



## CELEBRATING CAPT. THOMAS HUDNER '43

by George S.K. Rider '51

In the military, the only time is on time. Events are planned with precision down to the last detail. April 12, 2013, dawned with a snotty northeast wind blowing low-lying clouds across a battleship dark gray sky punctuated by a sporadic drizzle of rain and sleet—perfect for any sailor/aviator celebration.

The luncheon at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, Maine, honoring Andover's Medal of Honor recipient was just hours and a bus ride away from Andover. The occasion was to celebrate the naming of a new Arleigh Burke-class destroyer for Capt. Thomas J. Hudner Jr. '43. We were joined by the family of Ensign Jesse Brown, who perished in a battle over the Chosin Reservoir on December 4, 1950, when the Corsair he was flying was struck by enemy fire and forced down in rugged, snow-covered mountain terrain. Lt. j.g. Hudner and the rest of the squadron presumed that he had died in the crash. But when Tom flew a pass over the downed plane and saw Jesse waving from the open cockpit, he made a split-second decision and landed his plane wheels up, 100 yards away. The squadron leader radioed for help.

Tom tried to free Jesse, the navy's first African-American pilot, whose leg was trapped by the crushed fuselage. With his bare hands Tom packed the fuselage with snow to keep the flames away and labored in vain to free him. The helicopter pilot arrived with an axe and a fire extinguisher. They worked together—unsuccessfully—to free Jesse. He was fading in and out of consciousness. Darkness was settling in and snow was beginning to fall in the sub-freezing conditions. The mountains made flying out in the dark impossible. Jesse's last words to Tom were a message to his wife, "If I don't make it, tell Daisy I love her."

On April 13, 1951, President Harry S. Truman awarded the Medal of Honor to Tom Hudner for his heroic efforts to save his wingman.

The events on the Maine coast almost 62 years to the day later were a tribute to a great and enduring memory. Earlier that morning, Tom, his family and friends, and the Brown family had been invited into the cavernous building at Bath Iron Works (BIW) just downriver from the Maritime Museum to see the very beginnings of the USS *Thomas Hudner* take shape. Huddled amongst the steel and cold were BIW officials and nearly 20 of the workers who are bringing the destroyer to life. Richard Grant, a safety inspector with 24 years at BIW and 19 in the military, saw Capt. Hudner, his medal on a bright blue ribbon around his neck, enter the building. Tears sprung to his eyes. "I had goosebumps, just looking at him," Grant said afterward. "And when he came

1. Medal of Honor recipient Thomas Hudner '43 visited Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, where he met a number of workers building the destroyer named in his honor.
2. The events of the day culminated with a luncheon at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath.
3. The daughter and grandchildren of Jesse Brown, the navy pilot Hudner tried to rescue, attended the day's events. From left are Jamal Brown, Hudner, Pamela Knight Brown, and Jessica Brown.
4. Cmdr. Rob Patrick '88 presents Hudner with a navy medallion, a long tradition among navy officers.
5. Hudner shares a few good stories with Marshall Cloyd '58, whose admiration for Hudner inspired and made possible the event.
6. BIW workers are delighted to meet the namesake of a ship they are building, an event that has happened only three times in BIW's long history.

Courtesy Bath Iron Works



over and talked to me, I felt it was such an honor. We don't get to meet Medal of Honor winners." In fact, Tom is only the third Medal of Honor recipient in the BIW's 129-year history to visit with workers on a namesake ship in progress. The *Hudner* is scheduled for launch in 2017.

Back at the museum, the luncheon and festivities led off with Jesse's granddaughter Jessica, from Washington, D.C., speaking on behalf of Daisy about the bond that will always exist between Tom and her family. Her mother, Jesse's daughter Pamela Knight Brown, and her brother Jamal smiled and nodded from a nearby table. The affection between the families was obvious throughout the day.

Retired Admiral Gregory G. Johnson recounted a detailed history of the Korean War and had special praise for the *Andover* and the Military initiative.

Captain Mark Vandroff, program manager for the DDG class of ships, remarked "that in the not too distant future the USS *Thomas Hudner* will remind future generations of what it means to be a shipmate and to put your life on the line for another."

Cmdr. Robert Patrick '88, a U.S. Navy pilot, said that Tom epitomized what it is to be a pilot and quoted their motto, "Never leave a wingman! Capt. Hudner lived that motto to the fullest." He presented Tom with a special challenge coin, struck to commemorate his heroic actions. Each of the 160 alumni, faculty emeriti, faculty, and guests present received a beautiful replica.

A brief video by Charles Stuart '62 allowed Tom to graphically describe his actions during the rescue attempt in Korea and reminisce about his *Andover* and navy careers.

The event was a unique collaboration among the Maine Maritime Museum, BIW, the Pentagon, and Phillips Academy made possible by the support and behind-the-scenes work of Marshall Cloyd '58, Patrick, and Jenny Savino, associate director of Alumni Affairs. The presence of Jeffrey Geiger, president of General Dynamics Bath Iron Works, and staff members underscored the importance of the festivities.

At the close of the ceremony, Tom spoke briefly and thanked all for the support given not only to him, but also to those serving and who have served in the military. His smile told the story of this incredible event.

Gil Talbot



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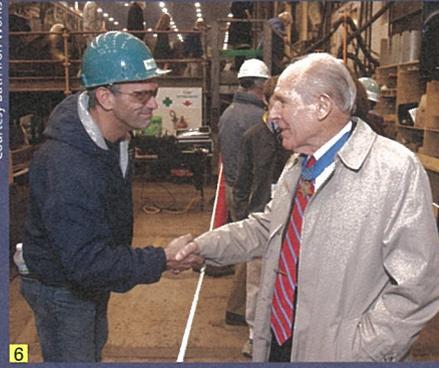
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Courtesy Bath Iron Works



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