



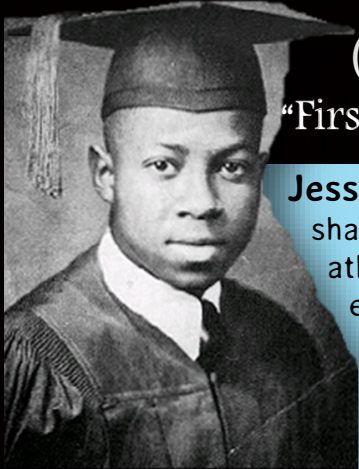
# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

### Jesse L. Brown

(October 13, 1926 – December 4, 1950)

“First African-American Aviator of U.S. Navy's Basic Flight Training”



**Jesse LeRoy Brown** was born October 13, 1926 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi to a sharecropper father and a schoolteacher mother. Excelling in academics and athletics, Jesse graduated salutatorian from the segregated Eureka High School and enrolled in The Ohio State University in 1944. For three years, Jesse worked two jobs from 3:30PM to midnight, while maintaining straight-As as an engineering major. However, his real passion was the university's aviation program. Despite his top grades, the university rejected his application multiple times because of his race. Jesse later learned of an aviation program through the Naval Reserve Officer

Training Corps (NROTC) program at Ohio State and joined the Naval Reserves on July 8, 1946. Although the white Navy recruiter attempted to discourage him from enlisting, Jesse passed all exams and aced the physical test, earning his place in the US Navy. In 1947, Jesse L. Brown became the first black man accepted into US Navy flight school. Even though marriage during aviation training was strictly prohibited, Jesse snuck away one evening and married his sweetheart, Daisy Nix.

On October 21, 1948, at the age of 22, Jesse became one of six trainees, out of 100 men who had started in the program, to earn “Wings of Gold.” On April 15, 1949, Jesse was commissioned as an ensign in the United States Navy. In October of 1950, Jesse, now married with a small daughter, was sent to join the United Nations force in Korea. As a pilot with the 32nd Fighter Squadron, he flew F4U -4 Corsair fighters from the aircraft carrier USS Leyte. Jesse quickly rose to the position of Section Leader and was an irreplaceable asset in the Korean conflict, winning an Air Medal and a Korean Service Medal for his 20 air combat missions.



On Dec. 4, 1950, Jesse's squadron headed for another daring mission near the Chosin Reservoir to support embattled U.N. troops. As they neared the target area, Jesse's plane was hit by ground fire, causing it to crash into a bowl-shaped valley near the top of a mountain and trapping Jesse under parts of the burning plane. When his wingman, Lieutenant Junior Thomas Hudner, realized that Jesse was trapped, he purposely crash landed his own plane in the same area to aid Jesse and calling for a helicopter rescue. Hudner worked frantically for 45 minutes trying to free Jesse from the burning plane, but a fire erupted and was inching closer to the plane's internal fuel tanks. Despite his actions, Jesse could not be freed from the crash. Fearing an ambush by the approaching enemy troops, Hudner and the rescue helicopter left Jesse behind. Not wanting the plane or Jesse's body to fall into enemy hands, they bombed the crash sight with napalm, with the pilots reciting the Lord's Prayer over the radio. Jesse's last reported words to Hudner were simply to tell his wife Daisy, that he loved her.

Ensign Jesse Brown was the first African-American to die in the Korean conflict. He was awarded numerous medals including the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Purple Heart, Naval Aviator Badge, Korean Service Medal, United Nations Korea Medal, and the Air Medal. On February 17, 1973, the US. Navy commissioned the Knox-class frigate USS Jesse L Brown in Jesse's honor.

