

Don Braswell attended Austin Elementary School, Sam Houston Middle School, Pampa Junior High School and Pampa High School, graduating in 1981. These schools, the teachers, the learning atmosphere and the friendships were literally the foundation for everything that followed in his life. Today, Pampa is still “home” and he returns often to visit friends. He started college at Texas Tech University. Tech was not painful enough, so he transferred to the US Naval Academy. During the four years of bliss at Annapolis, he was able to work on a British frigate, work on a submarine from San Diego, work on a surface ship from Norfolk, shoot (and clean) an M-16 in Quantico, and fly a T-34 in Pensacola. At the Naval Academy, Don learned that the secret to good leadership is to first become a good follower.

He graduated with distinction from the US Naval Academy in 1986 with a BS in Electrical Engineering, and graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1987 with a MS in Electrical Engineering. He then reported to NAS Pensacola for flight training. For the next 24 years, he flew the F/A-18C Hornet from aircraft carriers. Over this time, he made four deployments overseas to the Persian Gulf. The Gulf in the summer is routinely over 120 degrees, and falling to 95 at night. It is amazing how comfortable 95 degrees can be at night. His final deployment was to the South Asian Sea in 2005 where the temperatures were a much better 105 degrees during the day. He spent an accumulated four years at sea, counted day-by-day, he flew 2000 hours, and made 450 carrier arrested landings (150 at night). (To this day, nothing amazes me more than an aircraft carrier during flight operations. 4,000 American sailors routinely perform actions that no other nation in the world can perform. The more you know about each of the 4,000 jobs, the more amazing an aircraft carrier becomes.)

As a pilot at Operational Test Squadron 9 in the Mojave Desert, he tested and operated every weapon on the F/A-18C inventory. Testing the cutting edge weapons was another facet of America’s dominance. Today everyone has GPS, because engineers conceived GPS, designed, and launched the satellites necessary. What was cutting edge 30 years ago is today routine. The US military already had autonomous vehicles that could fly 1000 miles, follow a specific route, and arrive at a target with less than a 10 foot error. With that foundation, he was involved in three different combat operations: The Air War over Kosovo (1999), the Pentagon (9/11/2001), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003).

During the Air War over Kosovo (1999), he was part of a Navy Deployment to Vicenza, Italy where Air Force General Short directed the NATO air forces. 19 Nations in NATO contributed aircraft to fly missions over the former Republic of Yugoslavia. The alliance flew 450 strike sorties over Kosovo and Yugoslavia from 24 March until 11 June 1999. Lieutenant Commander Braswell planned and

briefed these 450 sorties to General Short and the other 19 NATO generals every third day. Cdr. Braswell was amazed at the coordination required to keep 19 nations flying and working together for a single goal.

From 1999-2002, Commander Braswell worked from the Pentagon with 20,000 other personnel. He was responsible for a budget including \$4.5 billion annually to purchase the new F/A-18E/F aircraft from 1999-2002. On September 11th 2001, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon directly under his office. While leaving his office on the fifth floor of the Pentagon, Commander Braswell was “the voice” on the fifth floor. 35 civilians were unsure of the exit route away from the E-ring, and followed Braswell’s voice to safety. As they exited the E-ring, the floor was collapsing under them. Next year will be their 20 year anniversary of life. Every single day since September 11th has been a gift.

In 2003, Commander Braswell was assigned to his final flying tour as Commanding Officer of VFA-25, the Fist of the Fleet. He was involved in the first flights over Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 17th, and his carrier air wing flew missions over Iraq until Baghdad was captured in April 2003. On the first mission, 40 aircraft launched, flew 400 miles to a tanker, tanked during a thunder storm, experienced an engine failure over the desert, and returned to the ship with a single engine. During this campaign, Commander Braswell flew 18 missions over Iraq supporting the ground troops as they advanced towards Baghdad.

Returning home, he was on the USS Abraham Lincoln when President George W. Bush landed on the carrier. The USS Abraham Lincoln had been at sea for 10 months – the longest carrier deployment since the Vietnam era. He continued flying with VFA-25 for the next 3 years and was then assigned to the carrier USS Carl Vinson as Navigator, earned a scholarship to Oxford, and finished his career while instructing at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island. Along the way, he also completed an MS International Relations (Troy University) and the Air Force War College. During his service, he visited 21 foreign nations and lived in 23 different zip codes.

Don retired from the military as a Captain, and began to teach high school chemistry and physics in Mesquite, Texas. Here he completed an MS in Education from SMU in leadership and science curriculum. He also served as the Science Department Head for the John Horn High School with 2000 students. In 2015, He joined the USPTO as an examiner for radar and telecommunications patents. He has continued his interest in education while serving as a school board member of the Global Village Academy in 2015-2016.

While Don has experienced a full life, he feels that his greatest successes and his greatest accomplishments are living with his family and working in his community. He has three daughters and one son and he is married to Sandra (nee Roten) Braswell. Don and Sandra have adopted Chloe (10) and Ben (9) from China, and they all live with their dogs Holly and Jack in Rockwall, Texas. He and Sandra are very active in their local church as Sunday School Teachers, Cub Scout and Girl Scout leaders, PTA members at Ouida Springer Elementary School, Girl Scout Cookie coordinators and Boy Scout Popcorn coordinators.