



United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program

First to Fight Part VI Discussion Guide

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

“Whatever the form of combat, the genius of the Marine as a fighter has caused his superiors to place a great deal of confidence in him. They are convinced of his ability, to the point where they will offer unhesitatingly his commitment in an hour of crisis. More important, the American people will accept the offer with the confidence, born of long experience, that when a Marine is called upon, he will be ready and, when committed to a fight, that he may be depended upon to win.” (p.177)

LtGen Krulak explains that it is the Marines’ *“(a)daptability, initiative, and improvisation [that] are the true fabric of obedience, the ultimate in soldierly conduct.” (p.179)* These proven qualities, have repeatedly earned the trust and confidence as stated above, and are perhaps its greatest assets as a fighting force. In *The Fighters*, the author captures how the Marines proved to be prepared for an unconventional fight, flexible in their tactical approach to the mission and above all determined to win.

Chapter 12 unfolds with the Corps’ unique multifaceted approach to what it saw as a counterinsurgency mission in South Vietnam. LtGen Krulak details the flexibility and ingenuity required of the Marines involved in securing the safe hamlets and airfields, something that had been foreseen and trained for only months prior to arriving in Danang. The most significant element of the Marine approach had to do with looking at the people as an objective vice the traditional terrain/physical objectives although it ran contrary to the combatant commander, Army General Westmoreland.

In Chapter 13, the author presents differing strategies to resolve the Vietnam conflict in an effort to highlight *“two qualities that the Marines have always possessed in abundance, two indispensable qualities that our government failed to exhibit in the Vietnam crisis: courage and flexibility.” (p.200)* LtGen Krulak juxtaposes the predominantly Marine strategy, or inkblot strategy, with the Washington-endorsed strategy of seek and destroy excursions into the hinterlands of Vietnam.

Chapter 14 chronicles our presence in Khe Sanh. LtGen Krulak offers a frank discussion on the strategic differences surrounding this piece of terrain. The purpose however, is to again underline the Marines’ performance. Regardless of strategic disagreements or political infighting/maneuvering, the fact is *“(t)he Marines who went to Khe Sahn...were warriors, doing nothing more and nothing less than carrying out their orders.” (p.221)*





United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program

First to Fight Part VI Discussion Guide

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

Chapter 13 proved the most effective part of *The Fighters* for two reasons. First, the chapter is quite straightforward. LtGen Krulak lays out his viewpoint and eloquently justifies himself. Second, the point-counterpoint he offers with the opposing strategies underlines his assertion that Marines have been relied upon to accomplish any mission with success. While the Marine leadership did not agree with the strategy, they executed it and the Marines performed their duties with honor and dedication to winning the fight wherever it occurred.

In *The Fighters*, I believe LtGen Krulak effectively argues his points as noted above.

3. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission? Does the author validate these assumptions in the book?

LtGen Krulak assumes that the Marine Corps will continue to adapt, as it has in the past to whatever new, strange kind of war based upon "*principles twenty-five centuries old.*" (p.177) The validation of this assumption is unfolding now in our own time, as we again find ourselves looking to our past experiences, the Small Wars Manual, and applying our own ingenuity to fighting a counterinsurgency. The actions taking place right now validates the author's assumptions that we as a fighting force will pursue victory with honor regardless of the nature of the mission, battlefield or enemy.

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

As a Marine Corps officer, the example of personal and professional courage presented in *The Fighters* was very relevant. As Marines, we are directed to execute the mission, and as officers, we are often, but not always, given an opportunity to advise or contribute to the planning of the mission. It is necessary to speak up when given the opportunity, but this takes initiative and courage.

I believe there is a relevant lesson to be learned from the courage exhibited by LtGen Krulak and those who supported him in dissenting with the attritional strategy of pursuing the enemy into the jungles of Vietnam while allowing the unrestricted flow of war material from the ports. Unfortunately, the U.S. government was more willing to pay the price of American service members' lives than to conduct statesmanship with the intervening Soviet and Chinese governments.





United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program

First to Fight Part VI Discussion Guide

It is incumbent upon the military leadership to give unfettered advice to our policymakers via the proper routes (JCS, Combatant Commanders). Only through the combined application of diplomatic and military elements of national power can a realistic policy and successful strategy be employed and won.

5. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.

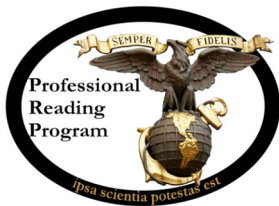
LtGen Krulak offers his conclusions quite eloquently. He concludes that although the Marine Corps is not necessary, its history and performance prove it is deeply desired by the American people. However, there are potential threats to its future due to a general decline in social standards and ethics (ie. quality of future Marines) and bureaucracy. While the strength of the Corps' history, traditions, standards and training will ensure generations of young Marines to come, it is the bureaucratic threat that is the greatest. He resolves to counter this threat with *"the one thing that impresses congressional members of all dispositions... performance."* (p. 225) And he reminds the reader that a key element to our future performance is the continued evolution of amphibious capabilities, and a nurturing of our naval identity.

6.a. With respect to the author's conclusions (either specified or implied), I/we accept or agree with the following:

I do agree that our country's ever-growing bureaucracy could threaten the future of the Corps one day when the economic outlook is not as optimistic, and there is not a clear and present danger from a powerful terrorist element, state or block of states threatening U.S. interests. Due to the nature of the global environment, however, it does not appear as though this might happen anytime soon.

Currently the Marine Corps is seeing a large growth in its overall size to an end strength of 202,000 active duty Marines. During this growth period, it will be especially important to maintain the standard of performance our country has come to expect from the Marine Corps. The Army has also increased its end strength and has recently come under fire for the quality of training and preparedness of new soldiers for combat. The potential for similar scrutiny exists for our Marines if they do not perform as expected. Regardless, the bottom line is the Marine Corps must continue to perform in a manner the country has come to expect, with honor and a warrior spirit.





United States Marine Corps
Professional Reading Program

First to Fight Part VI Discussion Guide

6.b. With respect to the author's conclusions (either specified or implied), I/we do not agree with the following:

I agree that societal standards can ebb and flow with each generation, but I don't necessarily see this as a threat to the Corps' continued existence. Rather, the young men and women who identify with the Marine Corps' standards, reputation or sense of being part of something larger than yourself will be that much more resolute in joining this Band of Brothers.

As a result of the personnel increases noted above, the Army has been criticized for relaxing standards and an increase of acceptable waivers for enlistees. The Marine Corps must remain vigilant in its efforts to attract the best and brightest young men and women to serve.

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

This book has changed the way I view Marine Corps history. I believe that when I look at the history of our Corps, I will apply the timeline laid out by LtGen Krulak. I will think of when the Marines were allowed to sit at the table with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and when Marines were undervalued, and underpaid, by our elected officials and when they were treasured, and preserved, by a powerful and active few. I have always worn the title of Marine with pride and humility and will continue to do so.

7.b. This book made an unfavorable impression on me for the following reasons:

N/A

Submitted by: A-M Theriot

