

June 23, 2003

Dear Chuck,

Congratulations on your website www.marineswwii.com. This is an excellent forum for Marine veterans to account for that epic time when so many gave their all. I particularly want to thank you for the information you posted about my late father, Lt. Col. John A. Butler who led 1/27 on Iwo Jima until he was killed in action on 4 Mar 1945. The original information you received about Col. Butler and his family, primarily from Morey and some from me had a few minor inaccuracies which were included in the website story "Beyond Valor." Your portrayal of his background, leadership, and character and the impact his loss had on my mother and his children can only be added to. He was an outstanding Marine officer who left a legacy with his family. The story of my mother "Honey Gal" as his jeep was named is one for the ages. She will soon be 88 and is now at an assisted living facility a stone's throw away from my sister in Kansas. Her eyes still light up when she recalls an event with my father in their brief but enchanting life together.

My dad, who was born in New Orleans, met my mother at a cousin's watermelon party when he was home on leave in his last year at the Academy. For him it was clearly love at first sight. She came to June week with his family for the special graduation event at the Academy. This led to an engagement, which became a two-year wait before they were married in New Orleans in June 1936. Marine officers, during that time, were not permitted to get married until they had two years in service. During this waiting time when they mostly just wrote each other, Dad completed basic school and reported to Panama for sea duty with the "banana fleet." In "Beyond Valor" you mention that Chesty Puller was one of his instructors at basic school. I may have been the source of that information, and it is likely incorrect. General Puller was an instructor at basic in 1936, but my Dad had finished by that time. In any case it was an interesting time in the Corps and there were some future Corps notables in that '34-'35 basic school class, including "Brute" Krulak, John Condon and Frank Tharin. Condon, who was a close friend of my Dad, was also my godfather. He was an accomplished Marine aviator and

retired as a Lt. General. As a Major on Guadalcanal in January 1943, Condon wrote the OP Plan for the take down of Admiral Yamamoto, which was carried out by Arm P-38's operating from the "Cactus" airbase on Guadalcanal. Frank Tharin was one of the famous four Wildcat pilots defending Wake Island. He survived the war as a POW and went on to serve in a number of aviation billets including CG of the 3rd MAW. Krulak, as you know, was the father a future commandant. He commanded a Para-Marine Bn at Choesiul, was CG FMFPAC, and in my opinion, was one of the few ranking officers in the Vietnam era that truly understood the enemy and what we should have done to protect South Vietnam. Another member of this class of outstanding Marines was Floyd Parks who commanded VMF 221 at Midway Island and was lost in the air against overwhelming Japanese aircraft. Parks was awarded a posthumous Navy Cross and had a destroyer named after him. My dad, Condon, Krulak, Parks and Tharin were all USNA '34 classmates.

Dad was assigned to the Memphis and the Trenton during his sea duty period. This duty took him to nearly every port of call in the Caribbean, an area in which he became an expert. He became fluent in Spanish and this led to Naval intelligence assignments in the Latin American section and later assignment as an attaché in the Dominican Republic.

One of his early mentors during this period was Capt. George O'Shea. As a young lieutenant O'Shea led a Marine patrol into Sandino's Nicaraguan stronghold. This first large-scale direct action with the popular bandit chief earned O'Shea a Navy Cross. O'Shea was my sister's godfather and periodically visited the family after the war. Another mentor was Capt. Earl Piper, who went on to be G-4 of the 4th Marine Division at Iwo. Piper was at the gravesite when Dad was buried on Iwo Jima. He wrote my mother a beautiful letter of condolence and grief for the loss. Recently his son, a retired Marine and Vietnam vet, contacted me with assistant from his old radio operator who lives in Tampa. Earl Piper, Jr. sent me the photo of my Dad's burial with Col. Piper and Padre Calkins attending at the gravesite, as well as some old photos of Mom and Dad taken in Panama. All this speaks volumes about the Marine Corps family.

Presently I am writing an account of "Remembering My Father." This is largely the story of the Butler family and my journey from that sad day when the family, then living in Coronado, received the news that Dad had been killed in action. Dad may have been physically lost, but his spirit and memory have been with us every step of the way! I am presently attempting to write about it. I have a draft of over 30 pages, but it needs further work and corrections.

