## Think Tank, Do Tank

# The Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity

Donald M. Bishop

On 29 March 2019, a ceremony at Marine Corps University (MCU) marked the opening and full operational capability of the Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity. The conception, birth, assignment of permanent staff, funding, and now-robust schedule of activities of the Krulak Center came after some years of gestation, providing a case study of organizational change.

The Marine Corps has long valued innovation and creativity, but the impetus to establish such a center had its origins in the decennial accreditation process of MCU by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). This article looks at the early conceptualization of a Center for Applied Creativity (CAC), the organizational starts and stalls, the thoughts about goals and organization that came together for the Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity, and finally the initial years of its activity.

# **Innovation and Creativity in the Marine Corps**

he basic series of 12 Marine Corps doctrinal publications, its "Bibles," so to speak, give frequent nods to creativity and innovation as keys to success on the battlefield—Warfighting, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1; Marine Corps Operations, MCDP 1-0; Strategy, MCDP 1-1; Campaigning, MCDP 1-2; Tactics, MCDP 1-3; Intelligence, MCDP 2; Expeditionary Operations, MCDP 3; Logistics, MCDP 4; Planning, MCDP 5; Command and Control, MCDP 6; Leading Marines, MCDP 6-11; and Learning, MCDP 7.1

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A recent listing of the most important innovations ever adopted by the Marine Corps offered nine examples.<sup>2</sup> Some were organizational and technological, such as:

- the triangular rifle squad of 13 Marines
- the Higgins boat
- the development of amphibious warfare in the interwar period and its application in World War II and Korea
- adoption of helicopters for vertical envelopment, logistics, medical evacuation, close air support, and C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance)

Others recognized elements of the Marine Corps' institutional ethos and mindset, such as:

- the Corps' warrior culture
- · developing good leaders who think, act, and communicate
- institutional self-awareness
- concept development, experimentation, and implementation
- the consolidation of Marine Corps schools in Quantico

Examining the list, Lieutenant General Victor "Brute" H. Krulak (1913–2008) played important roles in several of the innovations. Assigned to Shanghai, China, in 1937, then-First Lieutenant Krulak observed small Japanese landing boats with bow ramps—a design feature that was ultimately incorporated into the Higgins boats used in Allied amphibious landings in all theaters during World War II.<sup>3</sup> After the war, now Lieutenant Colonel Krulak took a personal role in promoting the innovative use of the helicopter in Marine Corps operations. Krulak's 1984 memoir, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, has been required reading in the Marine Corps for many years.<sup>4</sup> Two of its six chapters profile innovators and improvisors.

The professional military education (PME) enterprise for the Marine Corps is concentrated at MCU, located at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, the "Crossroads of the Marine Corps." Congress gave MCU the authority to grant advanced degrees in 1994, so long as the university "is accredited by the appropriate civilian academic accrediting agency or organization to award the degree, as determined by the Secretary of Education." Currently, the three degrees awarded by MCU are the master of military studies, master of operational studies, and master of strategic studies.

The accrediting body is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, which requires each institution "to develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)." This QEP is "based upon a

comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment for supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. It is used to outline a course of action for institutional improvement by addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional quality, with special attention to student learning."

MCU's accreditation was renewed by SACSCOCC in 2005 for a period of 10 years. Anticipating the 2015 reaffirmation process, MCU leaders considered themes for its QEP. In 2013, MCU was also mindful of the recent memorandum by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Martin E. Dempsey, on "Desired Leader Attributes for Joint Force 2020." General Dempsey's sixth attribute was to "think critically and strategically in applying joint warfighting principles and concepts to joint operations." MCU also drew on its institutional memory, consulting the U.S. Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education: 2006 Study and Findings (a.k.a. The Wilhelm Report).

On 13 August 2013, MCU began developing QEP proposals, culminating in the January 2015 approval and publication of the QEP entitled *Strengthening Leadership Through Enhanced Creative Problem Solving*. It included the formation of a CAC. The Marine Corps University Foundation would provide bridge funding for two years until MCU obtained approval to hire a permanent director. The university's statutory Board of Visitors appointed by the secretary of defense, which included among its members university presidents and distinguished academics, was briefed on the QEP and the planned CAC at meetings in 2015. Members provided feedback.<sup>10</sup>

In March 2015, the SACSCOC's on-site review committee usefully summarized the QEP's aim: "[to] enhance students' creative problem solving skills." These skills were to be essential for warfighters. The report of the accrediting agency favorably viewed the MCU report's findings in each section, including institutional process, the focus of the plan, institutional capability for the initiation, implementation and completion of the plan, broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies, and assessment. The accreditors noted with approval that MCU had determined a "foundational definition" based on the thinking of Arthur J. Cropley, Punya Mishra, Danah Henriksen, the Deep-Play Research Group, Michael Mumford, and Sigrid Gustafson. MCU had also developed goals, objectives, and assessment measures adapted from the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Creativity VALUE Rubric, which "is intended to help faculty assess creative thinking in a broad range of transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary work samples or collections of work."

