

BOOKS



Reviews of books relating to the military profession and of particular interest to Marines are welcomed. Prospective authors are encouraged to contact editor prior to submission. Preferred length 300-750 words. Any book reviewed in this section may be purchased through MCA Book-service, but prices are subject to change.

FIRST TO FIGHT: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps. By LtGen Victor H. Krulak, USMC(Ret). Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Md., 1984, 233 pp., \$18.95. (Member \$17.00)

reviewed by
Col J.E. Greenwood, USMC(Ret)

Senior Marines, lieutenant colonels and above, will need no introduction to this author. Victor H. Krulak was one of the most influential leaders of his era. He left his mark on the Corps as a whole as well as on those individuals with whom he served. Abundantly determined, energetic, and intelligent, he understood the Marine Corps as an institution and the issues it faced. He sought excellence. Not one to stand idly by, he moved forcefully to anticipate and shape events. Now in this book, written 15 years after his retirement, he has endeavored to explain the characteristics that set the U.S. Marine Corps apart from other armed forces.

Early in his introduction, Krulak says:

Over the years the Marines have slowly acquired many faces, many qualities of substance that they seem to possess in greater measure than do their military counterparts. No single quality is a true personification of the Marine Corps. It is only in the sensitive mixture of all of them that the Marines' real character and, consequently, their durability reside.

Later he identifies the principal inputs to this mixture as "brotherhood, valor, institutional pride, loyalty, intellect, obedience, originality, and parsimony"—qualities that Marines "have translated into a hunger for excellence, a conviction that there is no room in their lexicon for the word complacency. . . ." Krulak's stated purpose for writing is to illustrate and illuminate these qualities, which he believes capture the essence of the Corps and explain its success.

The book proper is divided into six parts bearing titles, respectively, of The Thinkers, The Innovators, The Improvisers, The Penny Pinchers, The Brothers, and The Fighters. Each part, in turn, is broken into from one to three chapters. The contents of these, however, are by no means what everyone might expect.

There is no culling of Marine history for foremost examples, no listing of great thinkers or fighters from bygone eras. There are no detailed explanatory discussions, nor is there anything that would pass for theoretical, philosophical, or managerial analysis. The chapters are vignettes, wonderfully told accounts of incidents that involved the author or happened close enough at hand for him to have some degree of personal knowledge. Krulak's ability as a raconteur is on display throughout it all, and it adds up to fascinating reading for Marines.



LtGen V.H. Krulak, USMC(Ret)

To illustrate the role of the thinkers, the author tells the story of the Corps struggling for its existence in the post-World War II period—one of the frequent occasions throughout history in which Marines have had to fight "for the right to fight." For innovators, he selects the development of the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations, 1934* (an event that began before the author's commissioning but one that set the focus of his early years) and the efforts to acquire the Higgins boats and the LVTs needed to implement the new amphibious doctrine.

The development of a radar night bombing capability, notably the role of Captain, later Colonel, Marian Cranford Dalby, and the Inchon landing are used to illustrate the degree to which improvisation has been a way of life for Marines. The eccentricities of Quartermaster General William P.T. Hill and

some humorous tales of institutional theft drive home the point of frugality and how Marines "do it on the cheap."

Turning to the band of brothers concept and the intense loyalty that Marines have for each other and the Corps, Gen Krulak quotes at length from Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune and then describes the workings of recruit training to explain, at least in part, how Marines build the bonds that hold them firm in battle.

In the book's final part, the subject is fighting—the central role of Marines. Here Krulak summarizes the Marine philosophy with these words:

The battle is what it is all about. Try as hard as you can to be ready for it but be willing to adapt and improvise when it turns out to be a different battle than the one you expected, because adaptability is where victory will be found.

The three chapters here use the Marine experience in Vietnam to demonstrate this point and highlight the dominant role of combat in the Marine Corps world. As commanding general Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Krulak furnished the Marine forces that fought the first three and a half years of the Vietnam War and played a key role in the decisionmaking during that period. He discusses the strategy of the war and controversies involving Marines with great clarity and persuasiveness. In the process he demonstrates that the ingredients that go into making a true fighter are more than valor and courage.

There is a final chapter labeled "conclusions" but it's barely more than three pages and not enough. Krulak sees the Corps as a priceless national heritage, one that has emerged only with long aging as a mystical institution. Its achievements are in reality those of the institution, not of individuals. Its values cannot easily be duplicated. He also sees the Corps still threatened by external factors—by the currently muted but ever-present threat from rival institutions, by mounting defects in the society that serves as the reservoir for Marines, and particularly by an all-encompassing military bureaucracy that envelopes and suffocates the Services, suppressing the very qualities that have defined Marines and accounted for their success.

In briefest form, that is the book—6 parts and 14 chapters of history, memoir, and insight seasoned with a few dashes of myth, lore, and occasionally a deliberate sprinkle of hyperbole. The author has accomplished his stated purposes; he has identified distinctive qualities that seem to set Marines apart and give them their mystique. He has done it without preaching,

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without pedantic lecturing. *First to Fight* makes for wonderful reading. It is fast-paced; often stirring; always informed, interesting, and enlightening. Marines will zip through it, delight in it, and wish it was far longer.