I would like to update you on the Butler family as well as make some corrections on the information you received from my brother Morey many years ago. My sister, Mary Jo Steger, lives in Kansas with her husband George, a retired U.S. Army Colonel who teaches at a small Catholic college near their home in Leavenworth. My mother lives nearby in an assisted living facility. Several years ago Mom moved from Florida to Kansas to be near and with my sister. At 88 years of age "Honey Gal" is moving ever closer to that great reunion with Col. Butler. Her eyes light up anytime she recalls the life she shared with him, so I am sure the Marines guarding Heaven's Gate will be alerting my Dad of her arrival. Morey is still motivating young kids in ROTC at Harrison High School in Gulfport. His five boys are grown and Morey is now twice a granddad. His wife, Jeanette is scheduled for back surgery this summer and we are all pulling for a successful outcome. Clint has retired to a farm in Tennessee. He has 3 daughters and is now 6 times a granddad! As a Marine Clint was a communications specialist and was with the 3rd Marine Division Headquarters in Vietnam from October 65 to November 66. He was farmed out to other units as a communications troubleshooter and participated in some large operations including Operation Harvest Moon in December 65. Clint left the Marine Corp as a Sergeant in 67. He began a career in insurance and has achieved considerable success. I am medically retired on disability. In December 96 I was diagnosed with a large, life-threatening brain tumor pressing on my brain stem. It was a non-malignant tumor, but in a bad location. The surgery at the VA Hospital was largely successful, but a number of problems followed. I developed complications, which resulted in multiple surgeries, and then disability. Luckily, after a year I began to improve and manage. I do not presently work, continue on disability, and still have to monitor the residual tumor as it does have potential for slow regrowth. That said, I have

had time to visit my grandchildren, some of whom live out West and I have also taken over cooking and grocery shopping because my wife is employed full time as a Librarian in a middle school. I also do meaningful volunteer work at the VA hospital and Vet Center and serve on our condo board as president. This is about all I can handle at this time.

The summary of my career, which you received, from Morey was accurate except for the time I was in Vietnam. Shortly after I arrived in Japan in May of 1964, where I became team commander for the 7th CI team, I applied for a temporary 30 day TAD assignment to an Advisory Team in Vietnam. This program, known as OJT, was set up to give some selected Marine officers in FMFPAC with a primary 0302 (infantry officer) MOS some combat exposure with Vietnamese Army units then engaged with Viet Cong guerillas units. I was selected and spent July/August 1964 with a battalion in the 2nd ARVN Division operating from Tien Puhuoc outpost in Quan Tin Province. I left the active Marine Corps in September 1955 to attend the University of Texas for a year, at which time I joined the 4th Becon Bn based in San Antonio as a company officer. I thought this reserve unit would be called up and sent to Vietnam as an intact unit, but such was not the case. Consequently in June 1967, with a growing family, I took a position with Sea Land, an ocean transportation company. This led to assignments in Puerto Rico and a career in the maritime industry, primarily servicing the Caribbean. Leaving the regular Marine Corps was as difficult a decision as I have ever made. In any case, my wife and I have had a good life, 40 years of marriage with four kids and now six grand kids. “Honey Gal” and Col. Butler are accountable for 17 great grandkids at the latest count.

One of the landmark events for Mom, my family and myself was attending the New Orleans reunion of the 5th Marine Division in 1990. That event in which my father’s brothers, Clinton and Emile, joined us was truly special. The get-together with the 1/27 Marines and the butler family will always be remembered. It was also the beginning of a long association and friendship, which has grown over the years. The regular and periodic contact with the men of 1/27 since that reunion has been very important to my family and me. Following that reunion in New Orleans the family

journeyed to Hawaii to visit Dad's gravesite in the Punch Bowl. My sister and Clinton, with his wife Barbara, who were unable to attend the New Orleans reunion, joined us in Dallas at the airport where we boarded the flight for Honolulu.

Chuck, I want to thank you for your work and dedication to keep alive events in our Nation's and Marine Corps' history that need to be remembered and treasured by our young people of today and the generations yet to come. We have seen some great young Marines on our TV screen lately in Iraq. They represent a few of the best now defending our Country. Knowledge of the people and sacrifices made in the past will help ensure the Nation continues to produce these few good men!

Simper Fidelis

John Butler