The academics in SACSCOC noted, however, some challenges. The director of the planned CAC required both soft and hard skills—"experience with and understanding of the creativity literature, comfort with associated psychometrics, competence in faculty development and pedagogical technique, etc."

Also, the director needed to be able to identify "champions for creative problem solving among the faculty at each school." <sup>14</sup>

On 23 July 2015, MCU created the Brute Krulak Center for Applied Creativity (BKCAC) as a "general support center to the University's schools," calling it the "centerpiece of the University's 2015–2020 Quality Enhancement Plan." In August, MCU submitted to SACSCOC a revised 93-page plan. The QEP related to the brainstorming, refining, and implementation phases of MCU's planning process, and it addressed curriculum development, faculty development, and integrated learning opportunities. <sup>15</sup> SACSCOC accepted the revised QEP and reaffirmed MCU's accreditation in December 2015 for 10 years. <sup>16</sup>

At this stage, the plan proposed an MCU Center for Applied Creativity, led by a director and deputy. It would partner with the MCU faculty; the development and outreach coordinator; the director of institutional research, assessment, and planning; and the director of the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL).<sup>17</sup>

## The Plan Meets Organizational Realities

The MCU plan contemplated that the Marine Corps University Foundation could provide interim funding for two years, after which operations and maintenance funds would be available. <sup>18</sup> The Marine Corps University Foundation, thanks to the generosity of California philanthropist Donald L. Bren, already funded faculty chairs in priority areas. In 2015, the foundation created an additional Bren Chair for Creative Problem Solving. The new chair would be "the lead individual for the standup of the Center for Applied Creativity." <sup>19</sup>

In 2015, Dr. Benjamin M. Jensen—at that time working for the Army Chief of Staff on the Army Futures concept—prepared a *QEP Implementation Plan* brief. It opened with these premises: "You don't teach creativity. You design spaces where MCU students can be creative." Jensen saw the need to "create a hub for developing future concepts." His plan, moreover, called to "reinvest in the profession of arms and the rich tradition of creative problem-solving techniques: staff rides, war games, and decision games."<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Jensen envisioned a process to improve PME; provide an environment to foster continuous learning; integrate state-of-the-art information and education technologies and facilities; and strengthen the university's outreach, research, stewardship, publishing, and conferencing. He believed in the connectivity of the MCU schools with Commandant of the Marine Corps fellows detailed to universities and policy institutes, including the MCU Red Team, the History Division, the Lejeune Leadership Institute, and the Middle East Studies program. He stated that the "center of gravity" must be a "willing faculty." He laid out a concept of operations and a timetable for the first year.<sup>21</sup>

Jensen became the inaugural Donald L. Bren Chair of Creative Problem

Solving—and director of the CAC—on 10 August 2015. He worked on assessments; an implementation plan; outreach to other military colleges and schools and civilian universities; and use of experts in the field of creative studies and research. Other initiatives included wargaming, a strategic communication competition, enhanced staff rides, and conceptualization of a PhD program intended to develop senior strategic planners for the Marine Corps.<sup>22</sup> Strengthening Dr. Jensen's recommendation to reinvest in the profession of arms, MCU gained the permission of the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles C. Krulak, for the center to be named after his father.

When Jensen moved to a Title 10 faculty position at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Dr. Jeffrey Nadaner was selected as the next Bren Chair of Creative Problem Solving. His 5 October 2016 contract with the foundation stated he was to be "a resident scholar to serve as Director of the Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity." Major Robin J. Arant, assigned as deputy from July 2016 to September 2018, bridged the transition.

The QEP had been accepted by SACSCOC, which would review how MCU implemented it in 2020. Jensen, Nadaner, and senior MCU leaders soon realized, however, that writing out goals and a plan in theory had been relatively easy compared to its implementation. Those who hoped for creativity and innovation checklists—or TTPs (tactics, techniques, and procedures)—were to be disappointed.

Because Bren Chairs are not Title 10 personnel but rather employees of the Marine Corps University Foundation, they have no authority to commit funds or make staffing and hiring decisions. In their 2014 review, the educators in SACSCOC had noted that the director of the planned CAC required both soft and hard skills that were described earlier, but they had not anticipated the issue of authorities to hire and expand.