But, as those who know the author no doubt suspected, there is more to the book than this—more than fast-paced entertainment, more than meets the eye of the casual reader. Krulak's examples are rich food for thought, grist for seminar discussions. The reader who pays less attention, who fails to pause and reflect, will miss a wealth of insight into leadership, followership, the inner-workings of an institution, human nature, the philosophy of the author, and an array of other items above and beyond the pure characteristics of Marines, which are the stated goal.

The lode is rich; the danger is that it will be missed. Marines are not necessarily skilled at learning from parables or historical examples, but the author makes few concessions. He gives examples; the rest is up to the reader. There are few signposts, precious little guidance to help with the interpretation. Whether you want to or not, you must proceed with care. Don't read too fast, don't think you understand too soon, or much of the lode will go unmined.

The scarcity of interpretive lecturing make *First to Fight* a book that could frustrate inquisitive readers. Take, for example, the insights into leadership. The Marine Corps almost invariably promotes officers who are highly skilled, professional, dedicated, energetic, hard-working, loyal, patriotic, personable, and obedient. *First to Fight* reminds that this is not good enough. For institutions to thrive—even survive—and for wars to be won something more is needed. Somehow the Corps must find the thinkers, the innovators, the improvisers, and the fighters who traditionally have made the difference for it. How does an institution attract, develop, encourage, select, promote, retain, and exploit leaders specially endowed with these skills? Krulak invites attention to this question and

others like it, but he refuses to answer them, discuss them, or often even phrase them.

Books always reveal something about their authors, and this one is no exception. But its purpose is not to define a personal creed or philosophy, and it doesn't. Those who wish to glean more about the author must also learn from examples, piecing together the hints and tidbits that have crept into his account. In a footnote Krulak mentions some advice he got early on from a senior non-commissioned officer about how to get along with their captain. "It's simple, lieutenant. Just find out what the old SOB wants and give it to him." Krulak claims that it was advice he never forgot. He gives us nothing more. But careful readers will quickly sense that there was far more to the Krulak formula than just pragmatic advice. He gave seniors what they wanted and a good deal more, but you will be on your own when it comes to analyzing the Krulak extras and translating them into a guiding philosophy.

In sum—this is one for Marines—for Marines who care. By almost every standard, it has to be the Marine book of the year—probably the Marine book of several years. Buy it, enjoy it, give it to several Marine friends. But don't put it on the shelf or assume it is properly entered "in your computer" until you've had a long, imaginary dialog with the author and formulated some of the questions he obviously thinks you should be asking.

TARAWA. By Charles T. Gregg. Stein and Day, New York, 1984, 198 pp., \$18.95. (Member \$17.00)

reviewed by
MajGen Michael P. Ryan, USMC(Ret)

Here is yet another book about Tarawa, and I am again surprised that interest in this battle endures after so many years. Author Charles T. Gregg attributes the legend's viability to the importance that this amphibious assault

assumed in the development of tactics and strategy for the subsequent drive across the Pacific to Japan, and he quotes British MajGen John F.C. Fuller's comment that amphibious warfare was "revolutionized" at Tarawa by "in all probability, the most far-reaching tactical innovation of the war."

Gregg's aims in writing this book were to put the battle of Tarawa into historical perspective and to place it in context in the overall military actions of the war in the Pacific. Extensive research has helped him to produce a well-written account of the genesis and development of amphibious warfare, particularly the struggle of the Marine Corps between world wars to convince military planners that attacking a fortified beach was not only a feasible objective but an essential element of modern naval strategy. A Navy veteran, the author is knowledgeable about Japanese and American naval objectives and tactics, and the first eight chapters of this book comprise a convincing, tightly written narrative with relatively few significant errors.

One of these bears mention. 2d Division Marines who landed with the 1st Marine Division in the Guadalcanal campaign will be surprised to learn that there was no opposition to the original landings, and that the only casualty was a Marine who cut himself while opening a coconut. To the contrary, my actions on Tarawa were greatly influenced by the fact that my unit fought its way ashore on Gavutu, and that I had a quick course of instruction in cave-fighting when the first grenade I threw into one came flying back out. I also learned that positions reduced only with grenades could come alive again a little later. Most of all, however, I was affected by my memory of Tanambogo, which had been subjected to a prolonged bombardment before the invasion; I walked over that island after the engagement ended and saw the little mounded fortification out of which scores of Japanese erupted in a kamikaze wave to push the Marines off the beach they had secured. Thus when we managed to overrun most of the turrets and pillboxes on the peak of Betio, I was convinced that without flamethrowers or explosives to clean them out we had to pull back the first night to a perimeter that could be defended against counter-attack by Japanese troops still hidden in the bunkers.

Four of the last five chapters of Gregg's book deal with the battle for Betio Island, and these are not so successful as the first ones. The narrative