



**Henderson Tinsley Riggan**

## Henderson Tinsley Riggan

### Chief Electricians Mate

Born November 8, 1911

Killed in Action November 1, 1944

Henderson Tinsley Riggan was born on November 8, 1911, in Surry County, North Carolina. He was the second child and oldest son of James Thomas and Dora Hatcher Riggan. James was born in 1871 and Dora was born in 1881, and they got married on April 29, 1909. Called "Tinsley" by his family, he was named after his grandfathers, Robert Henderson Riggan and Jesse Tinsley Hatcher. His grandmothers were Lucy Ann Hodges Riggan and Mary Etta Creed Hatcher, all of which lived in North Carolina.

Tinsley had four sisters, Lucy Etta, Beulah Eastman, Dora Belle Ellen and Virginia Dare, who died when she was two months old, and three brothers, Reuben DeWitt, Roland Ellsworth and Bedford Brown. In addition he had five half siblings, Lala Infanta, Cora Thelma, Frances Manie, Thomas Manley, who died when he was two months old, and Lloyd Vestal from James' first marriage. Other than Thomas, they were all very young when their mother died and were raised by Tinsley's mother, Dora. The Riggans moved to Hopewell in 1922, and lived at 1711 Atlantic Street then later at 100 South 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Tinsley's father ran a service station on Rt. 10 and later a grocery store on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and attended Primitive Baptist Church near Fort Lee.



*Tinsley with his siblings. front, L to R, Reuben Dewitt, Bedford Brown, Roland Ellsworth; back, Lucy Etta, Tinsley, Beulah Eastman. Dora Belle is barely visible at the bottom in front of Bedford.*



*James Thomas and Dora Hatcher Riggan  
Mother's Day, May 9, 1943*

Tinsley left Hopewell High School at the end of the June 1928 school year. The following year he was working as a carpenter's helper with W. W. Thompson Construction Company in Norfolk before joining the U.S. Navy on June 12, 1929. Since he was still 17 years old, his father had to sign for him to join. Tinsley stated the reason for enlisting in the Navy was to learn a trade and his desired position was an electrician. He also indicated that he planned to make the Navy a career. Upon his enlistment, several people provided character references, including Mr. George Hamilton with the Hub Clothing Company in Hopewell, J. E. Oakley with the A&P Tea Company in Hopewell and Mr. J. E. Mallonne, Principal of Hopewell High School. They all gave Tinsley good ratings and, in his reference, Mr. Mallonee said *"This young man will make you a good recruit. His reputation with us is good."*

On June 14, 1929, Tinsley was sent to the Hampton Roads Naval Training Station for recruit training, which he completed on September 3, 1929, to include swimming qualification. He then entered the naval electrical school which was also at Hampton Roads, completing that training the following spring on April 2, 1930. **(right: early Navy picture)**

