

= Jesse L. Brown =

Jesse LeRoy Brown (13 October 1926 ? 4 December 1950) was a United States Navy officer . He was the first African @-@ American aviator in the U.S. Navy , a recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross , and the first African @-@ American naval officer killed in the Korean War .

Born in Hattiesburg , Mississippi , to an impoverished family , Brown was avidly interested in aircraft from a young age . He graduated as salutatorian of his high school , notwithstanding its racial segregation , and was later awarded a degree from Ohio State University . Brown enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1946 , becoming a midshipman . Brown earned his pilot wings on 21 October 1948 amid a flurry of press coverage ; in January 1949 he was assigned to Fighter Squadron 32 aboard the USS Leyte .

At the outset of the Korean War , the Leyte was ordered to the Korean Peninsula , arriving in October 1950 . Brown , an ensign , flew 20 combat missions before his F4U Corsair aircraft came under fire and crashed on a remote mountaintop on 4 December 1950 while supporting ground troops at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir . Brown died of his wounds despite the efforts of wingman Thomas J. Hudner , Jr . , who intentionally crashed his own aircraft in a rescue attempt , for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor .

Brown 's successes in the segregated and desegregated U.S. military were memorialized in several books . The frigate USS Jesse L. Brown (FF @-@ 1089) was named in his honor .

= = Early life and education = =

Brown was born on 13 October 1926 in Hattiesburg , Mississippi . He was one of six children born to Julia Lindsey Brown , a schoolteacher , and John Brown , a grocery warehouse worker . He had four brothers , Marvin , William , Fletcher , and Johnny , as well as a sister , Lura . Brown 's ancestry was African American , Chicksaw , and Choctaw . The family lived in a house without central heating or indoor plumbing so they relied on a fireplace for warmth . As a child , Jesse 's brother William fell into this fireplace and was severely burned .

At the beginning of the Great Depression , John Brown lost his job and relocated the family to Palmer 's Crossing , 10 miles (16 km) from Hattiesburg , where he worked at a turpentine factory until he was laid off in 1938 . John Brown then moved the family to Lux , Mississippi , to be a part of a sharecropper farm . During this time , Jesse Brown shared a bed with his brothers and attended a one @-@ room school 3 miles (4 @.@ 8 km) away . His parents were very strict about school attendance and homework , and Jesse Brown walked to school every day . The Browns also were committed Baptists and Jesse , William , and Julia Brown sang in the church choir . In his spare time , Brown also worked in the fields of the farm harvesting corn and cotton .

When Brown was six years old , his father took him to an air show . Brown gained an intense interest in flying from this experience , and afterward , was attracted to a dirt airfield near his home , which he visited frequently in spite of being chased away by a local mechanic .

At the age of thirteen , Brown took a job as a paperboy for the Pittsburgh Courier , a black press paper , and developed a desire to pilot while reading in the newspaper about African @-@ American aviators of the time including C. Alfred Anderson , Eugene Jacques Bullard , and Bessie Coleman . He also became an avid reader of Popular Aviation and the Chicago Defender , which he later said heavily influenced his desire to fly naval aircraft . In his childhood he was described as " serious , witty , unassuming , and very intelligent . " In 1937 , he wrote a letter to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in which he complained of the injustice of African @-@ American pilots being kept out of the U.S. Army Air Corps , to which the White House responded with a letter saying that it appreciated the viewpoint .

Because the schools closer to his family were of lower quality , in 1939 , Brown lived with his aunt and attended the segregated Eureka High School in Hattiesburg . He was a member of the basketball , football , and track and field teams and he was an excellent student , graduating as the salutatorian in 1944 . During this time , Brown met his future wife , Daisy Pearl Nix .

Following graduation , Brown sought to enroll in a college outside of the South . His principal ,

Nathaniel Burger , advised he attend an all @-@ black college , as his brother Marvin Brown had done , however , he ended up enrolling at Ohio State University as his childhood role model , Jesse Owens , had done . Burger told Brown only seven African Americans had graduated from the school that year , but Brown nonetheless was determined to enroll , feeling he would compete well with white students .

Brown took several side jobs to save money for college , including waiting tables at the Holmes Club , a saloon for white U.S. Army soldiers . In this job , Brown was frequently the target of racist vitriol and abuse , but nonetheless persevered , earning \$ 600 to pay for college . In the autumn of 1944 , Brown took a segregated train to Columbus , Ohio , and began school at Ohio State .

