



Read2Lead

Pegasus Bridge
by **Stephen E. Ambrose**

Summary from Google Books:

In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, a small detachment of British gliderborne troops stormed the German defense forces who protected the Orin River crossing that would later come to be known as Pegasus Bridge and paved the way for the Allied invasion of Europe. Pegasus Bridge was the first engagement of D-Day, representing one of the first critical steps in what would become the turning point of the European Theater during World War II.

This gripping account of the opening moments of the D-Day invasion by acclaimed author Stephen Ambrose brings to life a daring mission so crucial that, had it been unsuccessful, the entire Normandy invasion might have failed. Ambrose traces the story of Delta Company, 2nd Airborne Battalion over many months, which culminates in the minute-by-minute excitement of the hand-to-hand confrontations on Pegasus bridge. This is a story of heroism and cowardice, kindness and brutality—the stuff of all great adventures.

While this mission occurred over 75 years ago, Ambrose’s account of D Company provides lessons on innovation, mission command, and leading change within a unit. Major Howard faced many of the same challenges that leaders face today as they try to adapt their tactics and training to keep up with a rapidly changing world. This guide is meant to help leaders learn from the successes and failures of Pegasus Bridge by engaging in dynamic group discussions and using the additional resources to help update these lessons for the 21st century.

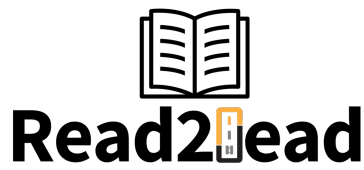
What is Read2Lead?

Read2Lead is a series of book studies published by the Center for Junior Officers, a small Army research center dedicated to empowering junior officers to develop themselves and their teams. Read2Lead modules give junior officers a ready-to-use product that they can integrate into leader professional development programs.

What’s in this module?

Every Read2Lead module contains:

- A short summary of the book that you can circulate to prime people for reading
- Advice for running your Read2Lead session



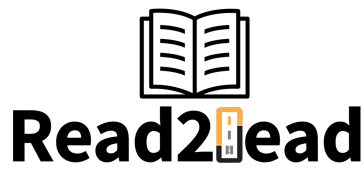
- A series of questions that can be used in multiple sessions, with options for using the questions over different lengths of time
- Additional resources that may be helpful for the facilitator

What do I need to provide to run a Read2Lead program?

First, the time. Read2Lead sessions work best when they're done over multiple sessions, so participants can digest books in small "chunks" instead of trying to cram them in all at once. Make sure you give your participants enough time to read the book and not fake the funk.

Second, the books. Books can be purchased with a government purchase card if they remain in the hands of the unit. Buying books for a Read2Lead session can be a great kickstarter for a battalion or even brigade library. You can also provide the books to Soldiers with the expectation that they pass them along to another Soldier when they are done with them. If you choose this approach, you should ensure you mark the books appropriately per the purchasing regulations and legal guidance of your organization.

Third, the space. Read2Lead sessions should be conducted in spaces where everyone can hear and see one another. Be creative: maybe you do them as hip-pocket training on a range, or at the end of motor stables. Or as a brown bag lunch in a barracks dayroom. When you run the actual session, think of it as a time for your Soldiers to think outside the box, discuss something beyond the day-to-day concerns of the unit, and improve their communication skills. The questions provided on the subsequent pages are a starting point, but feel free to add or substitute your own to make the session more meaningful for your Soldiers.



Pegasus Bridge, 6 Week Question Guide

Week 1: Airborne Troops and Pegasus Bridge (Prologue & Ch. 1)

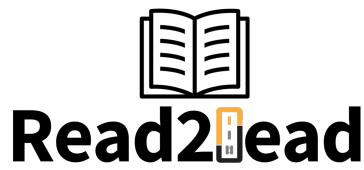
- The prologue discusses General Eisenhower and General Marshall's differing views on the use of airborne units. Airborne units were at the forefront of cutting-edge tactics and technology and General Marshall proposed a bold plan that would make use of their unique capabilities on D-Day. While General Marshall's plan was never tried, the operation at Pegasus Bridge gives a glimpse into what this plan of action may have looked like. Before moving on, put yourself in the shoes of leaders at the time and discuss the following: would you have agreed with General Marshall or General Eisenhower? What weaknesses are inherent in both arguments?

- In Chapter 1, Ambrose begins his account in the uncertain moments just before the operation. The superior intelligence capability of the British Army is a theme throughout the book, but despite the information provided by residents of the town next to the bridges, D Company still faced many unknowns. How did Howard and the members of D Company contend with uncertainty before the mission? What can we do to help contend with uncertainty in future missions we will find ourselves asked to execute?

Week 2: Preparing for Battle (Ch. 2 & 3)

- Chapter 2 begins with the state of the British army from 1941 to 1944. Ambrose writes that many of the soldiers were bored, and the War Office shied away from disciplining unruly Soldiers to avoid harming morale. Despite an Army-wide acceptance of indiscipline, Howard was able to create a culture in D Company that allowed him to impose proper order and discipline without harming the morale of the company. What tactics did Major Howard employ to help create a more disciplined and combat-ready force in the face of cultural headwinds? What of Major Howard's tactics can we carry forward into our units?

- Chapter 3 details the lengths that D Company and the British glider pilots went through to prepare themselves for their mission. List the different practices they put in place to prepare for the operation. Keep this list for the next week to see how it affected their



ability to fight. Discuss the factors that led them to adopt a proactive mindset without knowing the specifics of their mission. How might we train in a similar manner?

