

# The two by four minister

"When I was ten I told my mother that I wanted to be a nun, and her response was, 'Well you can't; we're Presbyterians.'" Big laugh all around.

"In all honesty," continues Pastor Lin Hutton, "once I recognized the call to ministry several years prior to getting out of the Navy, I actually ran in the opposite direction. I was terrified of becoming a minister."

Pastor Lin calls herself a "two by four minister." She explains. "God taps you on the shoulder, you brush him off. He taps you a little harder and then he punches you in the arm and you try running away. And then he kind of hits you up side the head with a two by four and you finally go 'Alright, already. I get it. I get it. Okay?'"

She shakes her head as if she's been slapped and smiles broadly. "The honesty is when you finally say 'Yes,' and when you do it's like this amazing weight is off of you and it feels so right. You feel lighter than air like you're going to float up; it feels so powerful." Her friends shrugged, rolled their eyes and said, "Well it's about time."

And so she went through the arduous process of becoming an Episcopal minister, starting with her parish priest, "the gatekeeper," forwarding her name as an aspirant for holy orders. She attended seminary at the multi-denominational School of Theology at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee and was ordained in Washington National Cathedral in June of 2004. From there, Pastor Lin served as assistant to the rector at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Warsaw, Indiana. The process from aspirant to ordination takes "a minimum of five years." And then follows the "laborious process," of linking up a rector to a church.

Anyway, Pastor Lin, as she likes to be called, is finally here. "I'm enjoying Orange and the surrounding area



This past December, Pastor Lin Hutton took over as the 30th rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church. The church, founded in 1740 and erected in 1833, is steeped in history.

Photo by Susie Audibert

tremendously," she says adding she loves being in a small town. "I like being in the place where the county seat is because that's where things tend to converge." She's looking forward to going to high school football games "because you have all the moms and dads, aunts

and uncles and cousins and everybody either went there or they played or they oom pah pahed in the band or they cheered. It's just fun." Besides, Pastor Lin needs a hometown to call her own; remember, she attended three high schools in four years!

A passionately dedicated alum of Florida State, Lin has an autographed poster-sized photo of Bobby Bowden on her office wall. "I'm so excited about being back in ACC country. I don't like Big Ten. I'm so sick and tired about hearing about Notre Dame," she snorts. "I'm a huge ACC fan."

She claims few problems converting to civilian life, because actually, you don't convert to civilian life when you move to the ministry from the Navy. "The ministry, in so many ways, is really so much the same. You trade one uniform for another. It's easy: black shirt, black pants, black jacket, white collar. How hard is that?" And coming from a military command environment, she is used to facing and resolving problems head on. "You're never going to please everybody all of the time," she says realistically, adding that she sees her role as someone who helps others find their own personal ministries.

It may have been an incident in her childhood that led Pastor Lin to answer the call. She tells a story of neighbors who had a cousin who was struck by a drunk driver. Their minister, of a different Christian denomination, prayed by the stricken boy's bedside to no avail. The child died. The minister came back to visit the bereaved family, "and what they heard him to say was 'well if you had prayed hard enough, he would have lived,' which is terrible theology," she shudders. "That family never went back to church again...He may not have even said that; the problem is, that's what they heard."

Something says that Pastor Lin will never be misunderstood like that. If she is, she'll just hit you upside the head with a two by four.



# "I can do that."

## The story of Lin Hutton

Pastor Lin now takes orders from "the best boss in the world." She sees her job as someone who will recognize and help develop the personal gifts of ministry in others. A photo on the window sill behind her shows her joking with President George H.W. Bush.

Photo by Susie Audibert

The photo below was taken on an aircraft carrier, when Captain Lin Hutton was a squadron commander based out of Norfolk. She and the navy airman are standing next to the loading ramp of a Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD) C2 "Greyhound" aircraft. This plane is capable of taking off and landing on aircraft carriers with 10,000 pounds of cargo!

