

RADM JOHN L BUTTS, JR.



Rear Admiral John L Butts, Jr. served as Commander, Task Force 130; and Commander, Hawaiian Sea Frontier, 14th Naval District, Pearl Harbor Naval Base, Manned Spacecraft Recovery Force Pacific, Fleet Air Hawaii, Barbers Point Fleet Air Detachment. He attended all of the Apollo recoveries and commanded the recovery missions of Apollo XVII and Skylab 1, 2, and 3. He retired from the Navy in 1973 after 33 years of distinguished military service.

Admiral Butts was born 20 December 1920 in Miami, Florida. He attended Marion Military Institute, the University of Mississippi, and California Western University where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree.

Entering flight training in 1941 at Naval Air Station, Pensacola as a Naval Aviation cadet, he completed training at Naval Air Station, Miami and was commissioned an Ensign on 16 October 1941 and was subsequently designated as a Naval Aviator. After serving as a flight instructor, he was ordered to combat duty in January of 1943 as Operations Officer for Bombing Squadron NINETEEN in the Pacific aboard USS [LEXINGTON](#) (CV-16). He flew missions during the Philippine Sea Battles and the Marianas Campaign.

He was awarded the Navy Cross for his action as a single plane attack on the main body of the Imperial Japanese Fleet on 24 October 1944, during the Battle for Leyte Gulf.

After World War II, he served as Navigator, USS [DUXBURY BAY](#) (AVP-38) stationed in Shanghai and Tsingtao, China. From there, he was ordered to Naval Air Station, Alameda. During that assignment, he was among the first group of aviators in the Navy to qualify in jet aircraft. He served with the Navy's first jet squadron. During the Korean conflict, he served as Commanding Officer of VF-112, and his squadron conducted combat operations from the USS [PHILIPPINE SEA](#) (CV-47).

Admiral Butts then attended and was graduated from General Line School at Monterey, California and went on for two years of duty in the Office of Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C.

Three command billets followed in succession; Commanding Officer of VF-51, Fleet Air Gunnery Unit Pacific at El Centro, California (the precursor to the Fighter Weapons "TOP GUN" school), and Advance Training Unit 206 at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida.

In April of 1959, he went to the East Coast to become Executive Officer of USS [SARATOGA](#) (CVA-60) until August 1960 when he returned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations at Washington.

On January 1, 1963, he became Commanding Officer of the fleet oiler, USS [PLATTE](#) (AO-24) until he detached early in 1964 to become the fourth Commanding Officer of USS [KITTY HAWK](#) (CVA-63).

Chief of Staff for Commander First Fleet followed and duty with the U. S. Naval Forces Europe in London. He moved to Honolulu as Executive Assistant to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. He then served as Commander Carrier Division ONE before assuming command of the Manned Spacecraft Recovery Force Pacific.

Besides the Navy Cross, Admiral Butts was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross with four gold stars, Air Medal with four gold stars, Presidential Unit Citation with two gold stars, Navy Unit Commendation with gold star, Joint Service Commendation Medal, as well as numerous service and campaign medals. His awards from other nations include the National Order of Vietnam and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

After his retirement in 1973, he was Turkey country director for International Executive Service Corps and executive assistant to the president of Northrop Airport Development Corp. Since then he had been a consultant, owner of Management Recruiters of Gaithersburg, and partner in Search A.V.G. Inc., an engineering firm. Admiral Butts died on 3 May 1992 from a sudden heart attack. His wife, Ginnabeth, died on 19 April 2013. Their daughter Shannon Butts Mansueto of Coronado, California died on 19 August 2016 and Dana Butts Nemeth of San Diego, California died on 26 December 2022. Their surviving daughter is Allison Butts Roulier of Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Written by Allison Butts Roulier