



By Jason Criss Howk

Steal this idea to improve our officer corps; we don't hold the patent.

Since Spring 2016 our ROTC class has awarded one graduating cadet a library of 50 books that we believe could help them navigate the challenges they will face throughout a 20-year military career.

When I was young my parents didn't have much money and worked more than one job until I graduated high school. The one luxury item my parents never denied me was a book from the school book fair and later some *Weekly Reader Bookclub* books. This one indulgence by my parents started my lifelong love of reading.

When I started public speaking and teaching in 2015 my audiences always asked for some good book titles on whatever topic I happened to be speaking on. These questions eventually led me to my local used book store to find books to gift my audience members. That sparked another idea—why not give out a small library from our class to a senior ROTC cadet at our alma mater Auburn University?

I talked to my rather small class (only about a dozen of us) and they agreed they would support it, if I would collect the books and deliver them to the college. We discussed what topics the books should include and even some of the titles (if available) that should be given each year. I bought 3-years' worth of books and drove down to give out the first award in-person; and to store the future winner's libraries in the ROTC supply room.

For the last several years, we have pooled a small amount of money and collected more than 50 books (We stick with physical books -not digital) and we present them to a deserving graduate right before they leave campus. We know the last thing on a new second lieutenant's mind is spending money on professional development books, so we give them a head start.

We hope it sparks an interest in reading about the military and everything else a military leader might want to know during their career. We even select books on topics that influence conflict, but might not have anything to do with war.

Our library includes topics such as the oil industry, intelligence operations, diplomacy, strategic thinking, leadership, small unit tactics, accounts of battle heroism, policy making, regional studies, religion, profiles in generalship, civ-mil relations, humanitarian and aid work, the press, and many more. We try to include classics, bestsellers, and nearly forgotten books that provide excellent insights into many fields of study that officers might never think of. There are novels, biographies, and history books in every batch.



We hope to build more renaissance leaders through this humble gift of books. Most often the books are used, not new, and that allows us to keep the cost of the library gift at a reasonable level. The recipient also gets a framed certificate with their name hand-written in calligraphy by my better half.

We named the mini-library the Fightin' Fred Ruoff Award to honor one hell of a leader and coach. Major (retired) Fred Ruoff is a 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group legend that the Auburn class of 2000 was lucky to have as their junior-year instructor. He greatly impacted our class and we wanted to ensure he was remembered for his work in building a group of creative leaders that functioned well in the JIIM world. Fred Ruoff was able to join half the class of 2000 in 2018 to present the award at the Spring commissioning ceremony.

We simply ask our ROTC Battalion leadership to choose an award recipient that embodies Ruoff's career.

This is our award verbiage. You can borrow as much as you like.

*The Auburn University Army ROTC class of 2000 hereby presents*

*The “Fightin’ Fred” Ruoff Award*

To \_\_\_\_\_ 2LT Name

*For embodying the selfless and highly effective style of teamwork and the humble character of Major (Retired) Fred Ruoff, U.S. Army Special Forces. Recipients of this award display a willingness to study and learn from life’s lessons and exhibit the potential to excel as a both a leader and a team-member.*

*The goal of the Ruoff Award is to foster a culture of self-study among young military officers. In the course of their career, these officers will spend more time in the Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multi-National environment than any other member of the United States government. They will deploy and lead forces in some of the most chaotic conditions at a younger age and with smaller teams than their predecessors. A broad understanding of a myriad of topics will make the difference between success and failure and even life and death. The books given with this award were chosen to assist award winners in building the necessary expertise for success at multiple levels of leadership.*

Awarded this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_

*Class of 2000, Ruoff’s*

*Raiders*

*War Eagle!*

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