

# Brute

## LtGen Victor H. 'Brute' Krulak, 1913–2008

by Robert Coram

**>Mr. Coram is the author of 12 books, including *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War.* He is writing a biography of LtGen Krulak.**

When Victor Harold Krulak entered the U.S. Naval Academy, he stood 5 foot 4 inches and weighed 120 pounds, a size that earned him the derisive nickname "Brute." The nickname stayed with Krulak, but in a career spanning from 1934 until 1968 changed to one of great respect. When Krulak died he was considered one of the most important officers in the history of the Marine Corps—a giant of the Corps. From the time he was a first lieutenant, Krulak had an influence far out of proportion to his rank. His name is welded to the course of American history throughout the tumultuous middle years of the 20th century.

Krulak was in Shanghai in 1937 when the second Sino-Japanese war broke out. When he received word of a proposed Japanese amphibious landing, he and a young naval officer sailed a tugboat into the middle of the Japanese landing force. Flying the American flag, Krulak's tugboat moved close enough to take pictures of the Japanese drop bow landing craft. When Krulak returned to Quantico he became a member of then-BGen Holland M. Smith's staff, and he made sure that Andrew Higgins installed a drop bow on his landing craft.

Krulak was 30 years old when he went through jump school at Camp Gillespie, CA, to become a Paramarine in World War II. In late 1943 he led the 2d Parachute Battalion on a diver-

sionary raid of Choiseul in what were then called the British Solomon Islands. A young Navy lieutenant named John F. Kennedy was skipper of one of the patrol torpedo boats that protected his withdrawal from Choiseul. The raid was so successful that Krulak received the Navy Cross from ADM William Halsey. Krulak was then-MajGen Lemuel C. Shepherd's operations officer when the Marines invaded Okinawa.

It was after the war that Krulak made his most important contribution to the Marine Corps. Today many Marines know very little about the "Chowder Society" and the bitter unification battle of the post-World War II years. Krulak was the most important member of the Chowder Society and had it not been for his efforts, the Marine Corps would either have been subsumed by the Army and Air Force or would have been reduced to an insignificant status. The crucial moment of the unification fight was the "Bended Knee Speech," delivered to a Senate committee by then-Commandant, Gen A.A. Vandegrift. It was one of the most powerful and effective speeches ever delivered by a military man to Congress. Krulak wrote most of the speech and all of the grand passages. He also wrote much of both the *National Security Act of 1947* and the 1952 amendment that made the Marine Corps the only branch of the U.S. military whose manpower minimums are set by law. Even while the unification fight was proceeding, Krulak played a prominent role in developing the tactical doctrine for the employ-



(Official Marine Corps photo by MSgt Bender.)

ment of helicopters. The doctrine he wrote far exceeded the capability of helicopters of that time.

In 1964 Krulak became Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific and was instrumental in creating combined action platoons in Vietnam.

Krulak was known as a hard man who was not reluctant to make tough decisions. He was a man of brilliant intellect and ability to see over the horizon. From the beginning of his career until the very end, he spoke with blunt candor to his superiors. In 1967 when he was frontrunner among those being mentioned as the next Commandant, Krulak confronted President Lyndon B. Johnson over how Johnson was micromanaging the war in Vietnam and not letting the military do its job. For that act of great moral courage, Krulak was denied the Commandancy and his fourth star.

To the very end of his life, the Marine Corps was Brute Krulak's first and greatest priority. His love and pride in the Corps are on every page of his book, *First to Fight* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1984), read today by every Marine. It is not widely known, but all royalties from the book are donated to the Marine Corps University Foundation.

