

## Col. James Matthew Slay, USMCR



**Major James M. Slay** was serving with the 1st Marine Division when he was wounded in the Battle for Peleliu in September 1944. During succeeding Pacific campaigns, Major Slay was Assistant G-3 to (then) Lt. Col. Victor H. "Brute" Krulak with the 6th Marine Division, taking part in the planning for Okinawa and for the expected invasion of Japan.

### **The War in the Pacific Theater**

Jim Slay was commissioned in 1937 and served during the next two years as a Platoon Leader and then as a Company Commander of Officer Candidates in the Officers Training School at Quantico, VA.

He was a 24-year-old 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve and was Commandant at the Randolph-Macon Military Academy in Front Royal, Virginia in 1941 when he and his new bride, Catherine, first heard the news about Pearl Harbor on the radio of their '39 Ford. The newlyweds headed back to Quantico, where he was re-assigned to the duties of Instructor in Tactics at the Marine Corps Officers Training School and (a year later) promoted to the rank of Captain of Marines. He would serve in the training school for most of the next two years preparing Marine Corps Officers for the inevitability and reality of combat in the Pacific Theater.





**Capt. Slay recovering from Peleliu wounds, with fellow Marine and brother Lt. Ronald J. Slay (1944)**

Captain Slay was promoted to Major and sent to the 1<sup>st</sup> MarDiv and then re-assigned to the newly-formed 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Division in Operations Planning (Assistant G-3) under Krulak in September, 1944.

**MajGen Lemuel Shepherd (later Commandant USMC) was CG of the 6<sup>th</sup> MarDiv (pictured at right).**



Days after the initial landing on September 15, 1944, Slay was hit by shrapnel and was evacuated to a hospital ship on-station for the battle. While recovering, he later rejoined his unit at Guadalcanal and received the Purple Heart Medal and returned to his duties at headquarters G-3.



**Capt. Slay (Center) with fellow classmates from Duke University (1944).**

He resumed active duty in time for the Invasion of Okinawa in April, 1945.

Major Slay was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with a letter from Lt Gen Roy Geiger, CG FMF PAC following that action.



**(Left) Maj. J M Slay, Asst. G-3, 6th MarDiv, on Okinawa before the anticipated invasion of the Japanese mainland (1945) and (then) - Lt Col Victor "Brute" Krulak on Okinawa in 1945.**

During those early tours at Quantico and in the following years in the Pacific, many strong and lasting friendships were forged with fellow Marines, Commanding Officers and Subordinates alike with colorful nicknames such as "Howlin' Mad Smith"; Lewis "Chesty" Puller; "Brute" Krulak; "Silent Lew" Walt; and "Archie" Vandegrift who would go on to become Marine Corps Legends. Major JM Slay completed his active duty WWII service under the command of GC FMFPAC Gen Roy "Jiggs" Geiger.

## Rebuilding the Reserves

In the finest Marine Corps tradition, those friendships remained strong throughout his life and served the Marine Corps well in the post-WWII years when Lt Col Slay was appointed Commanding Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> 105MM Howitzer Battalion in Richmond, and tasked with building up the Richmond-area reserve unit which had seen a steady decline. He took on that assignment with energy and commitment and had the 1<sup>st</sup> 105MM Howitzer Battalion up to full operational strength in two years.

**Lt. Col. James Slay, Commanding Officer  
of the 1st 105MM Howitzer Battalion**



A message written by Lt. Col. Slay reflects his belief in Marine Reserves:

“Young men have an opportunity to discharge their duty to their country by joining the reserve units in their home towns. In so doing, they not only contribute to their nation’s defense, but also prepare themselves for the ordeals of life soon to confront them.”

In his book, “Three-War Marine”, USMC Col. Francis Fox Parry wrote of Col. Slay’s success in rebuilding the Marine Reserve unit in Richmond:

“In our talent search I discovered a prime candidate for Commanding Officer in Lt. Col. James M. Slay, USMCR. Jim was a handsome six-footer with the sort of leadership qualities we sorely needed. He was about my age (thirty-six) and a rising star on the Richmond horizon who would add prestige to the battalion and attract new recruits... The battalion soon began to thrive under new leadership. Attendance rose steadily until it reached about 90%, a far cry from the 10% attendance we had inherited a year before.”

James M. Slay was promoted to the rank of Colonel in November, 1959. The father of four, Jim Slay served as Vice-President of the Fifth District, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond in his civilian career. Colonel James M. Slay died from cancer at the age of 45 on 10 May 1962.