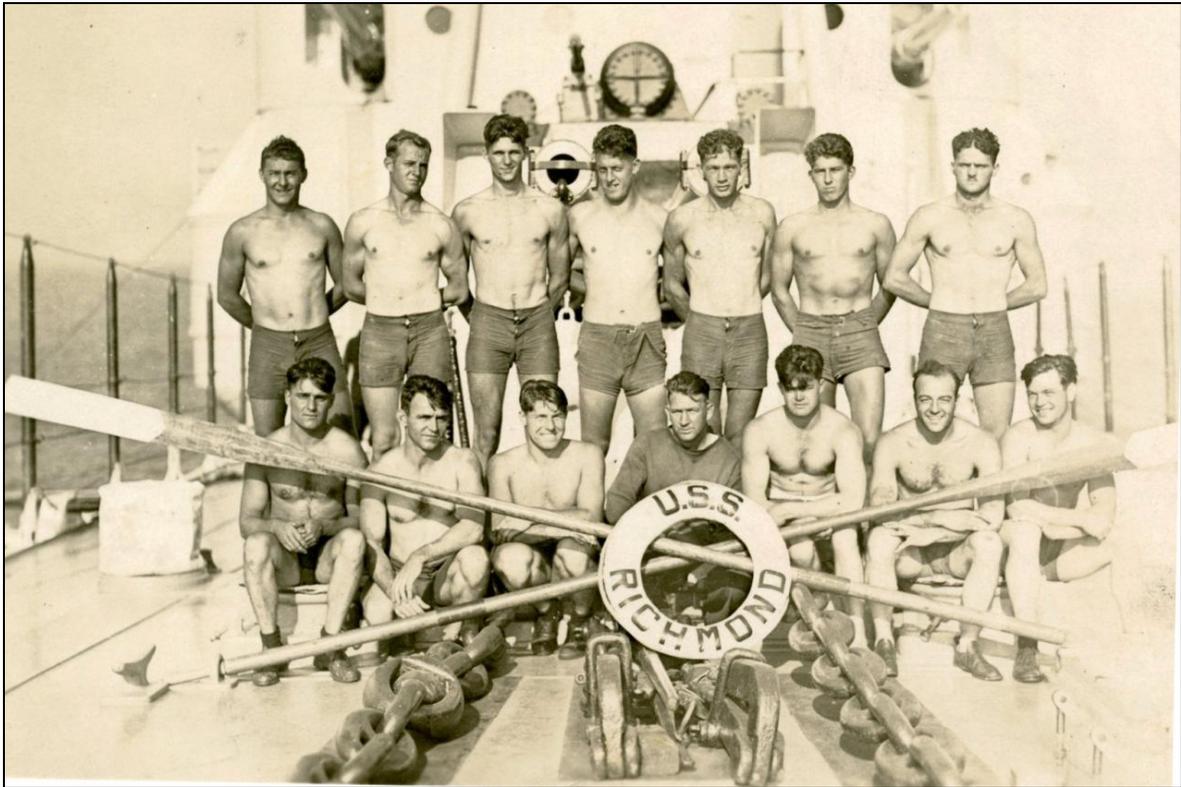




***Electrical Class School, Hampton, VA 1930  
Tinsley is on the left end of the front row***

Upon completion of electrician's training, Tinsley was assigned to the *USS Richmond* on May 7, 1930. The *Richmond* was a 550 foot light cruiser, named for the city of Richmond, VA. Three years later in November 1932 and having just turned 21 years old, Tinsley completed his initial enlistment and decided to re-enlist, staying with the *Richmond*.

While Tinsley was on board the *Richmond*, the ship served in the Caribbean, mid-Atlantic and New England waters, with occasional operations in the eastern Pacific until September 1934, at which time the ship was assigned as a flagship for the Submarine Force to the west coast. While serving off the coast of California, the *Richmond* responded to the crash of the Navy airship *USS Macon* on the night of February 12, 1935. The *Macon* was a 785 foot long rigid airship used primarily for submarine scouting. For his role in that rescue mission, Tinsley received a specific commendation at meritorious mast for his personal role in the recovery operation of *Macon* survivors from the *Richmond's* Commanding Officer, Captain Leigh Noyes. In November 1934 and again in October 1935, Tinsley was sent to the Naval Training Station in San Diego for 12-week gyro compass training classes, in which he scored high on his tests as well as having the opportunity for time on shore while being assigned to the *Richmond*.



***Tinsley and his USS Richmond Crewmates. Tinsley is in the front row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left.***

On November 4, 1938, now 27 years old with nine years in the Navy, including eight years serving on the *Richmond*, Tinsley left the Navy. However within three months he re-enlisted on January 31, 1939, for four years and was assigned to the *USS Dallas* for temporary duty and further training, before being transferred to the *USS Anderson* on March 10, 1939. The *Anderson* was a new ship in the process of being commissioned. It was built at the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Kearny, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from New York City. On June 28, 1939, while the *Anderson* was still at New York, Tinsley sent a letter to his mother in which he talked about going to the World's Fair in New York in which he said,

*"Believe me this World's Fair here is real good. Another fellow and I went out last Saturday afternoon and stayed until ten o'clock, and that wasn't enough time to see but a small portion of it and a very small portion at that."*

After leaving New Jersey, the *Anderson* underwent testing and shakedown on the east coast with stops in Washington D.C., Yorktown, VA, Norfolk, VA and Wilmington, NC before more extensive operations along the east coast. While the *Anderson* was on the east coast in 1939 Tinsley was able to come home on leave at least one time. Over the years Tinsley had steadily been promoted, reaching the rank of Electricians Mate First Class before he went on board the *Anderson*. He was promoted to acting Chief Electricians Mate on March 2, 1941, which was made permanent March 2, 1942.

