

Posthumous Award

Dana W. Brown, 1926-1983

*Captain, U.S. Air Force; Major, Alaska National Guard;
Test Pilot*

Class of 1944

In 1943 Dana Brown left Needham High School to enlist in the Merchant Marine. He subsequently transferred to the Army Air Corps, where he was trained as a pilot, bombardier, and navigator. Major Brown was one of six members of the class of 1944 who were granted diplomas while serving in the armed forces. While at Needham High School, he played tackle for the football team and sang in the Boys' Glee Club.

At the close of World War II, Major Brown returned to civilian life, attending Kent State and Bowdoin College. In 1947 he decided to return to flying and joined the United States Air Force. Trained as a fighter pilot in both piston engine and jet aircraft, Major Brown was sent to Korea at the beginning of the Korean War and flew over 100 combat missions. Following the Korean War he was selected from an elite few to participate in intensive training at the Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base. The course consisted of mathematics and engineering, as well as flight instruction on all manner of aircraft - from fighters to bombers to cargo planes. After graduation, Major Brown was sent to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, where he was applauded for his work. He was a pioneer in mid-air refueling and also tested wing stress and tire capabilities.

In 1956 Major Brown resigned from the Air Force and joined Lockheed Aircraft Corporation as a civilian test pilot. He was a leading test pilot for the F-104 Starfighter, having done all the initial testing (spin, stress, etc.). He also set an altitude record for the F-104.

Following three years of intensive testing on the F-104, Major Brown left Lockheed and moved to Homer, Alaska, where he lived in the bush, built a house, raised a family, fished, hunted, and flew single engine aircraft. He delivered mail to remote villages and joined the Alaska National Guard, attaining the rank of major. While in the National Guard he landed his plane near a Japanese fishing boat that was breaking Alaskan fishing regulations and took custody of the boat. The action had been authorized by the Alaskan governor after the federal government had refused the governor's request for assistance.

In 1965 he returned to Lockheed to solve some testing problems on the SR-71 Blackbird. He set the limits of performance for this surveillance plane which was retired in 1990 but still holds many speed and altitude records.

In the 1970's, Major Brown was a member of the team that convinced the Air Force to buy the A-10 Warthog, the plane that performed so effectively in the Gulf War.

Major Brown spent his retirement years in Florida.