

Clarissa Dalton  
Victoria Jerusal  
Mr. Peters  
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Period 2

### Joe Nettles

Joe Nettles was born in Riverside, California on March 9, 1945. His birth father was a World War II Air Force fighter pilot who was (tragically) shot down and died in combat. His mother also helped in World War II as she ran the three PX's at Camp Haan during that time. His mother remarried to Joe's new stepfather who also was a pilot. Joe grew close to this father and later in his life his stepfather proclaimed to him "I married your mother because I wanted to raise you." Joe described his father saying "He taught me respect, he taught me hard work. He one hundred percent supported me." It was because of this family experience that Joe enlisted in the Air Force.

At Poly High School, Joe was the President of FFA (Future Farmers of America) and was accepted to Cal Poly: San Luis Obispo. In September of 1964, he decided to wait a year before he went to college so he could work and earn more money to support himself financially in college. It was just one year later that he was received his draft notice.

Joe Nettles was drafted during the Vietnam War in August of 1964. He brought his acceptance letter from Cal Poly: San Luis Obispo to show the recruiter, but since he was not attending the school quite yet he could not get out of the draft. He picked up the envelope with his orders. However, if he opened the draft notice he would have had to go into the Army, but since he didn't break the seal of the envelope he could go enlist in any service branch of his

choice. In honor of his family, he crossed the street and enlisted in the United States Air Force. Three days following his enlistment, he reported to basic training.

Basic training was located at Lackland Air Force Base, TX and every young airman was confused. "It was total chaos." In one day of his training, one of the Drill Sergeant's in charge asked who was from California? Joe raised his hand. The Sergeant told him that he had a brother-in-law in California, and that he hated his brother-in-law. From that point forward, Joe learned to never raise his hand and volunteer again.

Three weeks into the Air Force basic training, he knew he wanted to be a pilot like his father. Unfortunately, Joe's vision was not passable to enter flight school. He tested high in Admin and Supply and was stationed at Carswell AFB, TX in October of 1965. Here he worked in supply as a supply specialist and was able to excel because of the skills he had developed. In high school, Joe took a typing class which put him one step ahead of the others. While others were learning to type as they worked, Joe was able to efficiently do his computer work quickly. Joe spent months at Carswell AFB and realized this was not the action he wanted.

In June 1966 Joe Nettles earned Airman of the Month for the Supply Section of the Air Force. It described him by saying "He can be depended on whatever job assigned." He was awarded three day pass and a steak dinner because of this award. In July of 1966, he was sent to March AFB, CA. In August 1966 he was sent to U-Tapao Royal Air Base in Thailand; WRSK (War Readiness Spares Kits) for KC-135 Air Refueling Tanker Airplanes. He was the sole supply man with fifteen Air Tankers to the base in Thailand. The runway was just recently completed in U-Tapao in 1965 so many of the facilities and buildings had not yet been constructed. Joe stayed at the end of the runway without living quarters for three weeks with only tarps and a supply duffel. The weather at U-Tapao was "hotter than hell," with hot, rainy, and humid days.

His supply tent was built shortly thereafter. Since Joe was excelling at his job and was able to trade for a refrigerator that his Colonel had wanted. The colonel offered Joe one of the three remaining bunks in his tent, so Joe accompanied the refrigerator and with his ability to trade, he accepted the bunk. Because of this living situation, the colonel allowed Joe to ride along with him on air refueling missions. After a year, he returned to March Air Force Base and then to TDY (Temporary Duty) at Edwards AFB to receive physiological training that permitted him to fly on any plane with oxygen provided.

On February 4, 1969 Joe Nettles went to South East Asia. There, he went on a totally different supply missions to supply Laotian Bases. He went to bases which were run by Laosians for the delivery of tactical aerial supplies. Joe took a two week leave (RR) while in Thailand to go through more training and earned his Thai Ranger Wings.

Joe was returning from one of his supply missions in a helicopter when it was shot down halfway back to base by enemy fire. Nettles and two crew members were listed MIA (Missing in Action) in Laos. In the accident, Joe received a severe leg injury. They travelled assisting Joe through the jungle trying to find a river where the Brown Water Navy patrol boats would pass for them to get help. About the sixth or seventh day in the jungle, Nettles asked the Captain to leave him behind so they could travel more quickly. He said “no way” and they would not let him give up.

When they were rescued after being missing for fourteen days, he was brought to a hospital for three days. The captain that was with him in the jungle, Captain Fuchs, came in on the last day to check on him. A month after, Joe was told that the captain was shot down again in combat and he was considered MIA. Joe stated “God bless ‘em, he didn’t let me give up.”

While in the Laos, his father wrote to him and asked, “What can I give you?”. Joe wrote back and said he needed courage. His father took this word, courage, and engraved it on a name placard and sent it to Joe. This courage placard has inspired Joe ever since.

Joe was awarded the Air Medal and a Purple Heart for his service in the Vietnam War. After returning to March AFB his last six months in the service, his commanding officers basically gave him a broom and said “Look busy.” When he was discharged, he returned to the family business of farming.

After reassuming life back in Riverside, Joe went back to school part time at Riverside Community College, Cal Poly Pomona and University of California Riverside to earn his credential. He also kept a stable living for his wife and son by continuing to farm. While balancing school, work and family it took Joe twelve years to earn his degree. When completing college Joe went and taught at Arlington High School as a teacher for the Agriculture Program. After teaching for awhile at Arlington, Joe transferred over and taught at Perris High School’s Agriculture Program. When he arrived only 30 out of the 400 students was enrolled in the class and 10 were involved with the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program. After five years of hard work, Joe made the program flourish into a massive and successful program. Unfortunately, due to the school having to expand, the Agriculture Class and FFA Farm Program had to be shut down to make room for more school buildings. Joe stayed with Perris High to teach Earth Science for a short time after. He learned he really didn’t have as much of a passion to teach the same curriculum every day (Read the book, get a worksheet and take a test). Soon after that, Joe Nettles went on to earn his Master’s Degree and he soon sat on various Vocational Education School Boards.

While living in civilian life Joe got involved with the POW/ MIA (Prisoner of War, Missing in Action) issue, issue after the fall of Saigon (mid 70’s), there were still 1600

unaccounted POW/MIA that needed to be found and brought home. This was at the beginning of the Vietnam Memorial's construction. Joe joined thirty guys from California for the First Rolling Thunder, a motorcycle run that stretches across the Nation to Washington D.C. These men were present for the POW/ MIA ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial. Joe remembers his six fellow servicemen and friends including Captain Fuchs being on that wall. The memories and experiences of Joe's military experience made it very hard for him to approach the wall especially since he was listed as an MIA a short time during the Vietnam War.

After returning home from South East Asia, Joe found his PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and found his escape in his farming. It is something he could always come to and find peace with himself. Joe also began to skydrive to help with all of his wartime troubles. Since he started, Joe has completed 1,518 sport jumps. While having fun skydiving, he also became a life member of the VFW and American Legion. He also supports the Wounded Warrior Project and Mom's of Military. Joe keeps giving back to not only to his community, but to those who are currently serving or have served. He continues to "Support the future generations of Veterans." Joe Nettles shares a great passion for life and shares it with all he comes into contact with.