

Mirroring the Ethos of the U.S. Marine Corps

by Tommy Jeppsson

TITEL:

First to Fight; An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps

FÖRFATTARE:

Victor H. Krulak

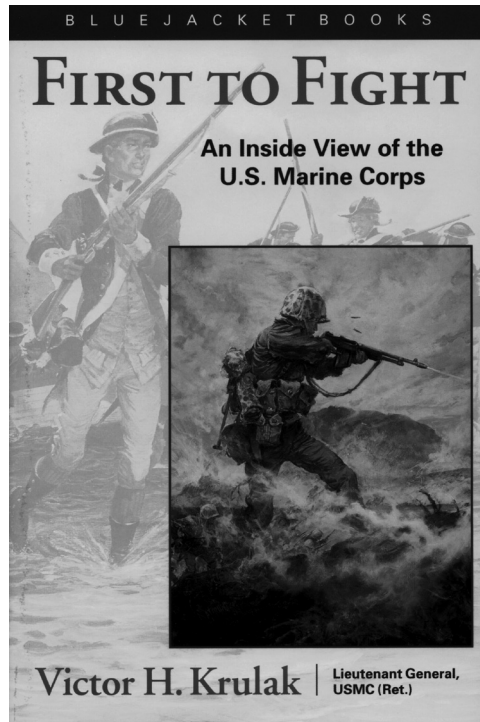
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Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, USA. First published in 1984.

THE LATE U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak was indeed a soldiers soldier, a thinker and an innovator. It should be mentioned here that his son Charles Krulak successfully followed in his fathers footsteps and rose to become the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995-1999. Also as a thinker and an innovator he became famous for launching the theory of “The Strategic Corporal; Leadership in the Three Block War” (in *Marines Magazine*, January 1999).

It is 26 years since *First To Fight* was published. Yet, the present Commandant of the United States Marine Corps (USMC), General James T. Conway, directed in 2007 every member of the Corps, independent of whether he or she was an officer, non-commissioned officer or Marine, to read the book. The reasons behind general Conways directive are not hard to find.

To a certain extent the motives for reading this book have to do with the personality of the author. General Victor H. Krulak



was commissioned in 1934 and saw action in every U.S. Conflict between 1941 and 1968. His book is both a history of the Corps and an autobiography in which he offers his readers an insider’s chronicle of the U.S. Marines excellence on the battlefield based on their extraordinary esprit the corps. The book examines the foundation on which the Corps is built as well as its contribution to the nations wars. The author expresses what it means to become

and serve as a Marine and not at least how the Corps has maintained its outstanding reputation.

Being an integrated part of the Navy and the junior service in the U.S. military, the executive level of the Corps has historically been forced to fight for its survival. It seems fair to assume that the present Commandant, heading a Corps at war, is eager to keep his personnel focused on those core values that have traditionally been its organisational strength and the basis for its ability to survive in the sometimes hostile environment that the other services have managed to create.

When reading *First to Fight* it strikes the reviewer those similarities that, at least to some extent, exist between the development of our own small amphibious units starting back in the fifties and the much larger ones represented by the USMC. A close contact between the Swedish Coast Artillery and its successor; the Amphibious Corps with the U.S. Marines has contributed to an exchange of ideas and concepts.

Experimentation, success and failure are in *First to Fight* General Krulak's personally gained experiences and it should be emphasised that these views are worth reading also for a Swedish audience with a connection to our naval services. The book describes a vast number of amphib-

ious ideas, projects and concepts. Some successful, some less successful, but what the overarching result tells us is that those ideas, projects and concepts have created a world class amphibious system that forms an integrated and very much respected part of the U.S. 21st century war-fighting capability.

Another aspect of the book is that it provides its readers with lessons concerning the obligation, founded on a moral courage, to argue out from one's professional military judgement. The ability to back up one's own professional views with good arguments in order to choose the best available options when military force is requested by the nation's political leadership, is a core quality for lower-grade officers in relation to their superiors as well as for the top ranking officers, in their relation to the political leadership. In our times moral courage is as important as ever where General Krulak's book serves as a reminder of its relevance.

The reviewer is a Lieutenant Colonel serving at the National Defence University in Finland at the Department for Strategic and Defence Studies. He is a fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences and is the editor of its Proceedings and Journal.