

Eulogy for Lieutenant General Victor “Brute” Krulak

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MCAS Miramar

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When General Charles Krulak asked me to be here today his instructions were simple: Be brief, or the Brute will come down and rip your head off.

I believe that to be true, so, like the General, I hope it is short but powerful!

When I first met Brute Krulak, I found him a man of great self-control, a man not given to revealing much of himself. So I went to his older son, Victor Jr., and said: “What moves your father? What does he feel passionate about?”

“The Marine Corps,” he said.

For Brute Krulak, it was ALWAYS about his beloved corps. He was devoted to his wife Amy and to his three sons — Victor, William and Charles — but the Marine Corps always came first.

He served thirty-four years, and if one word were chosen to represent those years, it would be INTEGRITY. He always did the right thing, no matter the opposition, no matter the cost.

Let me go back more than sixty years to give you an example.

During World War II, the Army began making plans to dismantle the Marine Corps in the post-war drawdown.

To stop this threat, a handful of Marine Officers formed what came to be known as the Chowder Society. Lieutenant Colonel Brute Krulak, because of his soaring intellect, his boundless energy and his remarkable abilities as a writer, was the most important member of that group.

Opposing the Chowder Society were a number of brother Marines, the President, several members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Generals Marshall and Eisenhower and powerful members of Congress.

But the Brute never lacked self-confidence, especially when he thought he was right. And, by the way ... he was always right.

Brute Krulak ran into General Eisenhower at a party, and the General said: "Just what is it that you Marines want?"

The Brute looked him in the eye and said: "The right to fight for our country, sir."

Read the Bended Knee Speech, the turning point of the unification fight. Read the National Security Act of 1947 and the 1952 amendments. Think about the fact that the Marine Corps is the only branch of the U.S. military whose size and manpower is protected by law, to ensure our nation always has a force most ready when the nation is least ready. Then thank Brute Krulak.

Much of General Krulak's reputation has to do with his toughness. He lived up to his nickname. He was a hard man who could make hard decisions. His candor to his superiors often bordered on impertinence. Colonels have retired rather than serve under him. But he was also a man of great compassion.

When he was Commanding General here at MCRD, the wife of one of his drill instructors went to Balboa to deliver her baby. The baby was stillborn. She was in great pain but was not attended to for some time, and then she was placed in a ward with the mothers of healthy newborns. Her husband came to comfort her, but it was not visiting hours and he was turned away.

The drill instructor called the Officer of the day who said: "Stand by that telephone." If there was one thing the Brute could do, it was light a fire under people who were not doing their jobs. Less than ten minutes later Major General Krulak called the Corporal, told him his wife had

been transferred and to go to her side. When the Corporal arrived, he found Captains, Commanders, and senior nurses waiting, all very solicitous. The standard of care had greatly improved for that young Marine's wife. The Corporal retired as a Master Sergeant, and to this day General Krulak is his hero.

Some of you may have wondered why we are gathered in San Diego rather than in Washington, and why the General will be buried at Fort Rosecrans rather than at Arlington.

When General Krulak was at MCRD, he set the standard for community involvement by a Commander. After he retired, the General and Mrs. Krulak lived in San Diego for more than forty years, longer than they lived anywhere else. He was on the board of the San Diego Zoo for most of that time, and the zoo has never had a more vigorous, more influential board member. For almost a decade he was President of Copley News Service and a prolific columnist.

Several weeks ago the General said he wanted to be buried here. "I have a civic responsibility to the people of San Diego," he said.

It was about duty.

His life was also about moral courage.

In 1967, Lieutenant General Krulak was Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and first among those being considered for Commandant of the Marine Corps. He had everything to lose when he went to the White House and confronted President Johnson over how the war was being prosecuted and how too many restraints were being placed upon the military.

The outlines of that incident are well-known. When I asked the General for more details, to tell me what happened next, he said: "President Johnson stood up, placed his hand in the small of my back and ushered me out of the Oval Office."

In the past year we have read of retired Generals publicly criticizing the President over the war, but it should be remembered they are RETIRED, and they were not looking the President in the eye when they criticized him. They had nothing to lose. General Krulak did the right thing. And there is always a price to pay for doing the right thing. He was not appointed Commandant. He did not receive his fourth star.

But he did receive something that has eluded President Johnson: a lasting reputation as a man of integrity.

Time has a way of eroding a man's accomplishments, of turning his life — along with his body — to dust.

That will not happen with General Victor Krulak.

He is among those very few men who have the honor of being known as giants of the Corps. When those men are listed, the name Brute Krulak is first.

It shines the brightest.

And it will be the most enduring.