The *Anderson* continued to serve in the Atlantic and Caribbean until April 1940, then transited the Panama Canal for duties in the Pacific. While in the Pacific, Tinsley received the following commendation on March 22, 1941, from the ship's captain, Lieutenant Commander W. M. Hobby, Jr.

*"Commended at meritorious mast for ability shown as an electrician, excellent work performed in maintaining the ship's electrical installation in proper operating and material condition and efforts made towards training prospective electricians mates. Especially commended for his excellent work in connection with the development of a modification to the Dead Reckoning Tracer Equipment."*

In June 1941 the *Anderson* returned to the east coast for North Atlantic patrol. While in the North Atlantic, the *Anderson* helped to rescue survivors when the *USS Reuben James* that was sunk by a German submarine torpedo on October 31, 1941. Later that year the *Anderson* was at Iceland when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, then left there for American eastern ports including Norfolk in early January 1942. Tinsley returned home again on January 4th and 5th, before returning to Norfolk where the *Anderson* was docked. While at home he was photographed with his brothers Ellsworth, Reuben and Bedford as shown below. This would be the last time Tinsley's parents got to see him.



**Front: Ellsworth & Tinsley.  
Back: Reuben & Bedford  
January 1942**

On January 6, 1942, Tinsley and the *Anderson* left Norfolk and returned to the Pacific later in the month. Over the next twelve months the *Anderson* participated as a unit of Task Force 17 in the Battle of Coral Sea in May 1942, the Battle of Midway in June 1942, the Guadalcanal Campaign in August 1942, the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands in October 1942 and the Bombardment of Wotje in January 1943. Tinsley was again commended for his service during this period by then Commander R. A. Guthrie.

*“Commended at meritorious mast for creditable performance of duty at battle station in action against the enemy on June 4 and Oct. 26, 1942 (torpedo, dive and horizontal bombers). On Jan. 29 and Feb. 1, 1943 (shore installation).”*

Also in late January 1943, Tinsley re-enlisted for another four years of service while on board the *Anderson*. In March 1943, the *Anderson* stopped at Pearl Harbor on its way to San Diego for overhaul and repairs, arriving there on April 9, 1943.

Tinsley sent a telegram to his parents on April 17, 1943, saying that he and the former Mary Edna Stephans of Los Angeles got married in San Francisco that day. They established their residence at 1086 Post Street in San Francisco. Two months later upon completion of repairs, the *Anderson* returned to sea and went on an escort run to New Guinea.



***Tinsley and wife, Mary Edna***

While in New Guinea in July, 1943, Tinsley was able to have a reunion with his brother Bedford, who was a First Lieutenant in the Air Transport Command and had made arrangements to fly to New Guinea to see his brother. From New Guinea, the *Anderson* went to Alaska, followed by operations in the Aleutians and going to New Zealand in October 1943. Its next assignments were as support for the invasion of the Gilbert Islands in November 1943 and the Marshall Islands in early 1944.

On January 30, 1944, the *Anderson* was hit by gunfire at Wotje, killing six and injuring 14, but Tinsley was not hurt. As result of this damage, the *Anderson* was sent to Pearl Harbor for repairs, which were completed in June 1944. While in Hawaii, Tinsley was the guest of Hopewell native Mrs. Louise Parker Matzuk and her husband at their house in Hawaii, and his visit was later reported in the September 26, 1944 issue of The Hopewell News. The Matzucs had a standing offer for all Hopewell service members to visit them whenever they were in Hawaii.



***Tinsley (l) and Bedford (r)  
in New Guinea, July 1943***

In July, 1944, the *Anderson* was assigned to the Seventh Fleet and participated in the landings at Morotai and Leyte. Naval battles and land combat ensued in October near the Philippines at Leyte Island. While operating at Leyte, the ship was under intense enemy attack when at 1813 hrs (6:13 pm) on November 1, 1944, a Japanese airplane crashed into the *Anderson*, fatally injuring Tinsley and 15 others. Tinsley would have turned 33 years old in one more week. The *Anderson* remained functional, was repaired and returned to service with no other damage during the war.

