

Richard L. "Tommy" Thompson
Landing Signal Officer
CVG-102
1950-1951

"roger"



"Tommy Thompson - must be waving in Monty [Monteau]."

USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31)

1951

(photograph from Monty Monteau)



“Whoever he is flagging is aiming to land on 0-9 level.”



(photograph from Monty Monteau)

Richard L. "Tommy" Thompson
Landing Signal Officer, CAG-102

(written by Lou Ives after interview with Tommy - June 21, 1988)

Tommy Thompson, a Reserve out of Los Alamitos, a schoolteacher out of Los Angeles, and a WWII Navy pilot, volunteered again when the balloon went up in Korea in 1950.

Tommy waved Air Group 102 (and VF-781 Pacemakers) from the *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31) in their 1950 training and 1951 Korean tour.

Tommy could signal a pilot to adjust attitude, air speed, and alignment so the aircraft would approach the cut during the proper angle of deck pitch whether the ship was rocking or rolling. We all believed in him. He believed in us. We were a team.

As such, his log comments on pilots' carrier passes included such gentle and delicate instructional phrases as:

FNKH (FKN Near Killed Himself): to Westmoreland, VC-61,. 11 October 1951.

FNKUA (FKN Near Killed Us All)

GOOD GOD!!! TCA OS W/O: to Lou Ives, VF-781, 3 November 1951.

Tommy earned his shootin' badges flying SBDs from the Island to the Slot and Bougainville in the South Pacific.

Tommy's waving career began after a year in the South Pacific. Looking for carrier duty he wound up on Illnou Island out of Noumea, Caledonia. Then to the New Hebrides - land-based sub patrol. Finally picked up for combat out of Torokina, Bougainville, to Rabaul and anti-aircraft suppression. Anti-aircraft fire was one thing the Japs had plenty of. "Rabaul always greeted us with three umbrellas of flak followed by a 'waterfall' of black puffs as we made our dives."

Choosing LSO training for reassignment, he honed his flag-waving aboard both USS *Wolverine* and USS *Sable* on Lake Michigan out of CQTU Glenview, Illinois.

Then to Barber's Point for night qualification waving on Jeep carriers. Finishing WWII aboard a CVE (CVE: Combustible, Vulnerable, Expendable). Tommy and ship's company weren't much worried about being torpedoed as they "figured the torpedo would go through one side and out the other before exploding."

In the Reserve at NAS Los Alamitos, Tommy often flew with the pilots who would later become members of VF-781 and the all-reserve air group CVG-102. After hearing that VF-781 had volunteered [at the beginning of the Korean War] under the indomitable leadership of its skipper, Collin Oveland, Tommy volunteered and was accepted as the LSO for the all-reserve squadrons of CVG-102 and jet LSO for VF-781.

For Tommy, it was a smooth homecoming and a new experience. He finally got his job on “the first team” and on an Essex class carrier. One regret Tommy has is not having succeeded in having a wider center line painted on the *Bon Homme*. However, flight operations were exceptionally efficient and intervals between planes landing were the best in the fleet [one VF-781 F9F division had an average 21 second landing interval - to go with their 17 second average F9 cat takeoff interval (H-4 hydraulic cats)]. Tommy occasionally worked both jets and props in the same landing pattern with 18- 25 seconds between aircraft.

After the Korean tour Tommy shortly found himself assigned to the billet of Flight Test LSO at Patuxent River. After two years at flight test Tommy went back to teaching for the Los Angeles City School System and more Weekend Warrior duty at Los Alamitos.

Tommy was assigned as XO of a reserve squadron and later CO of the same squadron. So after two wars, 23 years of reserve duty, and 31 years of teaching experience, he is retired to the good life--touring with his loving and forgiving wife, Loessa in their RV and attending reunions. They are now living in Carson City, Nevada.

His memorable flight: A 45-minute check-out in an F6F in the New Hebrides, and the next morning flying 550 miles in the same machine, over water to Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, and his good flight was when he “qualified in an AD-4 during our PAX River evaluation of the USS *Antietam*, our first canted deck Carrier. This was some 10 years after qualifying on the *Wolverine* in an SBD-4.”

NOTE: the transition of Reserve pilots to active duty was a result of their combined experience during WWII and the Reserve program which kept them at a high degree of readiness. In the true spirit of the “minutemen” tradition, the Reserves more than paid their dues and proved the value of the Reserve program.

Breaking up a squadron and reassigning people to different areas and jobs is difficult for the pilots who love to fly and have developed strong affection for one another, but it also provides an opportunity for growth of the individual along different avenues.

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