

“Bandit 12”

By Sawyer Brown, Age 12

Melvin Hugh Brown, my grandpa, earned his call sign, Bandit Brown, when he was promoted to a secret mission for the United States Navy in the 1970s. Piloting was his career, and he excelled at it, but loving others and living for his family was something he was admired for. Because he grew up in a Navy family, Hugh always believed in serving his country and did so throughout his life.

His heroic days began when he was born on May 21, 1948, in Roanoke, Virginia. His father was a Chief in the Navy for 30 years and raised him as a “Navy Brat,” also known as a military child. This military upbringing inspired him to do something special for his country. Hugh’s name at birth was Melvin Hugh Brown. After his father, however, he never liked Melvin, so he signed everything M. Hugh Brown. By the time he was in high school, he knew he was going to be a Navy jet pilot. Hugh graduated from the Naval Academy in 1970, and 2 years later, he became a designated Naval aviator. He showed what he was meant for and was then invited to train at the well-known, best fighter pilot school in the world, Top Gun, and joined the Red Eagles squadron.

These top US military pilots practiced dog-fighting skills against aircraft from Russian enemies that they acquired to train with. They did this in the desert of Nevada in the mysterious area Area 51. This ultra-secret mission was called Constant Peg. This job was dangerous and he was truly known as the best at his craft.

My grandfather was always working hard for the Navy. It was his passion. My grandmother, Linda, was such a proud Navy wife and was thrilled to welcome two sons early in their marriage. She had goals for them as well to be a pilot, as it came very naturally to Hugh. They were married for only a short time, but they were in love.

One early morning, Hugh said his goodbyes to his two sons, Brian and Brady, and his wife and set off to work. As he was training and flying the Russian MiG-17, he got into an uncontrollable spin. He tried so hard to save this historical plane, but the plane got too low to the ground, and he could not eject. Bandit 12, my grandfather lost his life flying as a loyal pilot on August 23rd, 1979. My dad, his son, was 11 months old. To this day, we know Melvin Brown as a hero and an inspiration to other fighter pilots and his loved ones. He was top in his field. Written on a Navy Memorial website, a colleague said, "Hugh Brown was one of the good guys - no one ever had a bad thing to say about him. We, the 30th company, are missing one of our best."

Hugh's legacy continues to live on through his family and as a heroic pilot. You can find his information in Reno, Nevada, at a special Navy Museum, as well as in a book written about his secret mission called "Red Eagles" by Steven Davies. Even though he was taken from his loving family too soon, his legacy is a powerful reminder of his dedication to service, love for his family, and his enthusiasm to excel. Hugh has a compelling story that will always keep him a brave hero. But despite all that he went through, Melven Hugh Brown, a hero, a dad, and a pilot willing to fight for his country, inspires us all to fly high.