Week 3: Training and Touchdown (Ch. 4 & 5)

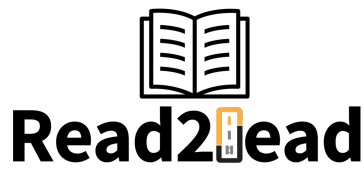
- In Chapter 4, Major Howard receives more specific orders related to the invasion and his company is given resourcing and intelligence priority, which allows him to tailor his training plan for the mission. At the same time, the repetitive nature of the training was a drag on morale. How did Major Howard balance these aspects throughout this period of intense training? Major Howard also received wide latitude to plan the operation, does this impact the quality of training and morale of the troops? Why or why not?

- Chapter 5 sees the D Company's training culminate as they touchdown on the objective. When the gliders crash, the men know what to do through instinct despite being dazed by the landing. Psychologists Daniel Kahnemann writes about this phenomenon in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow* (see Resource Article 1). He argues that new tasks often require concentrated effort, but through practice, we can transfer them to our "fast" mind which performs these tasks automatically. How can leaders create training schedules that reinforce this behavior? What resources or information would you need to ensure that your unit is trained on the right tasks?

Week 4: Differences Between the British and German Systems (Ch. 6 & 7)

- Chapter 6 sees the German officer Von Luck powerless to act against Howard's troops due to the leadership structure of the German forces. How can leaders learn from the weaknesses of the German system? What might the Germans have done differently? Compare and contrast the freedom that Howard had with the restrictions imposed on Von Luck had in running their formations. What are the weaknesses and benefits of each structure?

- Chapter 7 focuses on the exchanges between German troops and D Company. How did each of Howard's men react to the threats posed by the Germans? How did the Germans react to the actions of D Company? Is there evidence that Howard empowered his subordinates to act on their own? How can you retain command of your units while also allowing soldiers to make decisions in the heat of battle?

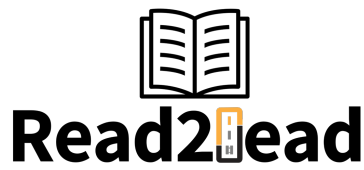


Week 5: The Wasting of D Company Part 1 (Ch. 8 & 9)

- Chapter 8 reveals the disorienting effects of battle on both D Company and the German Panzer regiment. How did both sides attempt to overcome the challenges of coordinating in such a chaotic environment?
- Chapter 9 depicts how D Company spent its final days in France as a battered remnant of its former self. Why did the War Office fail to make use of the unique skills in D Company even after investing the time and resources to develop them? What blind spots cause you to make the same mistakes in our formations? How can leaders avoid these mistakes?

Week 6: The Lasting Impacts of Pegasus Bridge (Ch. 10 & Epilogue)

- Chapter 10 reveals that no other coup de main parties were constituted to replace the capabilities lost when D Company returned home. How did this affect the rest of the war? Do you think recreating this capability would have been valuable for the war effort?
- In the Epilogue, Ambrose makes the case that the special training of D Company was integral to the success of D-Day and serves as an example of how democratic values are helpful in war because soldiers can continue to make decisions in the absence of leadership. Today, we see another example of decentralization vs. centralization in the Great Power Competition between the United States and China. Does decentralized command still have the same advantages in the 21st Century? If so, are we creating a culture that empowers soldiers to make use of this advantage? It may be helpful to read Resource Article 2 to spark further discussion.



Additional Resources

Discussion facilitators may want to have participants read the assigned chapters and the short articles below. If this is too time-consuming, the discussion facilitator should consider reading the articles to help him/her prepare to lead a robust discussion

Week 1: Throughout the book, you will see examples of leaders attempting to find creative solutions to complex problems. Leading creatively in the Army can be difficult, but below is an article that provides some suggestions on how to do it.

<https://juniorofficer.army.mil/leading-creativity-in-the-army/>

Week 2: Major Howard had to create a new culture of discipline in his unit. Below is an article from the Center for Junior Officers for leading change in the first 90 days of command.

<https://juniorofficer.army.mil/leading-change-in-the-first-90-days/>

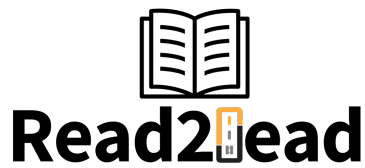
Week 3: Below is a link to a New York Times Review of *Thinking Fast and Slow*

by Daniel Kahneman which was referenced in week three. While Kahneman focuses a lot of his research on cognitive biases, leaders may want to think about which tasks they could train their units to shift from their “slow” thinking system to the “fast” thinking system

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/27/books/review/thinking-fast-and-slow-by-daniel-kahneman-book-review.html>

Week 4: Mission Command is meant to allow leaders to take action in the absence of explicit orders so long as they follow the commander’s intent. Read the article below and see how it compares to D Company’s system of leadership.

https://www.army.mil/article/106872/understanding_mission_command



Week 5: Despite D Company's innovative capabilities, they were not used to their full extent after Pegasus Bridge. Below is an article that describes how leaders today can use innovation to improve their units.

<https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2015/03/06/innovation-with-a-lowercase-i/>

Week 6: A major theme of the book was the practical advantages that decentralization has over centralization. When it comes to decision-making in rapidly changing environments, decentralized leadership can often better adapt/respond in a more agile manner than centralized leadership. In the essay below, however, Yuval Noah Harari undermines this claim by providing evidence that AI favors centralized decision-making.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/yuval-noah-harari-technology-tyranny/568330/>

This Read2Lead module was produced by 2LT Bryce Johnston. 2LT Johnston graduated from West Point in 2020 and commissioned as a Military Intelligence officer. Following graduation, 2LT Johnston studied International Development at the IE School of Global and Public Affairs as a Fulbright Scholar and will serve in the 173rd Airborne Brigade.