**RICHARD W. WILSON**

Brick Location: A6

Richard Walter Wilson, Sr., was born on May 21, 1925 and grew up in the Cleveland area. He also spent time on the family fruit farm in upstate New York. He attended East Technical High School in Cleveland. On June 5, 1943 he graduated from high school and by June 16, he was in the Great Lakes Training Station in Illinois for basic training in the U.S. Navy.

“We were taught to march, use a rifle, keep your clothes neat, and obey orders,” Wilson said of his training. Wilson then went to electrician’s mate school for four months and was sent to San Diego, assigned to a cruiser, the USS Canberra, which was headed to Pearl Harbor. Wilson also worked in the Naval Reserve as an electrician’s mate aboard the USS Nassau, one of the three baby flat-top escort carriers in the Navy.

During his service, Wilson was told to “join the Navy and see the world” and he did just that. He went to all of the islands from the Philippines to New Guinea and was in Hawaii over 20 times.

“It wasn’t much fun during the war, but the most fun we had was visiting the islands during leaves, where they gave you a case of beer and a bat and ball, and told you to play baseball on a deserted island,” Wilson said.

In the bunks of the Navy’s USS Enterprise, Dick Wilson was inducted into the Order of the Deep by a motley crew of men dressed as pirates and mermaids. The Order, created in fun to break the monotony of the sea, was composed of servicemen who had crossed the equator during their tours. But it wasn’t always fun and games.

“One time we were riding out a hurricane off of Okinawa, which was so bad that we broke our anchor chain and we went out to sea. When we came back after the storm, all of the little ships had been washed upon the beach, except us,” Wilson said.

When Wilson returned from the war, he married his high school sweetheart, Annie Potter, and they had two children, Rebecca and Richard Wilson, Jr. Just as they started to build their young family, Wilson was called back to duty in the Naval Reserve as the Korean Conflict erupted. At age 25, he was sent to Brooklyn, NY, to the USS Oriskany.

“They told us that they needed men who had experience on an aircraft carrier, so they called up 3,000 of us veterans for the Oriskany. I had relatives who had fought in the Battle of Oriskany during the Revolutionary War, so it was really a coincidence to me,” Wilson said.

In his last overseas trip, Wilson was in Sing-Tao, China, on the Yellow River. Their task was to search the river for mines that had been planted there by the Japanese. “There was a reward for anyone who saw one, but it was scary because we would rather not see any,” Wilson said.

After military service, Wilson worked at NASA’s Lewis Center in Cleveland. He was one of the directors of the wind tunnels, airplane hangar-sized vacuums of air that tested potential aircraft. He was active in his local American legion and VFW posts, and helped his children through school and scouting.

When his wife, Annie, passed away in 1997, he moved to Gahanna without hesitation to be closer to his children and grandchildren, Andrew and Sara Miller. Wilson is an active member of the Senior Center and spends time with his family.

Submitted by:

Sara Miller