

## **Admiral Thomas C. Lynch (Ret.)**



*“Always work as hard as you can, pray as hard as you can, and leave the rest up to God.”*

*—Marie Lynch*

**T**om Lynch is a man of uncompromising ethics and limitless optimism. He was born in April of 1942, the second son of Rodney and Marie Lynch, in Lima, Ohio. Tom has two brothers and one sister. Tom’s extended family, including his maternal grandparents and his father’s four married sisters, all lived within a block of him. Tom’s paternal grandfather lived with his family. His childhood was lively and raucous, and revolved around school, church, and neighborhood activities, which meant many Irish and German interfamily rivalries, arguments, and feuds. Kids went outside at first light and remained there playing sports, games, and whatever their imaginations would permit.

Tom’s father was a large man, a stern disciplinarian, and—like his father before him—the Superintendent of the West Ohio Gas Company. It was not uncommon for him to receive a call in the middle of the night alerting him to a gas problem anywhere within a fifty-mile radius, and he

would have to dispatch a crew to solve the problem. At age eleven, Tom inherited his older brother's 224-customer paper route. Tom did not have a vote in this. He hated delivering papers—and the weekly collections even more so, because many customers would dodge him, or not answer the door, to avoid his twenty-five-cents-per-week delivery charge. Then after a number of weeks, these customers would declare that they owed less than Tom's records indicated. Tom was learning human behavior, discipline, and the value of twenty-five cents. His persistence in performing his first job, whether he liked it or not paid off; after a year of saving, Tom became the envy of the neighborhood with his new Schwinn suspension bicycle with chrome fenders!

Although Tom's parents did not have a college education themselves—or maybe *because* they did not—they drummed into each of their children the vital necessity of obtaining a college degree. Tom was blessed to have priests and nuns as mentors, in his parochial elementary and high school, who re-echoed the values of his parents. Education, respect for authority, and love of God were the pillars of his formative years. And if a nun felt that her disciplinary measures, which included corporal punishment, were not getting through, the punishment at home would be even worse, no questions asked.

Tom was a good student and athlete, and by his senior year weighed around two hundred pounds, which attracted several schools to recruit him for football. The nuns urged Tom toward Notre Dame, but the school offered him a meager academic (not an athletic) scholarship—and there was little money at home. Then Coach Rick Forzano of the Naval Academy entered Tom's life. Tom went to Annapolis upon graduation in 1960 because he needed a free education; he wanted an opportunity to play major college football, and as a local sports writer quoted him at the time, "I hope someday to be in a position to do something for my country." On the fourth of July, 1960, he left Lima, Ohio, and headed by train to Washington, D.C. From there, Tom took a bus to Annapolis, and after a six-block walk, with great trepidation, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy. The next day he was inducted, with 1,200 others, into the class of 1964.

Life at a service academy is like no other. At the time, the Academy was homogeneous: all male, mostly white, and mostly athletically and academically strong. Each was a superstar in some aspect of life. Tom felt overwhelmed, but he fell back on his mother's dictum: "Always work as hard as you can, pray as hard as you can, and leave the rest up to God."

The mission of the Academy is to develop leaders for the Navy and the

nation. Plebe (freshman) year at the academy is designed to teach each student that before being placed in a leadership position, the student must first learn to accept orders and discipline, with a degree of humility. Tom hated it at the time and thought about leaving the Academy many times, but it worked, and over his time there, Tom developed strong bonds with his classmates and teammates that have shaped his life and remain important today.

