

Veterans interviews – RETURN TO: Judy Allen, Choctaw Historic Projects, PO Box 1210, Durant OK 74702 – [judy.allen@choctawnation.com](mailto:judy.allen@choctawnation.com). 580.513.7984.

NAME -- Joe Campbell

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Birthday -- [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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In which branch did you enter? United States Air Force

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Division -- 63<sup>rd</sup> Tactical (then Military) Air lift Wing, 433<sup>rd</sup> TAW, 459<sup>th</sup> TAW; 913<sup>th</sup> TAG; 302<sup>nd</sup> TAW 403 TAW  
-53<sup>rd</sup>, 59<sup>th</sup>, and Wash DC then 913, Tac Air=lift group  
302<sup>nd</sup> Tac Air Wing  
43<sup>rd</sup> Taw

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My wife said when we go or fly anywhere you will see at least one or two people you know. You develop an affinity to feel good and enjoy and to know that you have a comraderie with who you know, who you serve with.

Unit --

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Were you Drafted or Enlisted – I was an officer. I volunteered to go on active duty. I am a graduate of Baylor Univ. I was in ROTC, did 4 years there taking courses, so then I grad and I was commissioned as an officer in Air Force. I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.

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Next of kin – I married final year in Baylor. She and I were married – she passed after completed my service. Losing someone you have been with that long, my wife, best friend and mother of my children, gave sage advice as a woman. She was total encouragemtn, 27 different moves, different location, houses, passed in 2012.

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To be able to pick up and move and reestablish everything takes a special person and keep me centered. That is imp and she did a great job of that.

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RANK at discharge: Brigadier General

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Years served – from- 1960 to -- 1994 - 32 ½ years

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Where did you attend basic training? -- (was in ROTC, so commissioned)

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WHERE DID YOU SERVE ? – TX, GA MD, PA, CO, MS, Germany and England

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Some of the special ones – San Antonio, very special, special. I enjoyed being in several places. Special units that I embraced that I enjoyed and great comraderie. Colorado Springs is one of my favorites. Peterson AFB. I go back every 3 to 5 years for reunions. I just went in Sept. There were about 400 people. One of places my wife really enjoyed was Doylestown PA. The location of the base and towns we were by. Close to Philadelphia, NY, where GW crossed the Delaware. Four Seasons, covered bridges, beauty of land and beautiful part of world. We had a great time in Greenville SC, we were in the base of the mountain. Being from TX, we saw different weather.

I was born and raised in Bennington, We had one type of growth of trees, farming community. I am a farm person. I grew up shaking peanuts. I have sacked them in the back of a thrasher. I have picked cotton. I enjoy being in the country, I enjoy being around Durant. That is my part of the world. I have raised chickens and hogs and showed them at the livestock show at the fair. I remember spending the night showing a hog when I was 10 or 11 and slept in the pen with my hog. I can remember going to Durant and eating DQ ice cream. I remember the skating rink – I am sure it is long gone. When I was 9 or 10 my mother was a pianist and played for church. She wanted me to learn, I went every Sat on the bus and rode to Durant from Bennington and got piano lessons.

What was your job while in service? - Aircraft Pilot; Group Commander; Wing Commander

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Did you make any special friends in service? Who were they and do you have any stories? - yes – Clay Ford, 1960, still see each other; Gary Spence 1970's - still see each other

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Were there any animals (work or pet) around the areas you served? If so, what was their role? –  
Some dogs were guarding with MP to help protect our airplanes.

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Was there a point during your service, that you decided the military was, or was not, the right career choice? (Please explain) –

To be considered as a career, that was never in doubt when I went in. I enjoyed flying and that type of profession. It was a pleasure to me. I never had a doubt I was going to do at least 20 years.

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Yes, I totally enjoyed my job as a flight crew member. Enjoyed the adventure and sights/people/locations I visited. Enjoyed the excitement and challenges of flight. Almost every flight had something unique and a different perspective to be addressed. The people you come into contact with almost always presented a new twist to how things were handled. The friendship that comes from the close working conditions and hardships faced not only as a military member but also for family members. Family members are often left to cope with hardships w/out the spouse/father present. My family was strengthened through being together during the 30+ years of service.

Is there a battle or point during your service that you would like to describe so that future generations can better understand what military life can be – for better or worse?

Friendships are established that last forever. Teamwork is learned, problem solving requires trust, survival comes to the forefront.