Nearly a month later on Tuesday, November 28, 1944, both Tinsley's parents and wife, Edna, were sent telegrams from the Navy Department indicating he died of wounds following action in the Pacific. By then it had been almost three years since the last time Tinsley was in Hopewell in January 1942 to see his family. The last letter they had from him was dated October 10, 1944.

Condolences letters were sent to Edna on December 11, 1944, by Ralph H. Benson, Lieutenant Commander, U.S Navy, on December 26, 1944 by Ross T. McIntire, Vice Admiral, Surgeon General, U.S. Navy and on December 28, 1944, by James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy. Edna wrote to Lt. Commander Benson on January 25, 1945, asking for his service records that show actions that he was involved in enemy action while on board he was on the *Anderson*. She wrote this letter from Hopewell, in which she said she had come to be with Tinsley's parents, arriving on December 10, 1944. The Navy provided the information she requested in a letter dated March 24, 1945, sent to her attention at the Riggan's Hopewell address as follows:

Bombardment of Kiska  
Bombardment and Occupation of Tarawa, Gilbert Islands  
Bombardment of Wotje  
Bombardment and Occupation of N. Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands  
Cabalian Bay, Panaon Island, Philippine Islands

**Copy of Telegram to Tinsley's Mother Notifying Her of His Death  
Edna was sent an Identical Telegram**

NAVPERS-1486

TELEGRAM

PERS-53211-mf  
16051-A-3-3  
28 NOVEMBER 1944

MRS. DORA AUGUSTA RIGGAN.....  
100 SOUTH 5TH. AVENUE.....  
HOPEWELL, VIRGINIA.....

THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR  
SON HENDERSON TINSLEY RIGGAN CHIEF ELECTRICIAN'S MATE USN  
MULTIPLE WHILE IN THE  
DIED OF/WOUNDS FOLLOWING ACTION/IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS  
DUTY AND IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT  
APPRECIATES YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE  
AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED.  
HIS REMAINS WERE INTERRED IN ALLIED TERRITORY ON AN ISLAND  
NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT PRESENT REGARDING DISPOSITION OF  
IN THE PACIFIC PENDING CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES.  
REMAINS BUT BY REASON OF EXISTING CONDITIONS BURIAL AT SEA  
OR IN LOCALITY WHERE DEATH OCCURRED HIGHLY PROBABLE. IF  
FURTHER INFORMATION IS RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED.  
TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE  
THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION. THE DEPARTMENT EXTENDS TO  
YOU ITS SINCEREST SYMPATHY IN YOUR GREAT LOSS.

VICE

REAR ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS  
CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL

Years later, Tinsley's nieces, Brenda and Hilda, were told the following about the day his parents were notified of his death as follows.

*The naval officers that were assigned to notify Grandma and Granddaddy Riggan that Uncle Tinsley had been killed went to the police department in Hopewell first to find out where they lived. The police knew Grandma and felt she would need someone to be with her when the officers came. They also knew that her daughter, Beulah, lived behind her. So they sent a police officer to tell Beulah what had happened. Then Beulah went to be with her parents when the naval officers came.*

*At the time Grandma and Granddaddy had three sons serving in the Pacific, Tinsley, Ellsworth, and Bedford. When the officers were coming to the door Grandma saw them and knew there was only one reason they were coming. When she went out the door to meet them and she said, "Which one of my boys is it?"*

At the time of his death, Tinsley was a well traveled, experienced and highly decorated Navy Chief Petty Officer. In addition to his wife and parents, he was survived by all his brothers and sisters when he passed away.

The Hopewell News reported in an article on December 1, 1944, he had a campaign bar for service before the attack on Pearl Harbor with a star for being at sea on December 7, 1941, a European Bar for service in the Atlantic, an American Bar for action in American waters, the Asiatic Bar for action in the South Pacific with five stars for major sea battles, and a special bar with two stars for over twelve years of good conduct. He was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the World War II Victory Medal.

Tinsley was first buried at the U.S. Cemetery, Tacloban, Leyte Island, Philippines and he was later moved to a nicer cemetery near Palo, Leyte Island as indicated in a letter from Mr. W. L. Goodwin to Tinsley's parents dated Sunday, October 28, 1945. Mr. Goodwin was a family friend from Hopewell who was serving in the Philippines at the time. In that letter Mr. Goodwin said in part.