Brown moved into an on @-@ campus boarding house at 61 East Eleventh Avenue in the primarily black neighborhood of the University District in Columbus , and majored in architectural engineering . Brown attempted several times to apply to the school 's aviation program , but was denied because of his race . Brown joined the track and field team as well as the wrestling team , but soon dropped both for financial reasons . He took a job as a janitor at a local Lazarus department store and then was hired by the Pennsylvania Railroad to load boxcars from 15 : 30 to midnight each day . In spite of this , he maintained top grades in his classes . Facing difficulties with his academics and the institutional segregation in the city , Brown nevertheless found most of his fellow students were friendly toward him . Brown rarely returned to Mississippi during the school year , but in the summers he worked at a dry cleaner in Hattiesburg to help pay for his classes .

During his second year in college , Brown learned of the V @-@ 5 Aviation Cadet Training Program being conducted by the U.S. Navy to commission naval aviation pilots . This program operated at 52 colleges , none of which were predominantly black colleges , so only students such as Brown , who attended integrated colleges , were eligible . In spite of resistance from recruiters , Brown passed the entrance exams . Brown enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve on 8 July 1946 and was admitted to the aviation program , becoming a Seaman Apprentice in the U.S. Navy and a member of the school 's Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) program . A \$ 50 monthly stipend allowed him to quit his jobs and complete his architectural engineering degree in 1947 . At this time , the NROTC was the normal route to a regular Naval commission , but only 14 out of more than 5 @, 600 NROTC students in 1947 were black .

= = Career = =

On 15 March 1947 , Brown reported to Glenview Naval Air Station in Glenview , Illinois , for Naval Flight Officer training . There , his enlistment ended 15 April and Brown reverted to the rank of midshipman , becoming the only African American in the program . Although he anticipated antagonism , he found the other cadets were generally friendly and welcoming . He found many of the black cooks and janitors hostile to him , however , possibly due to jealousy . Brown got his first flight time aboard a Stearman N2S trainer aircraft .

In spite of the rigors of the initial training , Brown was encouraged by instructors and completed the first phase of training , transferring to Ottumwa Naval Air Station in Ottumwa , Iowa , for the next phase . The Ottumwa training involved intense physical fitness and technical training , which Brown completed . Thereafter , he was moved to Pensacola Naval Air Station in Pensacola , Florida , to train in aircraft flight .

In Pensacola , Brown and Nix married in secret , as Naval Cadets were not allowed to marry until their training was complete , under threat of immediate dismissal . Nix took a room in Pensacola , and the two visited one another on weekends . In spite of overt racism from at least one instructor and several classmates at this posting , Brown completed the rigorous training in August 1947 .

By June 1948 , Brown had begun training for carrier @-@ based aircraft , and hoped to fly either the F4U Corsair or F6F Hellcat , both of which were fighters . He trained in carrier takeoffs and landings aboard the light carrier USS Wright , after which he was sent to Jacksonville , Florida , for final flight qualifications . On 21 October 1948 , he completed his training and was given his Naval Aviator Badge . This accomplishment was widely publicized , and Brown became known nationally . The Associated Press profiled him and his photograph appeared in Life magazine . Author

Theodore Taylor later wrote that through Brown 's efforts to become a pilot , he had broken the " color barrier " which had been longstanding and preventing blacks in naval aviation .

Brown was commissioned as an ensign in the U.S. Navy on 26 April 1949 . He was assigned to Quonset Point Naval Air Station in Quonset , Rhode Island , as a part of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet . Brown reported that incidents of racism and discrimination , which had been harsh late in his training , were substantially relieved once he became an officer . Following his commissioning , Brown was assigned to temporary duty at Norfolk Naval Air Station in Norfolk , Virginia . His daughter , Pamela Elise Brown , was born in December . In January 1949 , Brown was assigned to Fighter Squadron 32 aboard the USS Leyte . Over the next 18 months , the unit conducted numerous training exercises along the East Coast , many of them taking place at Quonset Point . Brown reported here his superiors treated him fairly and held others to equal standards . The unit trained rigorously in aircraft maneuvers .

By the outbreak of the Korean War , he had gained a reputation among the others in the squadron as an experienced pilot and a capable section leader . He was well @-@ liked among other pilots and the black stewards and support staff of the carrier . Brown did not socialize much with the other pilots , however , and was known to spend as much time as possible visiting his wife . He was able to reveal his marriage following his commissioning .