Over the 30+ years, I had several things I was involved in. The longstanding one was Vietnam. I was a pilot in a multi engine heavy lift aircraft. I took supplies to VN and on return would bring back damaged equipment and body bags. That was very difficult to handle. I knew it was not a pleasant thing, but also knew that someone was waiting for that bag, so that was a tough part of the mission. I got involved in several other things. When we tried to rescue missionaries out of Africa, I flew in and would pick up a load in France and fly to Africa. Being over there and trying to rescue the Missionaries, meant spending the night in middle of jungle, locking doors, sleeping in the aircraft and securing the aircraft from inside so bad guys couldn't get in the plane. Gunfire overnight and bodies laid over the fence in the morning. You are in situations where you can be killed and you have to deal with this on a daily basis. It never becomes routine. I think military persons compartmentalize thoughts, what you are doing, you don't think about possibility of being killed, what could happen. You think of current things going on. Bad things you put back of mind and it gets you through the day.

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I rotated from \_\_\_ and England. Leaving wife home to run house and raise kids. You carried plenty of coke with you, bottled water was not in vogue. You brush your teeth with beer or coke. You don't drink the water = could get dysentery

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MEDALS AND CITATIONS RECEIVED

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Stories of Service:

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What or who did you leave behind when you joined the service? (family, child, pet)

My wife, Betsy. Hunt, (from Houston. Met at Baylor Jr year – she was a freshman. She was with me during my entire service.

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How did you get to your initial point of entry? To initial training, drove my car. She and I went together - TX, GA

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What type of training or schooling did you have? 16 months flight training at Moultrie, GA and Big Springs, TX. Initial training aircraft: T-34; T-37; T – 33:: advanced training OKC with C124 and Little Rock AFT, AR on C-130.

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What is your most vivid memory of your time training or in school? What was the BEST part? What was the WORST part? BEST was receiving my wings. The worst and most vivid was \*I remember my table mate ejected from his aircraft as we returned from a formation flight. He was severely injured.

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One of the things that sticks out was in Big Springs TX. We were in Advanced flight training at that time. What I call my table mate (he and I were both married and had wives with us. We sat at same table with one instructor) We were taking a formation flight and on return he crashed and I watched as I rolled down runway landing, he and instructor ejected from aircraft. One chute opened and one didn't. I knew one was killed – so I saw it crash and two people pop out, one open, one chute did not open. The guy in training with me did open his chute, but was severely injured. I went with some more senior officers to tell his wife he was injured, and then I had to go back to an airplane and fly again. This was what was done to not have a dread of flying. I was able to meet him again 20 years later. I have lost several other friends due to crashes – that is something you have to be prepared for.

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What did you think about the chow:

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Some were super while at other times BAD! What was your first assignment after training? Assigned to the 63<sup>rd</sup> MAW in Greenville, SC as a co-pilot

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Did you receive any specialized training? If so, what? Sent to OKC for Advanced Training on my operational aircraft, 4 months training

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Did you qualify with equipment (vehicles, aircraft, radios, weapons, etc.)? (If Yes) What was training with that equipment like

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Yes, it was stressful at times.

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What was the hardest part of training? Early arrival times and learning the "Emergency" procedures and overall operation of features of the aircraft.

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Did you receive any promotions? Could you tell me about them? It was very exciting to be commissioned into AF and have what we called and bars put on shoulder. I graduated from Pilots training and was able to have wings put on uniform and last promo to being General officer was very exciting to me.

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From 1<sup>st</sup> Lt to Brigadier General

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What was the hardest part of the military life-style for you to adapt to? Why do you think it was?

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Hardest part – you were required to be ready for deployment anywhere, anytime and often did. Once I remember I was called and told to pack and be at flight operations in one hour. I was gone a month, my wife did not know where I was or when I would be home. I was sent overseas in the war zone.

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Easiest part was being around fellow fliers, and flying missions locally.

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Wife and I adapted easily to lifestyle. It is always difficult to know you will be in a location for 2 – 4 years. You have to build your lifestyle around that. You are always having to make new friends and tell friends goodbye.

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One day in Greenville, SC, I went on a trip to Vietnam and was gone about ten days. My wife and I and little girl. (Oldest daughter) had rented a car in SC, My wife picked me up at base and told me what all was going on. I noticed we were not going the way where we lived. We pulled into a location and she said this is where we live now. She had found a new place less isolated, moved us into an apt. duplex where other military people were.

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### **Wartime Service .**

**Where did you serve?** Wartime: extensive flight time going to and returning from Vietnam. Peacetime: Worldwide flights.

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**Were you in a combat, combat support, or combat service support role? Or did the war zone make that designation irrelevant?** I was in a combat support role a lot during the middle of my career..

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### **(If combat/ wartime) How did your combat (wartime) experience change you?**

I became more aware that life is precious and that one must be aware of one's surroundings at all times. You must take full advantage of what you have and enjoy your freedom daily, once lost, it is hard to recover. Don't be led down the wrong path by promises of grandeur.

