the way he knew best.

*It Doesn’t Take a Hero* is GEN Norman Schwarzkopf’s autobiography. Schwarzkopf was the last American general to command Joint and Combined forces in a Large Scale Combat Operation (LSCO), during Operation DESERT STORM in 1991.

*Endurance* is Scott Kelly’s memoir of the year he spent on the International Space Station. The book’s narrative is split between Kelly’s year in space and his personal development from a child reading about astronauts into a naval test pilot.

## **Classics of Fiction**

*Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach is the story of an ambitious and adventurous seagull whose main aim in life is to do something worthwhile and remarkable. Through his animal protagonist, Bach shows us nothing remains impossible in this world if we trust our abilities and works tirelessly to achieve our goals.

*War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy broadly focuses on Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812. Tolstoy’s characters—peasants and nobles, civilians and soldiers—struggle with the problems unique to their lives, their culture, and their history to become some of the most moving figures in world literature.

*Slaughterhouse Five* is Kurt Vonnegut’s seminal novel that can be read as part science fiction and part autobiographical moral statement. The protagonist, Billy, continually runs up against forces that counter his Free Will. Vonnegut leaves it to the reader to decide if Free Will is just an illusion.

*No Country for Old Men* is Cormac McCarthy’s classic of *noir* crime fiction that ignores the workings of “justice” and instead focuses on the gritty dominion of inhuman time and place. Set in West Texas, the characters’ finer thoughts dissolve into crude fighting, fleeing, killing, and survival. The 2007 film, while good, hardly does the novel justice. See also *The Road* for McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic novel of the journey of a father and son. *The Road* won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; it is a “lyrical epic of horror.”

## **Inspiring Stories, Self-Help, and Self-Improvement**

*Undaunted Courage* by Stephen E. Ambrose reconstructs Lewis and Clark's 28-month, 8,000-mile journey through the Louisiana Purchase in 1804-1806. Ambrose, one of the most popular authors of World War II narratives (see *Band of Brothers*, both the book and the HBO series) shows why Lewis and Clark rightly stand among the first rank in Americans' pantheon of heroes.

*North* by Scott Jurek, an accomplished ultra athlete, is his personal story of pushing himself to great physical and emotional heights and depths as he runs the length of the Appalachian Trail. See also *Eat and Run* by Jurek, and *Born to Run* by Christopher McDougall.

*Who Moved my Cheese* by Spencer Johnson is a motivational business fable that describes typical changes one can expect to face in their work and life, and the standard reactions to those changes, from the perspectives of two mice and two "little people" during their hunt for cheese.

*Falling Upward* is Franciscan priest Richard Rohr's reminder that spiritual life is not static. You will come to a crisis in your life, and after the crisis, if you are open to it, you can enter a space of spiritual refreshment.