Contributed photo



So anyway, Naval aviator, Lin Hutton is trying to take off from an aircraft carrier somewhere near Puerto Rico. It is oppressively hot, which makes it hard to achieve lift. Still, she is to make what's called a "deck run," into the wind instead of taking a catapult shot to become airborne. In other words, she's just going to rev up that big ol' radial engine, release the brakes, and roll on down the deck, hoping and praying she has enough lift to be airborne when she reaches the edge.

She is flying fully loaded, "the heaviest plane on the carrier." It's called a Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD) aircraft, a cargo plane that can take off and land on this postage stamp of a deck with up to 10,000 pounds of supplies, mail and/or people.

She has the co-pilot radio the Air Boss, the guy in the carrier's tower who is the air traffic controller, to point out that, "We need 25 knots of wind or we will not get airborne." The Air Boss replies, that they have 25 knots of wind. "And I looked outside and I didn't see anybody's pant legs moving." At 25 knots, those bell bottoms should be flapping, not that they were wearing bell bottoms, but you get the idea.

She has the co-pilot reiterate her concerns to the Air Boss. Again he assures her she has 25 knots of headwind. Finally, she gets on the horn herself. "I really have got to have 25 knots. There's not enough deck space for me." The Air Boss

Lin Hutton is the first woman ever to command a Naval Air Station, in this case a fighter training facility in Key West, Florida. The base specialized in "aggressor" training...Top Gun fighter jocks with 380,000 square miles of unencumbered air space to "fight" in.

Contributed photo



interesting place to work," she says with a faraway look to her eye, "but I was ready to accept a different call. I had been fighting the call to the ministry for quite some time, and so it actually made it easier to leave the Navy from the Pentagon as opposed to leaving from the squadron, when you work with the sailors, because the sailors are the neatest people on the planet."

Any regrets? Yes, just one. She held a Captain's Mast, which is a naval judiciary procedure for a young sailor who after three beers let himself be peer-pressured into experimenting with drugs. "I think he would have benefited if we

could have kept him," she says. She even went to the admiral about the case. But the zero tolerance rule left her no choice. Still she says wistfully, "I do worry what happened to him."

Concerning the infamous Tailhook scandal, where partially clad women were forced to run a gauntlet of groping Navy airmen down a Las Vegas hotel corridor, Lin Hutton says "that's a good example of way too much alcohol and I would say a serious failure of leadership." Although she was not one of the women groped... was nowhere near there at the time... she comments "that's a good example of people in a mob

environment doing what they would never do as an individual."

Linda Vaught Hutton's bio says that during her 27-year naval career "she accumulated nearly 400 day and night carrier landings and over 4,500 flight hours." She has been awarded two Legion of Merits, three Meritorious Service Awards, and a Joint Service Commendation Medal. "I had a wonderful career," she says smiling. "I enjoyed it immensely."

And by the looks of it, she's full steam ahead in her new career as Rector of St. Thomas's. "It's really fun. You get to work with really neat people. You have the best boss in the world."

INSIDER

By PHIL AUDIBERT  
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is now really irritated. "You have... 25... knots," he snaps.

Lin shook her head in resignation, went over some emergency procedures with the co-pilot, including dropping the tail hook at the last moment to catch the last wire if necessary. And then she revved up the engine, let the brakes go, "and we're rolling and I'm not saying very nice things all the way down. And I set the attitude of the aircraft to rotate and I immediately yelled 'flaps!'" As instructed, the co-pilot gave her 1/3 flaps.

The aircraft disappeared off the edge of the deck. In fact, the entire flight crew rushed forward, fully expecting to see the plane upside down in the water, just seconds away from being cut in half by the carrier's prow.

But no... the plane is shuddering in mid air and the stall warning horn is blaring. "You're 60 to 80 feet above the water, so that's 60 to 80 feet you can get some airspeed. So I used that," says Lin coolly. "The main thing is to maintain balanced flight, otherwise you'll stall out and spin. My co-pilot has his hand on the flaps and I say just 'hold it, hold it, hold it' and we sloooooowly fly our way up out of the stall," her voice quavers dramatically. "Once we are positively clearly flying at about 150 feet now, the Air Boss says, 'Are you all okay?'"