Tom had the opportunity to play major college football on the same team with Heisman Trophy-winner Roger Staubach. Tom captained the 1963 Navy team, which had a 9–1 regular season record, beating Notre Dame, Michigan, Pittsburgh, and, of course Army, among others. The team lost to Texas in the 1964 Cotton Bowl for the National Championship. The 1963 Navy team has recently become the subject of Michael Connelly's enjoyable work *The President's Team*. Among all the stars, Connelly's book recognizes Tom as the heart and soul of the team:

“Assistant Coach Steve Belichick [father of Patriots coach Bill Belichick] said Lynch was the most charismatic leader he had ever coached in his decades in football. Lynch came to the Naval Academy from Lima Ohio, where he was captain of the football team, a basketball forward, and shot-putter for Lima Central Catholic High School. At the conclusion of his career, he was awarded the Thunderbird Trophy for his ‘leadership, adherence to discipline, and team spirit.’ The inborn leadership skills that bloomed at Lima Central Catholic were further strengthened at the Naval Academy. Lynch eventually served as Superintendent of the Naval Academy and reached the rank of Admiral.

A bond connected the 1963 Navy football team, and Tom Lynch was the custodian. Lynch pushed his teammates from day one to be the best they could be. The 6-foot, 1-inch, 210-pound Captain—who was a two-time heavyweight boxing champion at the Academy—was able to command the attention of his teammates without needing to ask for it. Players were inspired by his words and his actions.”

Tom's gift of dealing with adversity appeared with his leadership of the team during the nation's difficult days and weeks following the assassination of President Kennedy:

“After JFK's assassination, Captain Tom Lynch led a contingent of players, including Skip Orr and Roger Staubach, to the Chapel; others went back

to their rooms to listen to the radio or gathered in their company room, where the lone television was located.”

The moment had particular import because usually the President himself tosses the coin at the annual Army–Navy game:

“From the moment Tom Lynch and Dick Nowak had been named Captains of their respective teams, they had looked forward to the traditional coin toss with the Commander-in-Chief. But now they stood at midfield reminded again of the void the nation felt. What was intended to be a lifetime memory turned out to be a sad remembrance (for the Army and Navy teams). Lynch won the toss for Navy.”

A week after the Navy victory, an envelope showed up in the mailbox of Navy Captain Tom Lynch. When he opened it he found a silver dollar. Accompanying the coin was a letter from the Secretary of the Army, Cyrus Vance that read:

9 December 1963

Dear Midshipman Lynch,

I am forwarding the coin which the late president would have used and would have presented to you had he made the toss of the coin at the Army-Navy football game this year. Please accept this memento of a memorable football game.

With best wishes,  
Sincerely, Cyrus R. Vance  
Secretary of the Army

Admiral Lynch would treasure the coin, and the victory, for the rest of his life. In that game, Tom displayed the charisma of a great leader: Following the suspenseful game against Army to close out the 1963 regular-season schedule, Lynch spoke of the spirit that had consumed the team throughout the year:

“All season, we had a kind of motto that the way to really accomplish something worthwhile was to fight your way through tough spots. So when we found ourselves down there with defeat staring us in the face, I think all of us subconsciously thought about this spirit that we have believed all along. It’s kind of what we had in the back of our minds, and it helped us throw ourselves in there and hold Army.”

As if football were not enough, Tom spent his off-season boxing, to stay in shape. He won the heavyweight boxing title both years that he participated. Winning these titles probably served him well in his role on base as Company Commander.

In June 1964, Tom graduated with distinction and selected the surface warfare community for his follow-on naval service. Although obligated to serve for four years, he was unsure about making Navy a career. That September, Tom married his high-school sweetheart, Kathy Quinn, at the Naval Academy Chapel and recently buried her from the same Chapel. At last count, they have three children and ten grandchildren. Tom didn’t fully understand the magnitude of the decision to marry at age twenty-two; it seemed to be the natural thing to do. Kathy has supported Tom throughout his thirty-one-year Navy career, which meant guiding the helm of the family through nineteen moves, little money, lengthy deployments, and some hardship—but through it all she never wavered.