*"Several days ago, I received word that your son, and my friend, was buried on Leyte. I felt it was the least I could do to try to find the grave and to pay my respects to the memory of one of my friends that gave his life to make my arrival on this island comparatively safe. We are all deeply indebted to those boys.*

*My sister wrote that one of your boys has visited the grave at Tacloban. If he could see the grave now he would be surprized. The body has been moved to a U.S. Armed Forces Cemetery near Palo, Leyte. This is a much nicer cemetery. The cemetery is in a very nice location. Things are very peaceful here. The grounds are covered with green grass and they are kept neat and clean. The Cemetery is surrounded by a white picket fence with two latticed arches for entrance and exit.*

*There is an office that has complete records of each grave. I checked Tinsley's papers and made sure I had the right one. Their records showed his full name and that he died on Nov. 1, 1944. He was first buried at cemetery #1 at Tacloban and later moved to the present location."*

Notice that based on this letter, one of Tinsley's brothers had visited his grave while it was at the Tacloban cemetery. After Tinsley was moved to the Palo cemetery that Mr. Goodwin visited, he remained there until he was returned to the United States and interred at the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery at San Diego, California on February 14, 1949.

In November 1945, the Anderson came to San Diego prior to decommissioning. Regarding that event, Edna wrote to Tinsley's parents on March 4, 1946, in which she said *"The ship came into San Diego last November and the Executive Officer invited me to come aboard, which I did. Was the first widow to make the visit, but learned afterwards that several others followed."* She indicated it relieved her mind about the care he received by talking to men who had served with Tinsley.

Tinsley's father passed away just a few years later in 1953 and his mother passed away in 1968. Edna passed away on July 25, 1986 and is buried beside Tinsley at the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery at San Diego, California. At the time this biography was developed, Tinsley was still survived by his sister Dora Belle, as well as many nieces and nephews who continue to treasure his memory. The collection of information, mementos and pictures included in this document were provided by Tinsley's nieces Hilda and Brenda, who have preserved these items on behalf of Tinsley's family.



***USS Anderson***

The men on the USS Anderson had the plaque below made and provided a picture to Edna. Tinsley served during all campaigns except Kurile Islands. His life was lost during the Philippines campaign.





*Tinsley in Hampton, 1930*



*April 20, 1940*



*W.L. Goodwin, a family friend from Hopewell at Tinsley's grave at the U.S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Palo, Leyte Island, Philippines.*

# Mrs. Riggan Receives Late Husbands Medal

Mrs. Edna Riggan, widow of Chief Electrician's Mate H. Tinsley Riggan, USN, whose home is in Burbank, Calif., has received the Purple Heart Medal posthumously awarded to her late husband, who lost his life November 1, 1944 in the Pacific.

The medal was accompanied by an explanatory letter to Mrs. Riggan from the Navy Department, Bureau of Naval Personnel, together with a certificate suitable for framing. This read as follows:

"The United States of America, to all who shall see these presents, greeting: This is to certify that the President of the United States of America pursuant to authority vested in him by Congress has awarded the Purple Heart, established by General George Washington at Newburgh, N. Y., August 7, 1782, to Henderson Tinsley Riggan, Chief Electrician's Mate, U. S. Navy." (See "Mrs. Riggan" Page 8)

## Mrs. Riggan

(Continued From Page 1)

Navy, for military merit and for wounds received in action, resulting in his death November 1, 1944."

The certificate was signed by James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, and Randall Jacobs, Vice-Admiral, U. S. Navy, Chief of Navy Personnel.

Mrs. Riggan, until a few weeks ago, was in Hopewell visiting her husband's parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Riggan of 10 South Fifth Avenue. The Purple Heart Medal and accompanying letters, certificate, etc., were received on her return to California.

*The Hopewell News, April 20, 1945*



TINSLEY RIGGAN

# Tinsley Riggan Body Returned

Word has been received by Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Riggan, of 100 South 5th Avenue, that the body of their son, Henderson T. Riggan, Chief Electrician's Mate, USN, is enroute to the United States from the Pacific area.

He is one of 4,504 World War II dead that are being returned to the United States on board the Army Transport Jack Pendleton for reburial. He will be buried at Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, California.