= = = Korean War = = =

On the night of 25 June 1950 , ten divisions of the North Korean People 's Army launched a full @-@ scale invasion of the nation 's neighbor to the south , the Republic of Korea . The force of 89 @,@ 000 men moved in six columns , catching the Republic of Korea Army by surprise , resulting in a rout . The smaller South Korean army suffered from widespread lack of organization and equipment , and was unprepared for war . The numerically superior North Korean forces destroyed isolated resistance from the 38 @,@ 000 South Korean soldiers on the front before it began moving steadily south . Most of South Korea 's forces retreated in the face of the invasion . The North Koreans were well on their way to South Korea 's capital of Seoul within hours , forcing the government and its shattered army to retreat farther south .

To prevent South Korea 's collapse the United Nations Security Council voted to send military forces . The United States Seventh Fleet dispatched Task Force 77 , led by the fleet carrier USS Valley Forge ; the British Far East Fleet dispatched several ships , including HMS Triumph , to provide air and naval support . Although the navies blockaded North Korea and launched aircraft to delay the North Korean forces , these efforts alone did not stop the North Korean Army juggernaut on its southern advance . U.S. President Harry S. Truman ordered ground troops into the country to supplement the air support . All U.S. Navy units , including the Leyte , were placed on alert . At the time , the ship was in the Mediterranean Sea and Brown did not expect to be deployed to Korea , but on 8 August a relief carrier arrived in the area and the Leyte was ordered to Korea . Commanders felt the pilots on the carrier were better trained , and hence needed in the theater . The ship sailed from the Strait of Gibraltar across the Atlantic Ocean and to Quonset , then through the Panama Canal and to San Diego , California , Hawaii , and Japan before arriving in Korea around 8 October .

The ship joined Task Force 77 off the northeast coast of the Korean Peninsula , part of a fleet of 17 ships from the Seventh Fleet , including the aircraft carrier USS Philippine Sea , battleship USS Missouri and cruiser USS Juneau . Brown flew 20 missions in @-@ country . These missions included attacks on communication lines , troop concentrations , and military installations around Wonsan , Chongpu , Songjim , and Senanju .

Following the entrance of the People 's Republic of China into the war in late November 1950 , Brown and his squadron were dispatched to the Chosin Reservoir , where an intense campaign was being fought between the People 's Volunteer Army and the US X Corps . Approximately 100 @,@ 000 Chinese troops had surrounded 15 @,@ 000 U.S. troops , and Brown and other pilots on the Leyte flew dozens of close air support missions every day to prevent the Chinese from overrunning the U.S. troops .

== Death ==

On 4 December 1950 , Brown was part of a six aircraft flight supporting U.S. Marine Corps ground troops trapped by Chinese forces . At 13 : 38 KST , Brown took off from the Leyte with squadron executive officer Lieutenant Commander Dick Cevoli , Lieutenant George Hudson , Lieutenant Junior Grade Bill Koenig , Ensign Ralph McQueen , and Lieutenant Junior Grade Thomas J. Hudner , Jr . , who was Brown 's wingman . During this flight , Brown had the call sign " Iroquois 13 " . The flight traveled 100 miles (160 km) from the Task Force 's location to the Chosin Reservoir , flying 35 to 40 minutes through very harsh wintery conditions to the vicinity of the villages of Yudam ni and Hagaru ri . The flight began searching for targets along the west side of the reservoir , decreasing their altitude to 700 feet (210 m) . The mission was a three hour search and destroy flight as well as an attempt to probe Chinese troop strength in the area .

Although the flight spotted no Chinese , at 14 : 40 Koenig radioed that Brown appeared to be trailing fuel . The damage had likely come by small arms fire from Chinese infantry , who were known to hide in the snow and to ambush passing aircraft by firing in unison . At least one bullet had ruptured a fuel line . Brown , losing fuel pressure and increasingly unable to control the aircraft , dropped his external fuel tanks and rockets and attempted to land the craft in a snow covered clearing on the side of a mountain . Brown crashed into a bowl shaped valley at approximately 40 ° 36 ' N 127 ° 06 ' E. The aircraft broke up violently upon impact and was destroyed . In the crash , Brown 's leg was pinned beneath the fuselage of the aircraft , and he stripped off his helmet and gloves in an attempt to free himself , before waving to the other pilots , who were circling close overhead . The other pilots had thought he had died in the crash . Brown had crash landed near Somong ni , 15 miles (24 km) behind Chinese lines in 15 ° F (- 9 ° C) weather , and the other pilots began a Mayday radio to any heavy transport aircraft in the area as they canvassed the mountain for any sign of Chinese ground forces who might threaten Brown . They received a signal that a rescue helicopter would come as soon as possible , but Brown 's aircraft was smoking and a fire had started near its internal fuel tanks .

