



Richard “Dick” Dean – Aircraft Inspector

[Tyler County Booster](#) (July 26, 2013), 6B.

Richard “Dick” Neil Dean was born in Port Neches, but his mother died when he was five and at eleven his father died. He was raised by his aunt and uncle, Hendrix and Gladys Parks, in High Island in Galveston County.

His sister Betty Jo went to live with Walter and Madge Lybarger in Beaumont, Walter being the father of the late Pat Brown, Tyler County Clerk. Dr. James Brown is his second Cousin. His brother James went to live with grandparents in Port Neches.

Moving was tough, but Dick said, “Either that or to an orphan home. I did get the better deal. That is where I came to know the Lord. I was a ‘drug to church’ by my Aunt Gladys. Though I became a back-seated heathen for many years. Twenty-one years in the Navy. That should explain a lot.”

He joked about his heathen ways, but does not like to discuss them. He credits his Aunt’s prayers for helping him survive and return to his spiritual home.

Three weeks out of high school, he signed up for four years with the Air Force (AF) as an airframe repairman.

Late in 1960, on the way back from the Texas Prison Rodeo, a mutual friend introduced him to Shirley Blanchard. Love at first sight. Three months later, on New Year’s Eve Dec. 31, 1960, they married.

For 53 years love has grown. Their three sons are named Neal Hendrix, Richard “Rick” Earl, and William Ellis Dean.

Little Rick got bit by a fire ant causing a nearly lethal allergic reaction. “If we had not lived within a mile of a doctor, we might have lost him,” Dick said.

Their insurance did not cover expenses: \$48 per injection weekly while he made only \$128 a week.

Dick had an epiphany of sorts. “I know somebody that will pay these doctor bills – Uncle Sam.” So he joined the Navy in May of 1966 and made a career of it.

They moved to Virginia Beach, Va., where he was deployed to the USS Independence, Attack Squadron 75, servicing A6 Intruders. “A wonderful airplane,” said Dick. “The only



airplane that could haul more than its own weight in ordinance. We went to the Mediterranean. Three weeks out to sea, then to a port somewhere.”

Shirley had never been away from Port Neches and felt stranded with two kids in Virginia, but she adapted.

In December 1967, Dick left for Vietnam aboard the USS Kitty Hawk. He pointed to a ribbon. “The Presidential Unit Citation for Outstanding Performance was personally presented to us by President Lyndon Johnson for operations during the Tet Offensive of 1968.”

A two-day ceasefire between North and South Vietnam was agreed upon to observe the Tet Lunar New Year. But the Communists lied and executed a well-coordinated surprise attack with 80,000 troops on more than 100 towns in South Vietnam on January 30, 1968. The US and South Vietnam responded ferociously, killing about 45,000 Communists.

Dick said, “everybody was busy loading the planes with bombs. I was awake for 86 hours loading bombs, taking a catnap on the bombs for 10-15 minutes till the planes came back. In four days we loaded over 1.5 million pounds of bombs.”

He retrained as a flight engineer and began a second tour to Vietnam.

“We flew from 50 to 3,000 feet above water, at 400 knots, during Operation Market Time,” Dick said, emphasizing the danger of low-level flying. “Specially outfitted P3-B Orions flew 12-hour flights from Thailand, over Laos and Cambodia, and descended at DaNang, to identify all traffic that seemed offensive. Then we did it in reverse, all through my second tour.”

Back in the states, at Chase Field in Beeville, Texas, he became a Navy career counselor. He also served on the destroyers USS Mitscher and an amphibious assault ship the USS Guam.

The Navy needed recruiters, which was a natural transition for Dick. Recruiters were using unethical tactics, like recruiting from bars and trying to talk judges into reducing sentences if a man enlisted. “The Navy had 3,600 recruiters, and we fired 2,100 for all kinds of misconduct.” Though a heathen, Dick was honorable and was chosen to teach recruiters what the Navy expected.

His Recruiting Command award has a gold wreath with two stars, meaning he had exceeded all the goals the Navy asked, though sometimes he worked 80-hour weeks. As a Zone Supervisor covering 28,000 square miles from north of San Antonio to Abilene and east to Waco, “I drove 118,000 miles in one year supervising 18 recruiters in eight districts.”

On July 31, 1982, he retired from the Navy as a Chief Petty Officer. He is proud of his two Vietnam Crosses of Gallantry, three air medals for combat blight, and 14 other ribbons and medals.

Boeing opened in Lake Charles, and Dick made lead aircraft inspector in couple of weeks and supervisor in couple a months. But the seven-day work weeks were dreadful. “I had one Saturdays, two Sundays and Christmas off in one year.”

A kid who worked for him referred Dick to Lockheed in Beeville, Texas.

The supervisor called, “Mr. Dean, I am interested in talking to you about an inspector job. But I have to tell you, there is no such thing as overtime. It’s 40 hours a week.”

“I’ll take the job,” Dick laughed. He made more at Lockheed without the crazy hours. “We were there three and half years. Then the first Gulf War came. I got a call to go to Kuwait.”



The money was super good for six months.

"Saddam Hussein gave up too early," chuckled Dick.

Back in Tyler County about 20 years ago, God answered prayers and he returned to God.

He received his 50-year Masonic pin in 2011, a fraternity that values honor like no other.

Aircraft inspecting is rigorous with daily and weekly checks; after a specified number of hours, everything was removed from the plane. The inspector had to sign-off on every nut, bolt, part, crevice, and corner. On a 747, there could be 10-12 inspectors, and each one could find a 1,000 "gripes." A small area of corrosion could be flagged and would have to be repaired.

Some mechanics sought easy inspectors.

"But I stayed by the book," Dick said. "Today, 'gripes' are logged into a handheld computer and the trail is harder to fudge."

"An old 707 jet came in one day," Dick reflected. "A freight hauler. Almost missed it. There was a greasy spot where the wing connected to the fuselage. Something told me to look at the main wing beam, about 16 inches square of aluminum. I wiped the grease away and found a 14-inch crack running out of wing. I could stick my little finger in it! And where it was connected to the fuselage, there was another 6-inch crack. I wrote it up.

"But a representative from the airline tried to talk me out of it. But I told him, 'No! I have to. The wing is going to fall off.' It came down to a hassle."

Dick's supervisor called a friend from the FFA to come down and back Dick up. The FFA man condemned the whole plane, saying, "Junk the whole thing!" After the dust settled, Dick said, "I watched them junk it," with a bit of satisfaction, "saw the tractor come and crunch it in its claws."

"I was heel with airline, but a hero with the FFA." Dick smiled.

His heathen ways are in the distant past, but his proclivity for scrutinizing has remained. He has a knack for seeing through the "cracks" in life, his own and in others, as he encourages others in his church in Hillister, Texas. He cherishes his God, his family and friends, and his church.