Upon graduation, and following a six-month-stint coaching the plebe footballers, Tom reported to his first ship in December 1964: the World War II destroyer the *U.S.S Stribling*, whereupon he began a six-and-a-half-month deployment. Over the next ten years, a series of intermittent deployments followed. This included a tour aboard the *U.S.S Dickson* as Chief Engineer, and another WWII destroyer that was highlighted when—despite being the oldest ship in the battle group—it completed a six-month deployment to the North Atlantic and Mediterranean with fewer engineering casualties and equipment failures than any other. Tom took pride in this and considered it a reflection of the pride and hard work of his engineers.

In December 1968, believing he most likely would be sent for duty in Vietnam, Tom was informed that he was being sent to the Naval Academy to work for the Dean of Admissions. By then, Tom had his second daughter, Alison. He was still unsure about choosing a naval career, but he accepted the orders nevertheless. What he learned subsequently was that the antiwar hysteria sweeping the country and the Academy made the leaders of the Academy fearful that they might not have enough first-rate applicants to fill

the next year's incoming class. Tom, along with three others, arrived in Annapolis over the Christmas holidays and immediately divided the country in quarters, donned their dress blue uniforms, and proceeded to cross the country telling the young men of America that the Navy needed the best and brightest at Annapolis. Within the first year, they generated over 7,000 applicants for the 1,200 spots, and the Academy has not had a recruitment problem since.

Tom was introduced to the Naval Academy's Superintendent, Vice-Admiral James Calvert, who was responsible for Tom's career decision to stay in the Navy. In 1970, Tom's third child, and first son, was born. In 1971, Tom received a Master's Degree from George Washington University, which he attended in the evenings.

In January 1972, Tom began a six-month school in Norfolk, Virginia, to prepare him for joint-military operations. It was a period of study, thought, and reflection, with no sea duty and the opportunity to meet and learn from officers of the other services and from NATO allies. Over the next eighteen months, Tom was moved from Norfolk to Newport, Rhode Island, and then to Charleston, South Carolina. He was appointed Executive Officer of a brand-new Knox Class Frigate, the *U.S.S. Jesse L. Brown*. The ship was named after Jesse Brown, the first black naval aviator. To be a part of a ship's commissioning crew is a great experience—and a responsibility as well. Each ship develops its own persona among the fleet, so it is important that the initial crew sets a high standard and establishes a reputation for professionalism, competence, and a can-do spirit. While Tom was busy motivating his men to achieve such a reputation, he remembers how disappointed he was when he was commanded to leave the ship in the middle of another Mediterranean deployment. However, he realized that he was now prepared to have his own command someday: the dream of every military officer.

By April 1975, Tom was back in Virginia, this time for his first tour at the Pentagon. Duty in the Pentagon is all "half-days," 7 AM to 7 PM, which is no joke for those stationed there. During the next two years, Tom experienced decision-making at the highest levels. He was screened to command a destroyer and selected for the rank of Commander. He received orders to command the *U.S.S. Truett*, a frigate home-ported in Norfolk, Virginia. Tom's tour aboard the *Truett* was a defining moment. The Navy in this post-Vietnam period was experiencing a 20,000 petty-officer shortfall because of the dearth of ships. The consequent load on the fleet resulted in seven- or even eleven-month deployments with short turnarounds, followed by another deployment. Drug and alcohol abuse and racial tensions were

rampant, not unlike the civilian culture at the time. Many Navy families qualified for food stamps because the pay was far less than what was available in the private sector.

Amid this difficult environment, Tom embraced and promoted the philosophy of “Ship, Shipmate, and then Self.” Before every thought, word, or deed, a sailor must first ask himself what effect this may have on the ship, then on his shipmates, and then on himself. Tom held a formal recognition program for all the *Truett* “superstars” who always abided by this philosophy.