Ordinary organizational dynamics also came to bear. Such a large agenda could not be implemented by one Bren Chair/director alone. Determining how to assess intangible skills such as creativity and innovation of students took longer than expected. QEP partners were asked to include additional tasks to already full schedules. While the SACSCOC review had noted that "identifying champions for creative problem solving among the faculty at each school is essential," the directors and faculty members at MCU's schools had fixed academic calendars and schedules. It is not easy to rapidly integrate new initiatives into finite curricula, teaching time, and faculty workloads. Further, finding office space for the new center had not been integrated into the initial facilities planning. But most critically, with the ordinary rotations of key personnel came the loss of institutional knowledge.

Both Jensen and Nadaner had gained momentum despite these obstacles. In meetings at MCU's constituent schools, they socialized the new focus on

creativity and innovation. Here and there, key staff had not focused on the QEP when it was being written, and others, new to their positions, had to be introduced to its goals and implementation. The two successive directors worked with MCU's senior leaders and the schools to overcome misgivings and to harmonize different concepts, goals, and approaches.

It was clear from the beginning that progress toward the QEP goals would require assessment and evaluation, and this proved a major challenge. An early concept was that the measurement piece could be performed by contractors, but costs would be high, and members of the faculty were the subject matter experts. The formation of a crosscutting university team of evaluators, vice presidents, directors, and faculty worked through the theoretical issues and the choice of assessment tools. Dozens of faculty members, using evaluations that measured artifacts (papers written by students at MCU schools) against creativity rubrics benchmarked past and current performance. The early ratings indicated that one evaluation tool should be discarded in favor of another.<sup>24</sup> The assessment task was aided by a new director of institutional policy, assessment, and planning, Kathleen Kuehn, who joined MCU in the autumn of 2017.

The aphorism that "history is just one damn thing after another" alludes to how the constant churn of events and complications can crowd out even the best initiatives. In this regard, a new president of the United States was elected in November 2016, and he was inaugurated the following January. The new secretary of defense, retired Marine Corps General James N. Mattis, provided new energy to initiate changes in the Department of Defense, the Armed Services, and the Joint and Service PME enterprises. Establishing a new center was just one of many top priorities.

By the summer of 2017, MCU realized that implementing the QEP required more personnel resources than originally conceived, and it had developed a tentative plan to address shortfalls in the artifact review and assessment. The new president of Marine Corps University, Brigadier General William J. Bowers, initiated an Operational Planning Team to conduct a full review of the QEP, to identify requirements, document the status, and make recommendations for implementation.

On 18 December 2017, based on the recommendations of the QEP, Brigadier General Bowers issued *Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 1*. He bluntly stated, "In the two years following approval of the QEP, insufficient and sporadic progress was made in implementing the approved plan. There are no records of baseline assessments for assessment year (AY) 14–15 being performed, key implementation milestones were not met, and desired resources did not materialize." However, he noted the positive development of the approval of "Information" as the seventh warfighting function, which provided a unique opportunity. He issued *FRAGO 1* to get the QEP "back on track." <sup>25</sup>

His order outlined remedies to some of the roadblocks. For example, "the newly renamed Brute Krulak Center for Innovation and Creativity (BKCIC) will be resourced to include addition of designated personnel and the hiring of a new Title 10 Director." This was a conscious decision to reallocate a vacant position, accepting risk in student service and registrar functions to ensure that the Krulak Center would be established and functional. Mindful of the rapidly evolving technical aspects of war, he reiterated that naming the center after General Krulak emphasized the "connection with Marine Corps warfighting philosophy." MCU's vice president for academic affairs would foster continued support from the Marine Corps University Foundation. Once hired, the Krulak Center's director's tasks would include conducting the QEP's plan for an Innovation Summit.<sup>26</sup>

## Nothing Makes the Horse So Fat . . .

As Plutarch said, "nothing makes the horse so fat as the king's eye." A little more than eight months later, Brigadier General Bowers issued *FRAGO 2*, judging that "MCU has now 'caught up' in implementing the QEP." He pointed to the establishment of a QEP Implementation Team, validation of assessments through AY 17–18 using assessment rubrics, a larger BKCIC in new work spaces, the first Innovation Summit, and the integration of operations in the information environment (OIE) into MCU curricula.<sup>28</sup>

Valerie A. Jackson was named director of the Krulak Center in July 2018. The center's staff was rounded out by Marine Corps officers—a deputy director, operations officer, and technical information operations officer. In 2019, they were joined by MCU's two noted experts in Middle East Studies, and a bold insignia was designed for the center. The center's staff worked with the graphics and display experts at the National Museum of the Marine Corps to provide blue-ribbon facilities.

