



United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program
First to Fight Part I Discussion Guide

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

Why did he write *First to Fight*?

He states in his own words the answer to this question on page xvi. *"This book, therefore, is an effort to set down what I perceive to be the qualities that have caused the Marine Corps to survive and to flourish...I aim through the amalgamation of fact, legend, anecdote, and interpretation to create a faithful image of what the Marine Corps is and a rationalization of the mystique of this altogether American institution."*

Why should Marines read this book? Why do they need to learn about how the Corps was conceived? The historical nature of our present day Corps requires any Marine to know how the Corps came to be and the trials it has undergone as an institution. Part of what sets Marines apart from other services is how highly we value our own history and traditions. LtGen Krulak presents the information in Part I as a quick reminder of those men to whom the country and we owe a debt of gratitude for our continued existence as a service.

The primary argument or issue in chapters 1-3 was greater than the preservation of the Corps, rather the continued civilian control of the military via the new Office of the Secretary of Defense and what role the military leadership would play in the form of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Throughout this section, elements of the political-military machine struggle for power and authority over the armed forces. LtGen Krulak points out how the Marine Corps, more than any other service at the time, stood to gain or lose, as a direct result of this internal struggle. While the Office of the Secretary of Defense vied for greater control of the military in general, and the U.S. Army leadership conspired to do away with or absorb the Marine Corps.

"We saw by its testimony that the War Department was convinced that political thinking in military councils would enhance the country's ability to plan for, finance, and conduct war in the modern age. General Vandegrift had called it the 'extension of political-military control into fields of government that are essentially civilian in character.' We (the Chowder Society) believed that just the opposite was needed. We believed in undiluted military advice at the topmost civilian level; generals and admirals, if they were doing their jobs properly, would have no time to play politicians, too" (p.39).





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2. What part of the book was the most effective in accomplishing LtGen Krulak's mission? What part of the book was least effective? (Does the author effectively explain his viewpoint? Does he justify/validate it?)

LtGen Krulak effectively explains in detail the opposing viewpoints of the executive branch, Secretary of Defense, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps leadership. While there is much more information available on this time period, LtGen Krulak concisely and clearly presents the primary issues of this time from his perspective as an experienced and savvy Marine Corps officer. The fact that he experienced many of the conversations and testimonies first-hand lend validity to his explanation of the events.

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

As a Marine leader, the most relevant part of *The Thinkers* was the common perspective that LtGen Krulak provides Marines. He describes the political tit-for-tat going on in Washington, D.C. from the Interwar Period through to post-WWII. The result, perhaps, is he fosters some "sensitive paranoia" (p.15) in the reader.

He writes of President Truman's distaste for the Marine Corps in December 1945 as follows. President Truman "...declared that the Marines 'should continue as an integral part of the Navy,' he privately described the Corps as a duplication, the Navy's 'own little Army that talks Navy and is known as the Marine Corps.'" (p.31) *It could be paranoia, but the timing of such derogatory opinions of the Marine Corps is surprising to me. Just months earlier, Japan had surrendered to the Allies ending the Pacific Campaign, a victory that was due in no small part to the Marine Corps and its amphibious doctrine. This serves as a reminder to me that at any given time, efficiency and cost-benefit analysis may lead some to believe that the Marine Corps is redundant and too expensive. This may be especially possible following the end of a long overseas campaign that exceeds the peoples' standard for acceptable losses in personnel and resources, tangible as well as political. Therefore, it is necessary for all Marines to expect a high level of performance from themselves, their unit/Marines and their commanders. Without such vigilance, we run the risk of becoming redundant and just another land force which the country could do without.*





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

LtGen Krulak summarizes The Thinkers as follows.

"Throughout the two hundred years of our country's history, Congress has acted repeatedly to preserve and strengthen the Marines' fighting effectiveness. This congressional determination, while enhanced by lobbying or jawboning, is primarily a product of one thing: confidence in the Corps' performance. Without steady, reliable performance, year in and year out, Congress would never have so consistently stood by the Marines in their times of trial. Performance is what it is all about." (p.66) Bottom line, it is performance. Marines will continue to hold the high esteem of our elected officials only if we continue to perform in a manner that honors the title Marine. The implication of such a statement is that it is not left to congress to preserve the Corps, but to each one of us wearing the eagle, globe and anchor.

5. With respect to LtGen Krulak's conclusions (either specified or implied), I/we accept or agree with the following:

I agree with the author. With respect to the current political climate of change, I also believe that now is the time to be vigilant as a service. I do expect that there will again come a time when the Marine Corps will have to justify its necessity to our country.

5a. With respect to LtGen Krulak's conclusions (either specified or implied), I/we do not agree with the following:

N/A

6. This book made a favorable impression on me and it will change the way I approach:

This book underlined something I already knew, history is biased. It is important to remember, the perspective of the author when reading any historical documentation. One man's hero can be another's villain. As we seek to improve our knowledge in the profession of arms, it is important to consider the source of information and, when possible, seek opposing viewpoints.





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6a. This book made an unfavorable impression on me for the following reasons:

N/A

Submitted by: A-M Theriot

