

## **Letter to Chuck Tatum from John A. Butler**

**June 23, 2003**

**Dear Chuck,**

**Congratulations on your website [www.marineswwii.com](http://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 have posted about my father, the late 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 include din the website story “Beyond Valor”. Your portrayal of his background, leadership, character and the impact of his loss on my mother and his children can only be added to. He was an outstanding Marine officer who left a legacy for his family. The story of my mother “Honey Gal” as his jeep was named after, is one for the ages. She will soon be 88 years old and is now at an assisted living facility a stone’s throw 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 of service.**

**During this waiting time when they mostly just wrote each other, Dad completed Basic School and then 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 not correct. General Puller was an instructor at Basic School 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 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 Army 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 command billets including CG of the 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**MAW. Krulak, as you know, was the father of a future commandant. He commanded a paramarine 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 assignments as an attaché in the Dominican Republic.**

**One of Dad's 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 the 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 assistance 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 correction.**