



W. C. Dietz

WILLIAM CHARLES DIETZ

1919–2006

Elected in 1982

“For major technical and engineering advancements incorporated in high-performance bomber and fighter aircraft of the U.S. Air Force.”

BY ALAN C. BROWN

WILLIAM DIETZ, best known as chief engineer of the F-111 and F-16 aircraft programs at General Dynamics, in Fort Worth, Texas, died on July 31, 2006, at the age of 87.

He was born on April 17, 1919, in Chicago, and graduated from the Aeronautical University of Chicago in 1940 with a B.S. in aeronautical engineering.

Bill joined Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego on October 10, 1940, staying with that company, which became General Dynamics, for 53 years until his retirement on October 31, 1993, as vice president and senior technical staff member. He was very proud to have been the first employee to reach 50 years of company service in October 1990.

He progressed through the Engineering Loft and Lines Group at Consolidated Aircraft to the Structural Design Group as a structural designer, working on projects such as the Consolidated PBY Catalina, the twin-engine World War II flying boat (PBY, PB2Y, PB4Y, P4Y, B-24, B-32, and B-36). In 1943 he was promoted to group engineer on the P4Y project and transferred to the newly organized New Orleans Division. After termination of this project, he was promoted to project engineer of the PBY.

In 1945, Mr. Dietz transferred to the Fort Worth Division as fuselage group engineer and then was promoted to project engineer, responsible for all second-shift engineering operations in connection with production of the B-36. He then became assistant project engineer for the YB-60. After completion of the program, he was promoted to project engineer on the B-58 and continued with that project until August 1961, being promoted to senior project engineer and then chief of B-58 projects.

In August 1961 he was transferred to the F-111 project, where he was responsible for technical coordination of the proposal effort. After award of the contract in November 1962, he was appointed chief engineer of the F-111 project and managed and directed the F-111's engineering design and development. In May 1969 he was assigned as director of airframe and structures technology, responsible for airplane design, structures analysis, loads, and engineering test laboratories.

Mr. Dietz was made engineering director in October 1971 and in this position was responsible for the lightweight fighter proposal. After award of the contract in April 1972, he became director of YF-16 engineering. In July 1974 he was promoted to vice president of F-16 engineering and directed the engineering effort for full-scale development and production of the program.

In 1979, Mr. Dietz transferred to the General Dynamics Convair Division, in San Diego, as vice president and program director of the cruise missile programs. He returned to Fort Worth in 1982 and assumed responsibility for the newly organized Special Projects Department as vice president and program director.

In September 1988 he was assigned the task of assisting the vice president of the YF-22 program in coordinating the design and development effort. In March 1989 he became responsible for providing division-wide coordination of engineering tasks on key programs, including the A-12 program. In January 1991 he became division vice president and senior technical staff member. Then in March 1991 he was tasked with the

engineering design of the AX program (a Navy program to develop a stealthy shipborne attack/fighter aircraft), retiring from the company two and a half years later.

Mr. Dietz's personal list of career highlights includes the first supersonic bomber (B-58 Hustler), the first swing-wing military aircraft (F-111), and of course the F-16 fighter, which became one of the dominant international fighter aircraft of the past 30 years. As impressive as his accomplishments were, Mr. Dietz accepted little individual credit for innovations his work helped foster. "Nobody does anything single-handedly at a modern aerospace company," he said. "All of our accomplishments have been team efforts with a lot of contributions from different people."

Mr. Dietz was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1982. He was a fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. He was a past member of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, for which he received the Air Force's Exceptional Civilian Service Award, and he served on numerous Air Force and National Research Council committees and advisory panels. He was a member of the Advisory Group for Aerospace and Research Development's Flight Mechanics Panel, and in 1977 he received the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Reed Award.

Also in connection with his leadership of the F-16 fighter development team, Mr. Dietz received an award for outstanding engineering accomplishments from the Society of Professional Engineers, and he was a member of the team that received the Collier Trophy for F-16 development. More recently, in 1992 he won the Kelly Johnson Aerospace Vehicle Design and Development Award (named for the engineer who led the Lockheed Skunk Works), and in 2000 he was nominated as a National Aeronautic Association Elder Statesman of Aviation with the following citation: "Over 53 years William C. Dietz led or contributed to the design of thirteen outstanding military aircraft, spanning projects from the PBY seaplane to the F-22 air superiority fighter."

Bill was married to Leta Ruth Dietz for 47 years until her death in 1993. Survivors include his wife of 11 years,

Lorraine Dietz; a son, David Dietz; daughter Deborah Pipes and her husband Wayne; four grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; stepdaughter Earline Wood and her husband Jerry; two step-grandsons; and six step-grandchildren.

Deborah Pipes described her father as “kind, considerate, caring and generous. He was totally unassuming, never wanting the spotlight on himself. He was a hard worker and a man of integrity.” She also wrote that he enjoyed wonderful times with his family and friends, including bowling leagues, golf, holiday parties, and cookouts. In his later years he enjoyed trips with his wife Lori to Arkansas and New Mexico.