By that time, the Marine Corps University Foundation assented to gathering all of its Donald Bren Chairs—Non-Western Strategic Thought, Armed Politics, Strategic Communications, Cyber Security and Conflict, Applied Creativity, and Great Power Competition—in new offices in the Krulak Center, occupying prime space in MCU's Alfred M. Gray Marine Corps Research Center. Bowers called the Bren Chairs "general support artillery."<sup>29</sup> A Title 10 chair of Energy Studies also joined the center.

The role of the new Krulak Center in the overall QEP process was defined in its establishing charter, signed on 1 November 2018. The charter stated that the center would be "a research support center," an "incubator of academic innovation and mentation," and "a critical and creative thinking Center and integrator." The charter confirmed support to students as the new center's "main and primary focus," providing a place to "discuss, debate, and explore topics of

their interest while providing a state of the art collaborative workspace for their use." The charter integrated concepts developed earlier by Dr. Jensen and Dr. Nadaner. The important tasks outlined in the charter were integration, wargaming, professional writing, creation of a website, a lecture series, the Innovation Summit, and coordination and synergy with other Marine Corps "innovation/futures initiatives." <sup>30</sup>

A formal opening ceremony was held on 27 March 2019. Cutting the ribbon were General Krulak and the Krulak Center's director, Valerie Jackson. Also in attendance were former Secretary of the Navy and former senator from Virginia, John W. Warner; the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Alfred M. Gray Jr.; the 31st Commandant, General James L. Jones; and retired Lieutenant General Carlton W. Fulford Jr. This event marked the center reaching full operational capability.

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The center's debut came in November with a wargame that tested escalation theory in an OIE scenario. Then-Command and Staff College professor Benjamin Jensen and Bren Chairs Brandon Valeriano and J. D. Work guided the exercise. The three later repeated the wargame for Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Information Groups. An Energy and Innovation Scholars Program was launched with a field trip to the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado; the Rocky Mountain Institute in Basalt, Colorado; and the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum in Denver, Colorado. A student essay contest was linked with staff rides to Pennsylvania and New Jersey to examine the 1776 Battle of Trenton. Bren Chairs taught electives at the Command and Staff College in January 2019, and they joined and made presentations at many conferences and PME schools. Director Jackson and Bren Chair J. D. Work prepared Marines from the 4th Civil Affairs Group for their participation in NATO's Trident Juncture exercise, held in Iceland and Norway in late 2018.<sup>31</sup>

The center's operations officer, Major Timothy Riemann, offered a pioneering and highly lauded elective course at the Command and Staff College called Where Good Ideas Come From. This course had an unorthodox syllabus that featured readings selected by students and course discussions on innovation, leadership, ethics and philosophy, science, the mind, classical fiction and poetry, the future world, and contemporary issues. The course departed from the usual instructor-to-student model. Rather, it provided students with the ability to design the course syllabus of things they wanted to learn or read.

#### **Initiatives of the Krulak Center**

#### **Innovation Summits**

Phase I of the Innovation Summit, convened on 27 March, included a futurist panel—Harlan K. Ullman, Kara Frederick, and Nate Flick. The major topics of discussion were the effects of cyber technologies, artificial intelligence, and 5G technology on the future of war. A number of Marine Corps organizations and companies in the private sector organized booths and exhibits. Phase II opened with a lecture by retired Marine Corps General John R. Allen, now president of the Brookings Institution, on "America's Strategic Challenges in the 21st Century." Afterward, eight Marine Corps PME students gave presentations on creative problem solving for real-world topics, such as artificial intelligence, complex thinking, tactical agility, swarms of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), and development of innovation in Marine Corps units.

### Wargaming

Wargames are now regularly hosted at the Krulak Center. In addition to the wargames mentioned above, the Krulak Center hosted the Marine Corps War College's global wargame. Students engaged three simultaneous operational conflicts in Poland, Taiwan, and Korea.<sup>32</sup> The hallmark wargame for 2019 was MCU's annual Sea Dragon competition. In 2019, teams came from the School of Advanced Warfighting, the Command and Staff College, the Expeditionary Warfare School, and the College of Enlisted Military Education. International students participated with Marine Corps classmates. This wargame focused the teams on fighting a futuristic Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), employing concepts such as manned/unmanned teaming, artificial intelligence, and swarming.<sup>33</sup>

#### **Essay Contests**

The center now enhances the Marine Corps University Foundation's annual Thomas Lord Charitable Trust Lecture Series with an essay contest. The theme of the second lecture, in December 2018, was "Emerging Technologies and How They Are Shaping and Defining Tomorrow's Battlefield." The essay prize was presented by retired Chief of Naval Operations Jonathan W. Greenert, two retired Commandants of the Marine Corps, Alfred Gray and James Amos, MCUF President and CEO Richard P. Mills, and MCU President Bowers.