*The Hopewell News, January 18, 1949*

# Services Held for War Hero

Funeral services were held Feb. 14 for Henderson T. Riggan, Chief Electrician's Mate, U.S.N., at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. Edna Riggan, of AEC Catalog File at TMP, is the widow of Mr. Riggan, who was killed in action Nov. 1, 1944, aboard the USS Anderson during the Leyte invasion.

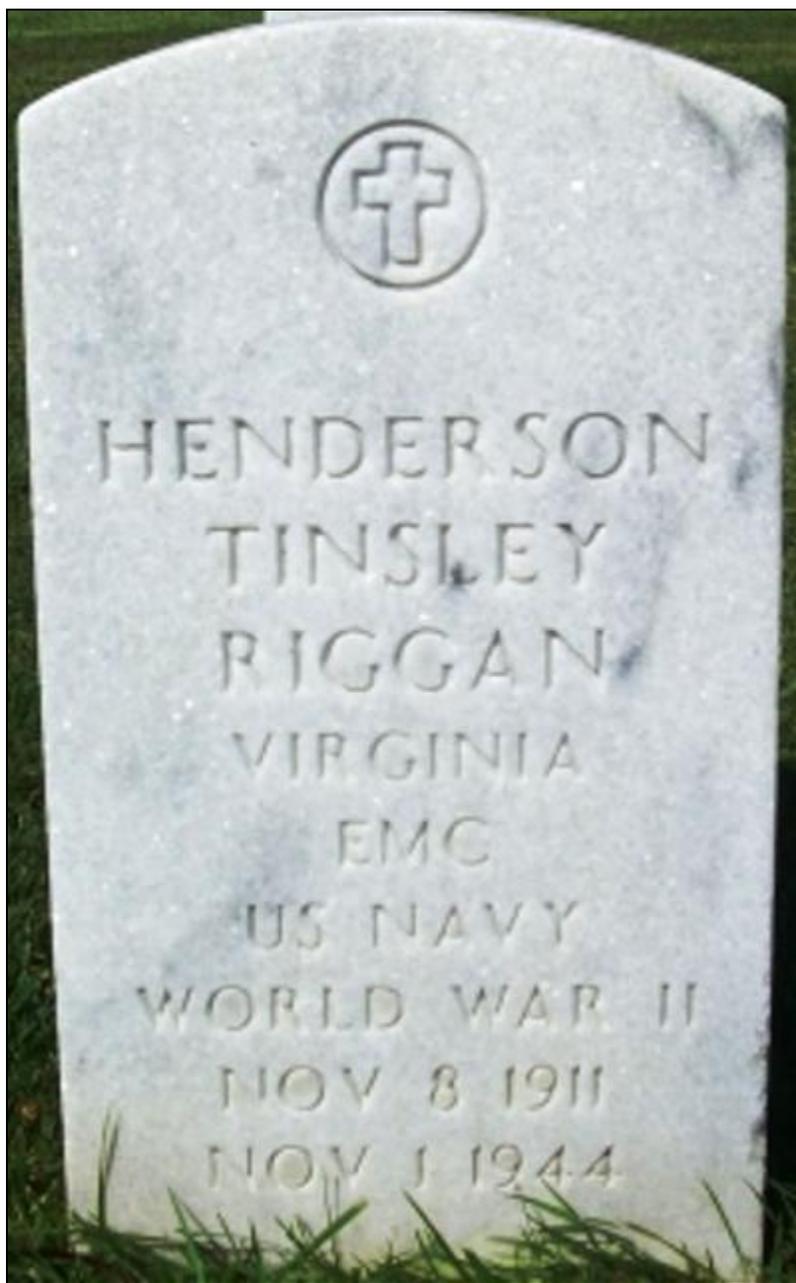
During his naval service he was attached to the USS Richmond prior to the commissioning of the Anderson, and saw action in the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, Santa Cruz and Guadalcanal, and in the Aleutians, Gilberts, Marshalls and New Guinea campaigns.

*Announcement of Tinsley's Funeral Service of February 14, 1949  
at Ft. Rosecrans, San Diego*

**The City of Hopewell War Memorial Monument  
and Tinsley's inscription**



HENDERSON T. RIGGAN



***Final Resting Place***

***Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery***

***San Diego, California***

This memorial tribute made possible by support of:

J.T. Morriss and Sons

The Bank of Southside Virginia

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Mrs. Jeanette Wallace

Mrs. Alvah Wagner

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