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Being a flyer, my trips would carry a load in and be on ground 4-5 hours. Coming in safely at high altitudes and spiral way down in a confined area so would not be shot. It was a heavy lift aircraft.

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Gave me a more enjoyment of life. Gave me pause to think about what could happen, a more sense of responsibility, a better understanding of what life is about, made me very thankful that I was who I was and the life that I had. I knew things could be bad. Mainly it gave me a better sense of knowing that I had religion (which became stronger and I am still very strong in my faith). It changes you. Makes you sit back and think, this could really happen. I lost a good friend - we were in Germany together, went to US, then Vietnam and was killed in plane crash.

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**What kinds of friendships and camaraderie did you form while serving, and with whom?** Friendship comes from longevity and closeness. Camaraderie comes from enduring hardship together under life/death circumstances.

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**How did you stay in touch with family and friends?** Our methods of communication were via mail and seldom phone calls.

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**What did you do for recreation or when you were off duty?** Usually gathering with friends for parties in a home, meeting at the club, bowling, etc. Almost always with family members included.

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We would go to parties at the club with the wives; have unit parties – I was in several midnight bowling leagues, unit softball games – I learned to play bridge out of defense!! We would have bridge parties. And other card games, dominoes. Visit at friends homes. When living on base build your friendships with those people.

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### **Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?**

One, just to show one is never out of sight. I was in Africa and CBS film crew was there for 60 Minutes. I was filmed leaning against the aircraft main gear tire getting out of the hot sun. When I got back to my deployment location, my wife had sent a letter telling me where I was and asked about when I was coming home. I had been gone some 80+ days at that time. Another unusual experience: My friend Clay Ford and I were flying "forest fire fighting" missions in California. This one mission we were told to go to a specific point, a degree and mile, from a navigation facility landhold. Our load of retardant of approx. 3,000 gal was armed and ready for discharge on the fire. As we proceeded to our designated holding position, we noticed we were flying into a valley between large mountains with the terrain rising as we proceeded along. Clay and I discussed the fact that the mountains were too close for us to turn around. Our discussing then was to open the rear ramp and doors, extend the two discharge tubes and prepare to dump the entire 3,000 gallons of fire retardant if we needed to. Max power was applied, flaps extended

for extra lift, airspeed lowered to increase altitude and just as we were to discharge the load, we cleared the ridge line to open skies.

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**Was there something you did for "good luck?"** I carried a small cross my son gave me.

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Not superstitious. The only think I guess could be called superstitious, my oldest son when very young, gave me a small aluminum cross he got in Vac. Bible School I think,. I carried that always with me.

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**What was the best part of your service experience?** The friendships that were established.

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**Do you recall the day service ended? Where were you?** Oh yes! I was in Biloxi ,MS, and went home for a short period of time to work in the family business before going back into flying.

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**How did you readjust to civilian life? Did you work or go back to school?**

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Discharged in March 1994. Totally been retired. Unfortunately (or fortunately) 32 ½ yrs in Military. Not very sick, didn't have bad illness – broke foot in fall, cut fingertips of left hand.

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4 years after retired, I contracted cancer. With that happening, it changed my whole life of what I was wanting to do. I am very fortunate the good Lord decided I needed more tiem on Earth and I was cured. I thank the Lord every day, and am thankful for doctors. I have been in remission for 20+ years. Every day is a day of possibility for me.

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## **Reflections**

**What are some life lessons you learned from your military service?** Take one day at a time.

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**Are there lessosn to be learned from the way Native communities treat their veterans:**

Continue to honor all those who have served. I have witnessed such through the Choctaws, please continue

**How has your military service impacted your feelings about war and the military in general?** Very definitely. A strong military equals freedom. Yes, and I still have very strong feelings, thoughts about some of the things going on. Very strong in opinions, but will keep opinions to myself. If you keep to yourself you don't have to be harassed.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to share your recollections of your military service.

**Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?** I married while in college (Betsy Hunt from Houston.) we have three children, Melissa, Jennifer and Barry. Melissa works in the business world, Jennifer is a homemaker, Barry is an attorney.

**Most important invention seen in lifetime?** development of the computer.

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**WHAT HAS AMAZED YOU MOST?** How our world has changed. From the life I experienced as a child, youth, young adult to middle age to a senior adult. The loss of our freedoms, regulations that restrict so much of our life now. How the government controls or restricts our life.

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**What do you wish more people knew about veterans?** Vets are like everyone else, just that they have some very mind/body situations that may have altered their thinking.

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**What about Native American veterans?** Everyone needs to be a part of something.

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What we went through, sacrifices we made, sacrifices family has to make, and it is not all rosy. it is not all cut and dried. There are events happen daily that can change and have potential to change wehre you are and what you are doing and what you are involved in.

