

## Lorin Brown: Example in Service

by Jay M. Jones

When the Soviet Union launched the first satellite Sputnik I in 1957, Cedar City native Lorin Brown was in the ROTC program at the University of Utah, majoring in Physics.

After graduating, Lorin joined the Navy in 1961 and entered pre-flight training at Pensacola, Florida. During this time, he filled out paperwork indicating that he would be interested in participating in the astronaut programs at NASA if future opportunities arose.



Lieutenant junior grade Lorin Brown on the wings of the A4 Skyhawk he flew in Vietnam. Photo taken at Cubi Point Naval Air Station, Philippines, early in 1965. Photo courtesy Lorin Brown.

After receiving his wings, he served on the aircraft carrier USS Ranger, which was deployed to Vietnam in 1964, a few days after the Gulf of Tonkin incident led to escalating U. S. involvement in Vietnam. In 1965, he served on the carrier USS Enterprise, also in Vietnam.

While Lt. Brown was in Vietnam, NASA announced that it was recruiting more astronauts for its Apollo program. Lt. Brown received a letter from NASA inviting him to apply.

Relatively few applicants applying to NASA became astronauts during the Apollo program, but with his science degree, his jet fighter experience, and a letter from NASA inviting him to apply, Lorin would have been included in a group receiving serious consideration.

However, the squadron which Lorin was a part of was significantly short-staffed, having only 13 pilots instead of 20 or 21 needed to be at full strength. Being involved in combat, that shortage was critical.

When Lorin told his commanding officer of the letter, he was asked what his feelings were. He replied that he was interested in opportunities at NASA, but he knew that leaving the squadron at that time would put an extra hardship on the remaining pilots and it would not be fair to them.

At the time, Lorin was the administrative officer for the commander, and routinely handled correspondence for him. Lorin was told he should write his own response to the invitation, and then he could also write the commander's endorsement.

Lorin wrote that he was very much interested in the opportunity. For the commander's response, he wrote that the squadron was short-staffed and Lt. Brown could not be spared at that time.

As part of Attack Squadron 94, Lorin flew 132 combat missions in an A4 Skyhawk over Southeast Asia, including missions over North Vietnam and Laos.

Another pilot serving in Attack Squadron 94 in Vietnam was Bill Shankel. Both Lorin and Bill were part of a combat mission on December 23, 1965 over North Vietnam from which Bill did not return. He was listed as Missing in Action.

About four years later, Bill's girl friend Mary Ann, a young executive with IBM, recognized Bill as a prisoner being paraded around in a North Vietnamese propaganda video, and his status was changed from Missing in Action to Prisoner of War. Following Bill's release in 1973, Bill and Mary Ann were married and Bill began training to become a medical doctor.

Lorin met Bill again while both were serving in the Washington D. C. area. Lorin was at the Naval Research Labs and Bill was working at Bethesda Medical Center.

Lorin invited Bill and Mary Ann to come over to his home for dinner. Lorin wanted to show his children what true heroes were like - Bill for his military service and enduring the POW camp and Mary Ann for waiting for him for seven long years.

After Lorin's service in Vietnam was over, he was given the opportunity to pursue graduate studies. He returned to the University of Utah and graduated with a PhD in Physics. During this time he met and married Marilyn, and together they have raised seven children.

Lorin spent the rest of his career at the Naval Research Labs and worked on projects involving high energy lasers and fiber optics.

Since retiring from the Navy, Lorin and Marilyn have lived in Cedar City.

Until the Covid-19 outbreak, Lorin traveled to Pensacola, Florida each year to participate in an on-going study to better understand and treat the long-term challenges faced by returning prisoners of war. Lorin was part of a control group of non-POW combat pilots to help sort out which characteristics are mostly POW related and which characteristics are common to combat pilots.

Lorin's service and devotion to duty to his family, his country, and his fellow servicemen should be remembered and honored.