Lin Hutton shakes her head, commenting that it's times like these when you wish you could come up with something witty. But she just couldn't muster it. "I had this death grip on the yoke, and all I could do is, I keyed the mike and said 'Boss we're okay but I think COD 2 behind us needs a whole...lot...more...wind.'" This may have been followed by a string of choice expletives...putting a new spin on the term, 'swearing like a sailor.' Either way, "I was furious," she admits.

Pastor Lin Hutton smiles as she tells this story from a comfy couch in the rector's study at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Orange. *The Holy Bible* sits on the coffee table in front of her. These walls probably have never heard a sailor swear. But now, as St. Thomas's new rector, Lin Hutton is doing a different kind of swearing, as in swearing an oath, this time to a different Air Boss, one who will not send her fully loaded off the deck of a carrier without the benefit of a catapult.

So, this incident, was that the catalyst that sent her to the ministry? Did she see God that day? Was this her epiphany? Was this the time when the hawk landed on her shoulder and with its talons told her how to steer the aircraft out of that mess like it did in one of those classic 1940s films?

Fraid not. Sorry. No, Lin Hutton has wanted to be in the ministry ever since she was a child. It's just that she detoured to the Navy first. But, man oh man what a ride it has been: from the little girl who wanted to be a nun, through her meteoric and stellar career in the Navy, to now serving as captain aboard the good ship *St. Thomas*.

Born in the San Francisco Bay area, the daughter of a career Naval aviator, Lin Hutton could have easily been the quintessential California girl: Tall, athletic, blond and intelligent, you could just see her catching a wave, flying upside down, making a legal point and preaching a sermon on any given Sunday.

But being a military brat means you move around a lot. In four years she went to three different high schools...all of them in Virginia, which she considers more her home state than just about anywhere else she's lived (Texas, Rhode Island, Maine, Florida, and all over the world). Graduating from Florida State with a double major (physics and education), Lin came home to live while she contemplated how she was going to fund her next move, which was to law school. Becoming a Naval aviator was about the furthest thing from her mind.

And so, "Mom and Dad dragged me to happy hour one Friday night in hopes of meeting a cute young Naval aviator...I married a cute young Naval aviator, but several years later...but what I did see were two women officers there, and I didn't know they even had women officers. And I said, 'Dad what are they?' And he said 'Women officers.' And I said, 'but what do they do?'" Apparently, he shrugged and muttered something about personal admin, typing, filing, that sort of thing. Then he offhanded a comment about the G.I. Bill.

"It was like a light bulb went on. 'Oh, I could do that.' So the next



Following a 27 year highly successful career as a Navy aviator and base commander, Captain Lin Hutton has traded her sailor's togs for the black suit and collar of the Episcopal Church. She now prefers to be addressed as Pastor Lin.

Photos by Susie Audibert

Monday I literally walked into the recruiting office and said 'I'd like to be a naval officer.'" The recruiter looked her over and told her she had to take some tests; didn't she want to study first? Nope, she'll take them right here on the spot. She sailed right through them and came home early. Her Mom asked her where she'd been and she breezily announced as she skipped out the door, "Oh I went down and joined the Navy."

Her father was waiting for her when she came back. He had not prepared the usual individual happy hour drinks, but a whole pitcher of straight up martinis instead. He was not watching his usual happy hour show "The Nightly News" with Howard K. Smith and Harry Reasoner. No, his head was buried in the *Wall Street Journal*. Apparently, he was not happy. The pitcher of martinis sweated. So, one could imagine, did Lin. "What's this about you joining the Navy?" he finally queried, convinced that she'd been arm-twisted by the recruiter. She assured him the recruiter had not.

And so, father properly assuaged, it was off to Newport, Rhode Island, to Officer Candidate School. The year was 1974, and they weren't even accepting women to the naval academy or to ROTC yet. An assignment officer came in and said they were opening the flight program to only the second group of women in history. Anyone interested? Raise your hand. "And I said, 'Well, my dad's a Navy pilot. I can do that,'" chirps Lin brightly. And so, Lin Hutton became the seventh woman ever to earn her Navy wings.

