



United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program
First to Fight Conclusion Discussion

1. Identify LtGen Krulak's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.

LtGen Krulak's task was to summarize that the Marine Corps' reputation and stature at the end of the 20th century resulted from a deliberate commitment to excellence combined with the good luck to be noticed for the ability to be at the right place at the right time with the right blend of warriors, equipment, ideas and fighting spirit to get the job done. LtGen Krulak also warns of three challenges facing the Marine Corps: people, bureaucratic processes, and the challenges of crossing oceans to get to the fight. His purpose is to show that the means for addressing these challenges lie within the institution of the Marine Corps so long as the Corps dedicates itself to making Marines who think, innovate, improvise, do more with less, see themselves as part of a family, and are ready to both fight and win.

2. What part of the conclusion was most effective in accomplishing the author's mission? What part of the book was least effective?

The most effective part of the conclusion was the description of the recruiting challenge and the belief that the Marine Corps' capacity to attract people dedicated to being members of an elite held to higher standards of performance and selflessness than the society at large. The least effective part of the conclusion is the third challenge regarding the future of expeditionary warfare from the sea. It is one thing for the Marine Corps to commit to the proposition that its future is inextricably linked to the US Navy, but there exists a huge challenge in convincing the Navy to commit to institutional excellence in amphibious power project so that Marines are able to employ the full extent of their capabilities. LtGen Krulak's conclusion does not address this parallel set of challenges.

3. What does LtGen Krulak assume in order to accomplish his mission? Does he validate these assumptions in the conclusion?

Again, with regard to the third challenge (the future of expeditionary warfare from the sea), LtGen Krulak assumes that technological advances "serve only to make amphibious assaults more formidable to the enemy" without acknowledging the impact of technology in defending against amphibious operations: coastal defense artillery systems, cruise missile and other precision guided munitions, and mine warfare (particularly very shallow water mines) are all threats that we as a Navy-Marine Corps team have not yet effectively countered.





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4. The part of the book that is most relevant to what I/we do:

This answer depends heavily on the individual or organization considering the question. From a general Marine Corps perspective, the answer is threefold. First, we must continue to develop Marines more dedicated to the long term success of the Marine Corps rather than to the prosperity of their own individual careers. Second, the Marine Corps must be able to operate within the Department of Defense bureaucracy without allowing bureaucratic processes to define the Marine Corps. Finally, the Marine Corps' relevance lies in its contributions to naval expeditionary capabilities. The Marine Corps' role is to present unique capabilities in the naval expeditionary (littoral) environment – not to merely duplicate the other services capabilities on a smaller scale.

5. Identify LtGen Krulak's specific and implied conclusions.

Specified conclusions are identified in the responses to questions 1 and 4, but feel free to add other specific conclusions if you are approaching this discussion from a different perspective.

Using the same Marine Corps-wide perspective adopted above, the implied conclusion of LtGen Krulak's first challenge is the gap between societal and Marine Corps values is not static. *Warfighting* expresses this dynamic very well throughout its first chapter (see MCDP-1, "The Human Dimension" pages 13-14 in particular). LtGen Krulak wrote this book in 1984 drawing from the perspective of 34 years of active duty (1934-1968) and over fifty years of observing the transformation of civilians into Marines (including commanding MCRD San Diego from 1959-1962). With respect to values and ethics, the gap between civilian recruit beginning the transformation process and basically trained Marine emerging from the transformation process will vary, sometimes widening and sometimes narrowing. The Marine Corps needs to be its own harshest critic in examining the transformation process and continually strive to improve that process.

With respect to the second challenge – the Marines need to recognize that bureaucracy (a term whose primary definition in Webster's Dictionary is "a body of non-elective government officials; an administrative policy-making group" is nothing more than another human process. Bureaucracies are only as unresponsive or as slow as their leaders permit them to be.





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It is only when processes rather than results become the focus of effort that bureaucracy comes to mean the second definition “a system of administration marked by officialism, red tape, and proliferation.” This implies that Marines must always treat a process as a means to an end, not an end unto itself. Any process involving Marines, from acquisitions, to planning, or to clearing fires, needs to focus on delivering the decision or other action at the end of the process. Marines find ways to add value at every step in a process so as to reduce the amount of time the process consumes in delivering some real benefit to other Marines.

Finally, the implied conclusions of the third challenge are the Marine Corps has no future relevance if its institutional outlook narrowly focuses on prowess in winning battles on land or in the air. The future of the Marine Corps is inextricably linked to the Navy’s commitment to expeditionary operations. To be first to fight we must first get to the fight. Just as there are many problems whose solutions compete for the nation’s resources and attention, the Navy faces significant challenges with limited resources. Partnerships in solving problems require trust, sharing information, and finding common ground rather than dwelling on differences or sharpening points of contention. As good as we are at what we do, and as much as we will improve at what we do, the Marine Corps is inextricably linked to the Navy.

Answers to the remaining questions definitely require an individual perspective. The lack of templated answers should not discourage discussion of those questions, for as LtGen Krulak points out on page 224: *“the Corps’ healthy and useful survival is dependent, as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow, on its being unfettered intellectually and professionally.”*

Submitted by: S. D. Griffin