Although it required Tom to spend the next thirty of thirty-six months at sea, his three years in command of the *Truett* were the most rewarding of his life. The *Truett* was tops in battle efficiency, awarded the Arleigh Burke trophy for most improved ship in the fleet and the Golden Anchor for highest re-enlistment rate in the fleet. It completed a seven and a half-month deployment to the Mediterranean and to the Red Sea, including sophisticated surveillance of the Soviet carrier *Kiev*, and a three-month operation in the Gulf of Aden with no liberty. The most searing events were the deaths of six *Truett* sailors during those three years. It is unusual to lose a sailor in peacetime, but the loss of six—four to freakish accidents ashore, and two to separate suicides on board—certainly raised questions within the chain of command.

In August 1980, Tom reported to the Pentagon as administrative aide to the Secretary of the Navy. Within a short period, Ronald Reagan was elected President and John Lehman was appointed Secretary of the Navy. Tom was selected Captain and detailed to Senate Liaison in the Russell Senate Office Building. This was the last job held by Captain John McCain before he retired and returned to Arizona. Tom quickly learned the power of politics, as well as the dedication of many devoted men and women who worked long, stressful hours to keep their senator apprised of the issues. Tom’s job was to make sure Congressional staff and their bosses understood the Navy’s needs, as stipulated in the Defense budget.

In 1985, Tom left for command of a tactical operation destroyer squadron in Norfolk, Virginia. He led a group of ships around South America to operate with the Navies of all the United States’ South American allies. Shortly before Christmas of 1986, Tom was informed that he had been selected for flag rank—the Naval term equivalent to a general in the Army General—and would be returning to Washington, D.C., as the Navy’s Chief of Legislative Affairs, working directly for the Secretary of the Navy. Tom’s job was to get the next carrier funded as a major part of the six-hundred-



ship goal, and to get the F-18 and Tomahawk missiles funded and integrated into the fleet.

In 1989, Tom was assigned as Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 12, in Mayport, Florida. Tom soon embarked aboard the carrier *Eisenhower*, and when he deployed in March 1990, they became the Eisenhower Battle Group. He conducted a major live missile exercise in the Gulf of Sidra. He responded to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August of that year by being the first U.S. presence in the Red Sea prepared to strike if called upon (Operation Desert Shield). The Eisenhower Battle Group returned home with over 21,000 flight hours recorded, no major mishaps, and a proud record of achievement for the country during a tenuous period.

In June 1991, Tom achieved his dream job: Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy. Unlike any previous assignment, his lovely wife Kathy was an integral and very visible professional partner and asset throughout this period because the job required planning, supervising, and hosting innumerable Midshipmen events, entertaining Congressional visitors, recruiting and caring for guest speakers, receiving visiting dignitaries, and overall management of the staff who cared for the Superintendent's residence at Annapolis. Although Tom's three years of service as superintendent were marred by several Midshipmen deaths and a cheating scandal that rocked the Academy, he reflects that he would gladly return and do it all over again.

The opportunity to help develop and train the future leadership of the Navy and the country is a privilege few are given.

In 1994, Tom was told that his next assignment would be a fleet command. Instead, following another Pentagon assignment, Chief Naval Officer Mike Boorda called Tom to his office to inform him that he was to be promoted to three stars but there would be no fleet command. Tom had other offers to consider, so with that news, he decided to reconsider them and change careers. He retired on November 1, 1995, and on that very same day, began a new civilian career in venture capital with Safeguard Scientifics, located in a suburb of Philadelphia.

Tom remained at Safeguard Scientifics until June of 2000. During that time, he participated in bringing more than a dozen companies public, worked an eighteen-month stint in Dallas as President and COO of CompuCom Systems, a billion-dollar NASDAQ company, and served as a board member for a host of small technology companies within the Safeguard portfolio. Tom next joined his close friend and former teammate Roger Staubach to assist the Staubach Company in establishing a federal real estate practice in Washington, D.C.

Today, Tom serves on numerous boards of public and private corporations and foundations. Presently, he is a partner in the Musser Group, a mainline Philadelphia venture capital firm, and makes his home in Villanova, Pennsylvania.