Before it became clear Brown was seriously injured , Hudner attempted in vain to rescue Brown by radioing him instructions for escaping his damaged aircraft . Hudner then intentionally crash landed his aircraft , ran to Brown 's side and attempted to wrestle him free from the wreck . While Brown 's condition worsened by the minute , Hudner attempted in vain to put out the aircraft fire using snow and to pull Brown from the aircraft . In great pain , Brown began slipping in and out of consciousness . A rescue helicopter arrived around 15 : 00 ; its pilot Lieutenant Charles Ward and Hudner were unable to put out the engine fire with a fire extinguisher , and tried unsuccessfully to free Brown with an axe for 45 minutes . They even considered , at Brown 's request , amputating his trapped leg . Brown lost consciousness shortly thereafter . His last known words to Hudner were , " Tell Daisy I love her . " The helicopter , which was unable to operate in the darkness , was forced to return to base at nightfall with Hudner , leaving Brown behind . Brown is believed to have died shortly thereafter of his injuries and exposure to the extreme cold . No Chinese forces threatened the site , likely owing to the heavy air presence of Brown and Hudner 's unit .

Hudner begged superiors to allow him to return to the wreck to help extract Brown , but he was not allowed , as other officers feared an ambush of the vulnerable helicopters resulting in casualties . To prevent the body and the aircraft from falling into Chinese or North Korean hands , the U.S. Navy bombed the aircraft with napalm two days later , with pilots reportedly reciting the Lord 's Prayer over the radio as they watched Brown 's body be consumed by flames . The pilots observed that Brown 's body was still stuck in the aircraft , but his clothes were gone . The remains of both Brown and the aircraft were never recovered . Brown was the first African American U.S. Navy officer killed in the war .

== Legacy ==

For his actions in Korea leading up to his death , Brown was awarded the Distinguished Flying

Cross , the Purple Heart Medal , and the Air Medal . For the failed rescue attempt , Hudner received the Medal of Honor , the highest valor award presented by the U.S. military .

Brown 's shipmates memorialized him in a shipwide newspaper as " a Christian soldier , a gentleman , a shipmate , and friend ... His courage and faith ... shone like a beacon for all to see . " As word of his death spread , Brown inspired numerous other African Americans to become pilots , notably Seaman Apprentice Frank E. Petersen . Petersen would become the first African @-@ American Marine Corps aviator and the first African @-@ American Marine Corps general , being graduated from the Naval Aviation Training Program in 1952 and retiring from the military after 38 years in 1988 with the rank of lieutenant general .

On 17 February 1973 , the Navy commissioned the Knox @-@ class frigate USS Jesse L. Brown (FF @-@ 1089) , the third U.S. ship named in honor of an African American . Present at the commissioning ceremony in Boston , Massachusetts , were Daisy Brown Thorne (who had remarried) , Pamela Brown , and Hudner , who gave a dedication . The ship was decommissioned on 27 July 1994 and renamed the Damiyat after being commissioned with the Egyptian navy .

An extensive biography of Brown later was compiled by author Theodore Taylor , who had served in Korea and had been deeply moved by the news of Brown 's death at the time . Taylor interviewed many of Brown 's closest friends and family and consulted Daisy Brown 's personal diary and records from the Leyte 's ship log while preparing his 300 @-@ page book , published in 2007 .

In July 2013 , Hudner visited Pyongyang in an attempt to recover Brown 's remains from the crash site . He was told by North Korean authorities to return in September when the weather is more predictable .

= = Awards and decorations = =

Brown 's military decorations and awards included the following :

His Distinguished Flying Cross citation reads :

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross (Posthumously) to Ensign Jesse Leroy Brown (NSN : 0 @-@ 504477) , United States Navy , for heroism in aerial flight as Pilot of a fighter plane in Fighter Squadron Thirty @-@ Two (VF @-@ 32) , attached to the USS Leyte (CV @-@ 32) , in hostile attacks on hostile North Korean forces . Participating in 20 strikes on enemy military installations , lines of communication , transportation facilities , and enemy troop concentrations in the face of grave hazard , at the Chosin Reservoir , Takshon , Manp Jin , Linchong , Sinuiju , Kasan , Wonsan , Chonjin , Kilchu , and Sinanju during the period 12 October to 4 December 1950 . With courageous efficiency and utter disregard for his own personal safety , Ensign Brown , while in support of friendly troops in the Chosin Reservoir area , pressed home numerous attacks destroying an enemy troop concentration moving to attack our troops . So aggressive were these attacks , in the face of enemy anti @-@ aircraft fire , that they finally resulted in the destruction of Ensign Brown 's plane by anti @-@ aircraft fire . His gallant devotion to duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service .