

TTU ALUMNUS TOOK TO THE SKIES

by Megan Trotter

Everet Dyer of TTU worked on the development of the X-15. Photo courtesy of NASA



Pete Knight, who set a world speed record in the X-15, signed this photo for TTU grad Everet Dyer who worked on research on the aircraft.

Former Tennessee Tech student Everet Dyer is now retired and living in Texas with his wife Darlene after a long and successful engineering career in NASA and the Air Force. However, before he got the chance to work with cutting-edge technology, he was just a mediocre high school student.

“I graduated from high school, but I was a C student,” Dyer said. “It was when I got to college that it all clicked: mathematics, engineering, the whole nine yards.”



He remembers being in Cookeville High School and being asked what his plans were after graduation.

“I said I planned on becoming a steam fitter, welder, going to the Middle East and working for 10 to 15 years and then returning to the U.S. to perhaps start a business of my own and settle down. That drew some chuckles,” he said.

It wasn't until his senior year that Dyer's love of engineering really ignited. His science club took a trip to Tullahoma to visit the Arnold Engineering Development Center.

“I still recall the Saturday bus trip over to the vast complex and seeing one of its vast wind tunnels,” he said. “I still recall standing inside one of its vast wind tunnels and thinking how I'd love to be associated (with) something like this. ... I'd always been interested in airplanes, but never considered being a part of its business.”

However, as Dyer approached graduation from high school and enrollment in Tennessee

Tech, he did not believe he had what it took to major in engineering. Instead, he majored in pre-pharmacy. He plowed through his studies, making passing grades, but by his second semester, he knew his heart wasn't in it. He considered quitting school and joining the National Guard.

He went to his advisor, Dean Brown of the engineering department. With his help, Dyer decided to change his major to engineering. With that, he found his calling.

“Here was that kid ... who originally was more than likely going to be heading to either being a draftsman or working in one of the automobile plants who was now headed onto a very different horizon,” he said.

Dyer graduated from Tech as an engineer and was offered a job working at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va.

When he reported for work, he received a folder saying he was assigned to the Space Structures group.

“Although I was somewhat disappointed, I knew this was the place where I needed to be and just needed to be patient,” he said. “Just after that thought was being processed, the guy handing out the folders said, ‘Wait a minute, Dyer. You’re going over to the special assignment’ and replaced my folder for one at the Hypersonic Research branch. Bingo, I’m on my flight plan!”

Dyer found out his project was to unlock the knowledge in three different company proposals about how the hypersonic research engine was going to interface on the X-15#2 aircraft. Later the test pilot Pete Knight would set a world speed record with a dummy hypersonic research engine located beneath his X-15#2.

“Here I was a rookie engineer and I started getting (asked), ‘Can you solve this and this and this?’” Dyer said.

After advancing in that career for a while, he decided to join the Air Force. Shortly before graduating his training, he and five other pilots were pulled out and told they had been drafted.

They were later deployed to Vietnam.

His missions became increasingly dangerous. Dyer tells of one particular mission where he started smelling a strange odor shortly after his plane had been refilled with fuel.

“All of a sudden my cockpit fills up with fumes. I said, ‘We’re going to have to get out of here.’ So we abort, start heading back to South Vietnam, and we’re talking about how this thing is probably not going to make it home. At one point, we jettisoned my canopy and within 45 seconds, fire broke out,” he said.

The aircraft went down into the Gulf of Tonkin. Dyer and his fellow pilot drew on their survival skills to hang onto a raft for about two hours before they were finally picked up by a Black Ops helicopter.

Also during his career he flew 111s, went to test pilot school and worked as propulsion manager for B1 aircraft. He worked up to the ranks to lieutenant and retired shortly before he could be reviewed for promotion to colonel.

Dyer's career has been an exciting one — especially for someone who started out as a C student and never dreaming that he had what it took to reach for the stars.

One of his most prized possessions is an autographed photo of Col. Pete Knight who set the unofficial world speed and altitude records with the X-15 by going Mach 6.7 — 4,520 miles per hour — at 354,200 feet.

“I had him inscribe on it, ‘Ev Dyer, never forget your roots and wings,’ Dyer said.

“My roots were Tennessee Tech engineering (which allowed) me to have a career with wings.”

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN and its residents at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>