

# Tommy Tomlinson

By CAPT John Lacouture, USN (Ret.)

CAPT Daniel W. "Tommy" Tomlinson is one of four Naval Aviators who will be inducted into the Carrier Aviation Test Pilot Hall of Honor on 31 August 1995 aboard USS *Yorktown* at the Patriot's Point Naval and Maritime Museum in Charleston, SC. This is an honor so far accorded to only 17 Naval Aviators.

Tomlinson, born in Batavia, NY, 28 April 1897, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1917, and is its fifth oldest living graduate. Obsessed with becoming a flyer he became Naval Aviator #2923 in 1921.

Early in his career he had two sensational crashes. Neither was his fault but he was fortunate to survive one of them. After each crash he was court-martialed and removed from flying status. To Tommy, "No greater punishment could have been dealt me."

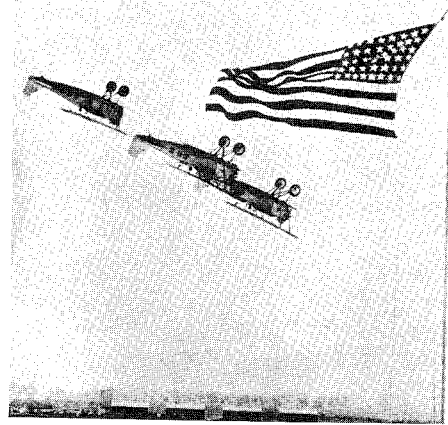
Badly injured from the second accident he was determined to fly again. It was said of him, "He was a Naval Officer by Act of Congress and a flyer by Act of God."

He bought his first airplane, paying for it with money earned stunt flying, wing walking and plane-changing in mid-air at aviation exhibits.

He begged his way back into a flying status in 1925 and became Flight Officer of VF-2 on *Langley*. In 1927, at the National Air Races in Spokane, WA, he became upset at the poor quality of the Navy's aerial exhibitions compared to the

Army. Subsequently, he clandestinely formed the Navy's first stunt team, choosing Bill Davis and Putt Storrs as wingmen. (Bill Davis will also be inducted on *Yorktown* in August).

In 1928, before commencing a deployment to Hawaii via San Francisco, Tommy and his team were summoned to "do their stuff" by RADM J. M. Reeves. It was unprecedented for high command to toler-



The Seahawks, upside down.



Left to right are Seahawks, LT Bill Davis, Tomlinson, and LT Putt Storrs by engine of F2B-1.

ate hazardous acrobatics, much less authorize them.

Tommy and his Fighting Six performed at low level over San Francisco. Then his team, *The Three Seahawks*, broke off and put on an unforgettable show, culminating in inverted formation flight down Market St. below the tops of the buildings. This triggered official recognition of Navy acrobatic flying teams.

Tommy went on to command VF-6 (later VB-2), developed dive bombing techniques which proved valuable in WWII, and became the Chief Test Pilot for the Navy at NAS Anacostia in Washington, DC. He left the Navy and made a mark in the commercial aircraft industry, testing numerous aircraft, including the Boeing *Stratoliner* and the Lockheed *Constellation*. He also tested Army aircraft, including the B-25, later used on the Doolittle Raid, and the P-40.

## Marshall Mars

301 men on JRM Marshall Mars, May 1949



Mr. R. Ferris Randall tells the story this way:

"I was a PN2 on the CAG-5 staff, temporarily attached to the USS *Valley Forge* (CV-45), in 1949. We had just gone up the West Coast with the *Valley* and we knew we were going to disembark at Alameda as the *Valley* was going out to sea. At Alameda we got off, but the problem was how to

get 301 enlisted men back to San Diego. There were landing craft in the bay and they thought of putting us on those, but then someone got the wild idea to put us on the *Marshall Mars* seaplane.

"This was a cargo craft with two decks. We were squeezed on the plane on May 24th, and took off, helped aloft by two JATO rockets on each wing. You can imagine

301 men laying on the floor of the decks as there was no head room, for over two hours.

"We reached San Diego with no problems, and set a world record for those days, as to number of person on an aircraft (308, counting 7 man crew). I have always said the Navy should have received some kind of medal for that trip."