And she found she had a talent for flying, which translated into a talent for leading. "I was very lucky to be a good pilot, and because of that I was able therefore to focus on being a good officer, which is really what you're evaluated on more than anything else. If you have problems flying, just because it doesn't come naturally to you, you tend to get over-tasked and taxed in the cockpit, and that lack of confidence in the air tends also to affect your work in the squadron as an officer. That's probably true with any profession."

So, what's the ticket to being a good pilot? "It's more than eye-hand coordination," she muses. "There's a spatial orientation issue that you either kind of have it or you don't, because, I've seen people who are great athletes, but they're lousy pilots. I don't think eye-hand coordination is really the connector." She thinks about this a moment more and adds, "People really good at games tend to be really good pilots,



Gameboys and X-boxes and stuff like that, because you're multi-tasking."

She remembers during flight training how instructors would throw everything but the kitchen sink at her, watching how she reacted. "There are many things that can go wrong in the airplane mechanically, and a certain number will kill you and some of them won't," she explains. She simulates a fuel problem, followed by a hydraulic system malfunction. As the trainee works on these things, she throws in an engine fire. "Back up," she says to the student; "You're dead. You were so busy chasing down the hydraulic problem and the fuel problem that you ignored the fire warning light that's going to kill you."

And so Lin Hutton is on a training flight to Jacksonville Florida, where her father has just retired as commander of the Naval Air Station there. And on her approach, she doesn't need to hear a warning horn to know something's wrong; her major thrust rod is broken and she's rapidly losing oil pressure. "I just did an engine out landing, which is really easy." Easy????

Her dad noticed something was wrong, but kept mum. Cool as a cucumber, Lin tells the tower she's coming in without an engine and brings the aircraft in just as nice as you please. The guy who directs ground traffic—the guy who waves those paddles around—directs her to a parking place, and signals her to shut down. "And I took my helmet off and I had long hair and it was windy and the cockpit was open, and my hair is blowing all around." She laughs at the memory of it. "He literally fell over...He probably had no idea that women could fly."

Aha! There's that pesky gender thing. Pastor Lin smirks, "About 25 percent of the guys really hated the fact that women were there. Another 25 percent thought it was really cool, and 50 percent really didn't care; they just wanted make sure you were going to do your job... And if you just focus on doing your job and doing it well, then they're happy. I quickly realized you don't argue with the guy who is adamantly opposed to you; he's never going to be in favor of it. He's just going to waste your time."

Another gender problem: the generalization that all women are judged on how well or how badly just one performs. "For good or ill, I



knew that men were going to judge not just me but all women based on how they saw me do." She remembers other female officer candidates and pilots grouse how unfair that is. "Well, you're right it is unfair," shrugs Pastor Lin, "but you know what? Life's unfair."

Here's how she dealt with it. "You're always prepared. If it's a training flight you've read everything you need to have done in your ground school and your pre-flight planning so that your pre-flight check list is flawless." So, nothing the instructor could throw at her would rattle her.

Well she does remember being a teeny weeny bit rattled when, 500 feet above ground in the Azores, wind shear "flipped us about 160 degrees, almost completely upside down, and we had complete opposite controls; we could not get the airplane to right itself." Well, eventually they did, of course; otherwise we wouldn't be having this conversation.

That was when Lin Hutton was flying P3 Orions out of Spain, England, Germany and Greece. But as these low flying sub hunters became increasingly involved in Cold War feints, parries and thrusts, Lin Hutton had to move because of regulations forbidding women serving as combatants. Instead she flew P3s in the Pacific in electronic warfare and oceanographic research missions, where they studied thermo clines and mapped sea mountains for submariners, who, for obvious reasons didn't want to go about pinging their way across the ocean for

everyone to hear.

From there, Lin Hutton worked her way up in the Navy, flying COD's onto and off of carriers everywhere. And yes, Lin Hutton landed on carriers at night, which she did not dread as much as others do. "Actually I liked night landings better because they're just like flying instruments and I was a very good instrument pilot...in fact, full moon nights I didn't like because you could see the wake and the outline of the ship and you have that sense of motion. That's a little freaky."

