

## Hero Duo: Top Gun Meets Top Nurse

John Shoemaker

Here is a simply marvelous story. In our effort to capture the stories of military veterans during and after their service to our country, we learned of two heroes who stood side-by-side for decades.

Since rank has its privileges, I will start with **Colonel Peggy Brown**. Graduating from the School of Nursing at Boston University in 1973 was an eventful time with the Vietnam War still raging. No matter, while working at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, she decided to enlist in the Air Force and headed to George AFB, CA, in the Mojave Desert.

Now to include the other member of this “Duo”, **Lieutenant Colonel Ron Brown**, who decided to enlist in the Air Force in 1965. During his four years as an enlisted man, his goal was to become a pilot, but not just any pilot, but a fighter pilot flying F-4s and F-16s. To do that he finished his time in the Air Force and went to college. After graduating from Indiana University at Fort Wayne, he enlisted again in the Air Force and began two years of pilot training at Laughlin AFB, TX, and George AFB in Victorville, CA.

Ron would spend years on assignments in Kunsan AB, Korea, for the 80th TFS and then at Valdosta, GA, flying F-4s, before attending the Air Force version of the Navy’s “Top Gun School” or what they call, “Fighter Weapons School” in the Air Force. It is located at Nellis AFB, CA, and is the famous “Home of the Fighter Pilot”.

As he progressed in his career and training, he was not only a ‘**Top Gun’ fighter pilot** but was then assigned to be an **Instructor of the Instructors** at the 31<sup>st</sup> Tactical Training Wing, Homestead AFB in a “train the trainer role”. That is an incredible honor and speaks to Ron’s skill as one of the best of the best!

Now, while all this was happening for both Ron and Peggy, the nexus was at George AFB in CA. That is where Ron met Peggy. Then Ron headed to Korea and Peggy to Germany. Two years later Peggy flew to Valdosta, GA, on leave, and married Ron on her lunch break at the Town Clerks’ office, so Peggy could join Ron at Moody AFB, GA. That would be the official start of a *marriage made in 1977 lasting more than 45 years*.

Soon after, Peggy was off to Moody AFB. Then they went to Homestead AFB, Nellis AFB, back to Wiesbaden, back to Homestead, Tyndall AFB, and Lackland AFB, San Antonio where **Peggy was the 59<sup>th</sup> Support Group Commander** at the AF ‘Flagship Hospital’ Wilford Hall, where she had over 500 Airmen in five diverse Squadrons under her command. It was to be her last assignment and retired after 26 years. As she said, she joined expecting to stay for two years and stayed for twenty-six!

They both have incredible stories over that time. Ron with all his experiences with aggressive, brave, brash fighter pilots flying the best fighter planes in the world. And then he was part of the 422 Test Squadron to push their limits, be creative, but always vigilant to protect each other. It takes a special kind of man to define his perceived limits in flight combat maneuvers and then push them beyond their comfort envelope.

For Peggy, as everyone knows, the nursing profession is grueling with long hours and extremely difficult situations dealing with all kinds of severe emotional and physical trauma and not just treating Americans. At Wiesbaden, her Aeromedical Staging Facility supported the transport of Freedom Fighters (the Mujahedeen) from Afghanistan. America was supporting those who were severely wounded fighting the Russians, they were sent to the American hospital in Germany for treatment and some were sent to Western Europe and North America.

For Ron, he was stationed at Homestead AFB flying F-16s and wound up a **Squadron Commander**, go figure. His last assignment was at Tyndall AFB in Panama City, FL, which completed his career of 26 years.

Between them, they served in the United States Air Force for 52 years. There is simply not enough space in this article to list all their experiences, schools, training, and success that fills the walls of their home with such evidence.

After their military careers, Ron became a pilot for United Airlines for ten years and later was the **Vice Mayor of Highland Beach (2012-2015)**. Peggy did volunteer work at Pope John Paul II High School, St Lucy Catholic Church, and the Boca Hospital. In addition, she did Home Health Nursing and enjoyed time with their son. They are both involved in the local neighborhood “POA” or **Bel Lido Property Owners Association** where Ron is the President and Peggy is the Treasurer.

Peggy has a brother and sister-in-law living in Boynton Beach and so they looked for a home in the area. Ron found the perfect setting in 2000 to be close to the beach, without the noise and crowds of commercialism, and in a new, emerging neighborhood of **Bel Lido**. They simply love the culture and community feel of Highland Beach. Their son, Zachary, a musician, lives in North Carolina and visits when not on the road performing.

Their home has walls full of plaques, pictures, ribbons, commendations, and impressive memorabilia. As Ron said, they are just lucky to have found their home in “a little piece of Paradise” in Highland Beach.

Noting words that apply to both LTC Ron Brown and COL Peggy Brown at their retirement from the Air Force, it is evident that “their work was proudly done, they climbed the heights and reached the horizons with goals they set, sought and won.”

We salute this “Dynamic Duo” as **Highland Beach Heroes** and thank them for their service to our country and continuing service to Highland Beach and their neighborhood.

Now for the **Air Force Song**:

*“Off we go into the wild blue yonder; Climbing high, into the sun; Here they come, zooming to meet the thunder, At ‘em boys, Giver ‘er the gun! Down we dive, spouting our flame from under, Off with one hell of-a roar! We live in fame, Or go down in flame, Hey, Nothing can stop the U.S. Air Force.”*