#### **Publications**

Thinking about the future of the Marine Corps was stimulated by the publication of future visions in graphic story form, published by the Marine Corps University Press as *Destination Unknown*. A workshop at the Krulak Center that brought together Marine Corps illustrators with a graphic novel artist

helped bring the project to fruition. In 2019, an essay contest resulted in another publication, *The U.S. Marine Corps Postmortem: 2019 Essay Contest*, which gathered stories written by Marines looking at issues that might hypothetically cause the Corps to be dissolved in 2040.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Lectures**

From a long list of lectures and presentations hosted or organized by the Krulak Center, space permits mention of only a few. The Donald Bren Chair of Non-Western Strategic Thought, Dr. Christopher Yung, moderated the fourth General Graves B. Erskine Lecture, focused on naval expeditionary power. The Commandant, General Robert B. Neller, was joined by Admiral John M. Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations. David J. Snowden, founder and chief scientific officer of Cognitive Edge and director of the Cynefin Centre at the University of Wales, addressed complexity theory in November 2018. Mike Weeks presented a seminar on peak performance coaching in high-pressure workplaces and environments. The Latvian ambassador to the United States and the Latvian defense attaché spoke on "Securing Transatlantic Alliance: U.S. Role in the Baltics" on 12 February 2019. Dr. Williamson Murray spoke on military innovation at the Krulak Center on 27 February. On 5 March 2019, Finland's military attaché to the United States spoke to MCU staff and students on Finland's security challenges and its responses to threats. Libby Liu, president and chief executive officer of the Open Technology Fund and former president of Radio Free Asia, spoke to students and faculty on "Communicating with Closed Societies" on 15 January 2020.

### **Special Events**

A few of the Krulak Center's special events included a meeting of the MCU Energy and Innovation Scholars Program—focused on project prototyping—with Lieutenant General Charles G. Chiarotti, deputy commandant for installations and logistics. There was also a December 2018 workshop on academic publications chaired by Donald Bren Chair of Great Power Competition Dr. Chris Harmon. Finally, Dr. Chris Yung, working with the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, hosted a China symposium in January 2019.

### **Lessons Learned**

What lessons might be derived from this narrative? Large institutional changes that derive from new fundamental thinking cannot be implemented by a few individuals notionally partnering with others whose regular duties are still required. Success requires dedicated and hand-picked staff—and streams of regular funding. The rigidity of the appropriations process means, however, that gaining regular funding in any U.S. government organization takes years, not

months. This reality can cause holdups for any large initiative. It is difficult to set necessary staffing and funding in motion ahead of conceptual planning. The willingness of the Marine Corps University Foundation to establish chairs and fund individual initiatives, which allowed MCU to launch the CAC, was an indispensable contribution. The accrediting agency played a key role in stimulating MCU to consider how to enhance educational quality.

Maneuver warfare and the desired traits of innovation in warfighting are synonymous. It is not possible for creativity to be taught with a "check off the box" mindset. Rather, it is necessary to create an environment where seemingly disparate ideas and experiences can collide and mesh in novel ways. Marine Corps University had the raw materials for enhancing creative problem solving in its students, but the students lacked a place where they could reveal the innate side of their warfighting mentality. The Krulak Center provides that much-needed space.

That the Marine Corps' PME enterprise is centered at Quantico—confirming the early visions of Generals John A. Lejeune, John C. Breckinridge, Ben Hebard Fuller, John H. Russell Jr., Robert E. Hogaboom, and Alfred M. Gray Jr.—was an intangible enabler of progress.

It is a reality that military commands and institutions must constantly integrate new demands and initiatives from senior leadership. Indeed, a certain level of organizational turbulence, even turmoil, is an ordinary and normal feature of defense organizations. As of this writing, Marine Corps units and staffs are fully engrossed by the 2019 *Commandant's Planning Guidance*; General David Berger has forcefully set in motion fundamental changes to the way Marines will fight. At the same time, MCU is responding to the Department of the Navy's 2018 *Education for Seapower* study that recommended the creation of a chief learning officer for the department.<sup>36</sup> Sustaining attention to initiatives set in motion by a 10-year accreditation sequence will always prove a substantial challenge. This may indicate that planning for the next five-year visit must begin as soon as the last adjourns.

Last but not least, the greatest lesson we learned was: do not expect innovation to be easy.

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