Somewhere in the middle of all this she met and married that "cute young Naval Aviator." The marriage lasted 10 years. Later she was married to a Navy Seal, and on her bookcase, there's a picture of them both chatting with President H.W. Bush at a Congressional Medal of Honor ceremony. "Well sir," she remembers saying to the President, "it's good to see another young Naval Aviator who made good."

In 1986, Lin Hutton graduated from the Armed Forces Staff College and became the first woman aviator to command a carrier squadron. It was during her tour here that the squadron won the Navy's Aviation Safety Award. It was also on her watch that the Navy started expanding the use of the CODs to do things other than delivering mail and supplies. "We'd drop special warfare people out of our planes for them to do crazy stuff." Crazy stuff? She pauses and sums it up with one word all-telling word: "Seals." Oh, that kind of crazy stuff.

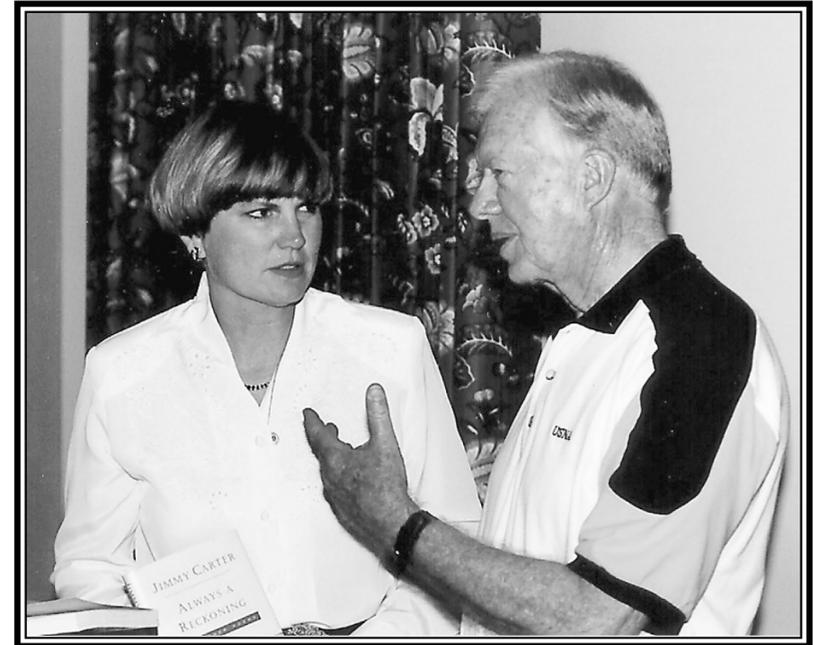
Based in Norfolk, Commander Hutton had 450 sailors working for her. And it is here that she ably used some wise advice from her dad, namely, "take care of your sailors...When it comes time to do something, some task, ask them how they would do it, because, if they buy into it, they will make that process work."

It was August of 1995 that following a stint as air ops officer on the staff of the commander of the Second Fleet that Lin Hutton assumed command of the Naval Air Station, in Key West, which she terms, "just unbelievable fun." These were the fighter jocks, the Top Guns, darting about in multi million dollar jets doing "aggressor training." And they had at their immediate disposal "380,000 square miles of unencumbered air space...For

jets which are always fuel critical, you can get far more impact for your training sortie...you can get more what we call head to head engagements in that amount of time." Consider that the flyboys out of Oceana have to travel all the way off the coast of North Carolina before they can have fun. At sunny Key West, "they could go out to the Dry Tortugas 50 miles away and fight all the way back."

After Key West, Lin Hutton was kicked upstairs. Handpicked by the chief of Naval Operations, she served in a strategic studies group in Newport, Rhode Island; ironically her launch point in 1974 had now become her landing point. But it was at the Pentagon that she decided to change course completely.

"The Pentagon is an



While Lin Hutton was in Key West, Jimmy Carter and his family decided to ring in the New Year at what was known as the Truman Little White House near the Naval Air Station. In this photo Lin Hutton holds a book of poetry penned by the former president.

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