

Neil E. Spencer



Neil Eugene Spencer was born on September 7, 1922 in Orville, Ohio and grew up in Canton, Ohio. He was a member of the “Greatest Generation”. He attended McKinley High School in Canton where he was on the swim team as a diver as well as a gymnastics cheerleader. After graduating from McKinley in 1940, Neil hitch-hiked to William & Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania for his first year of college. In his sophomore year, Neil transferred to Springfield College in Springfield, MA to work on a Bachelor of Science degree. There he was on the prestigious gymnastics team that was featured on one of the first black and white television shows broadcast in the early 1940s.

Neil had an appointment to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, but was one-half inch too short. The only word he heard was “Next!” He tried three more times to get into the Navy, but his height was still a hindrance. Finally, during WWII, the Navy came to

him and asked if he would enlist after his graduation from Springfield College in December 10, 1943 to become a Navy pilot.

He was so excited! Neil entered the Navy on December 16, 1943. He earned his wings at the end of the war in 1945. Neil was known as a Navy Corsair pilot and his job was to ferry and fly all types of planes back and forth across the country, including flying off aircraft carriers. He served on the U.S.S. Princeton (CV37) during a peacetime mission right after the war and even walked through the rubble of Nagasaki, Japan! They then traveled to Guam where he was in a group called the "Green Banana Flight". He went on "inactive duty" after returning from the war on December 19, 1947.

Neil went back to Canton to be married to his childhood sweetheart, Betty Johnston, on June 19, 1948. His first job was as an Instructor at the YMCA in Ashtabula, Ohio. They began a family and were blessed with 5 children, 16 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

Neil was called back to active duty on October 1, 1961 and moved his family to Hanover, Massachusetts where he was stationed at Naval Air Station South Weymouth during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After September 30, 1962, he moved his family back to North Canton.

Neil continued to serve with the Naval Reserves out of Akron until July 1, 1970 and would take two-week trips to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba or Reykjavik, Iceland each summer. Neil earned the rank of Lieutenant Commander while serving in the Navy.

Neil also worked as a packaging design engineer and then in carpet research at The Hoover Company in North Canton, Ohio for thirty-five years. Meanwhile, he attended Kent State University in Kent, Ohio to earn a degree in architecture and began a second career as an architect, working from home. Neil also loved inventing things. One of his favorite inventions was called Sierra Land, which was a car that could also fly and float like a boat! Presently Neil and Betty live at the Canton Christian Home in Canton, Ohio.