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**Questions about your non-military life:**

**Where were you born and who were your parents?** Born in Bennington, OK

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Parents were Bronson Campbell and Lucille Riddle Campbell

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Mother was half Choctaw, so I am a card carrying ¼.

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Mother attended Wheelock Academy. She was pianist for Wheelock. She used to tell me 'I played the piano as all girls walked in for dinner. '

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My grandfather was Jeremiah Gardner. We started out in LeFlore MS with our history – Big Tombee river was a place in MS

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**Where did you go to school?** Bennington through 8<sup>th</sup>, then Spring Lake HS in TX. Then Baylor.

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**Advice for future generations:** Have a dream, go for that dream. Stay focused, trust in your God, and know that family comes first.

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**Did you have brothers and sisters?** I am youngest of 3 and am 84. My sister was Billie Bronson Campbell Tate. (deceased), Brother was Roy Campbell (deceased) and one of uncles was Albert R Jones married to Vivian Jones one of three sisters for housing in Durant.

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Our father was in WWI and brother was in WWII. Father was a business owner, Cotton Gins. Mother was a store clerk and business clerk.

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Who Raised Me: my dad in Bennington was working in TX. My mother woered in a dry good store in Bennington. I was raised by a lady Mrs. Joel. She was my mother so to speak. MY birth mother came home every eveing and was home with me. Mrs. Joel was the one who disciplined me. She was the one who would say Joe Lee, you are in trouble, go get a switch. If it wasn't the right size or type, I had to go get another one. She was married to a full blood Choctaw who was a tracker for the Army and also rode Pony Express. A lot of the ways I think, is because of her. She passed away when I was 8 years old. After she passed, it was probably 3 or 4 motnths before I could go into the room where she slept. She was always there for me. I can visualize her, her gray hair, her cotton dresses she wore, the apron she wore, the house that we lived in (water was on the outside – we had to go on back porch to draw water, we had an outdoor privy.) I was raised in a less than prime place to live, but I had everything I wanted. And I never really felt - I knew I was loved and could come home and talk about anything and I was never bellitted or chastised for it.

I walked back and forth to school. I had a big wheel tricycle. I used to go the ice house and bring back 50 pounds in my wagon. I operated a movie theater at 10-12, 13 years old. Operated projector and movie house. I cleaned out settling basins for the water system in Bennington, I harvested peanuts, picked cotton, went on marshmallow roasts and parties at night with friends when I was young, I soaped windows in Bennington during Halloween as a prank. I dragged chains across the front porch of the teachers (lol) Helped raid old cemeteries, smoked grape vines, had corncob fights, threw horseapples and cow patties, I had a super childhood. I roamed the whole neighborhood. My brother would come to find me when it was dinnertime.

In that part of OK when peanut season and summertome came, we got out 6 weeks. We would go back to shool and be out 6 weeks for harvest.

I have some old pecan crackers, and a set of ice tongs, both of which I used. They are my treasures.

I did have a set of cotton scales.

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**What are some family traditions that have been passed down?** Love one another, support each other, love your God.

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Being in Military when I went in 1960, I was gone all the time. Even growing up we went to Tishomingo a lot and Turner Falls, Lake Texoma on the north shore. There used to be ferris wheels and all kinds of stuff at the lake.

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**What was it like growing up Choctaw? Did you ever face adversity as a youth, or as an adult?**

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No. Racism in my opinion did not start until later on. There was no such thing as racism in Military as we know it today.

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**Do you speak any Choctaw?** No, but my son and all three kids have I am Choctaw tattoo on arm, another daughter on foot, son has Seal.

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**How would you describe yourself?**

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Very pro-Choctaw

I am a family orientated person. God fearing, follow things I was taught as a youngster by my parents and the lady who helped raise me. Ms. Joel was married to a tracker for the Army and Pony Express Rider. She raised me as a Indian, gave me insight and strength to believe in myself. I will never forget my parents and her. It is because of them I am who I am today.

**How has COVID 19 affected your life?** \_\_\_ My son had a bad case and his wife had covid. He was more ill that DIL. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Advice for future generations:**

Tell the kids the importance of what they need to learn? Listen to mother and daddy, stay in school, study hard = have a vision that is very important to them to keep in forefront. Listen to older people and not toss them aside, and have a strong religious belief. I am very very strong on that.

I go to first Baptist church.

One other thing to add. I have an article somewhere with pics when Pentagon found out I was American Indian General Officer, I had a display in the Pentagon. I can't find it but I have pics of display at Pentagon. I was one of the first American Indian Officers in Air Force.

When I was a Lt Col I would go to HQ for operational meetings and one guy was a full Col. And he would show up at these meetings with a headdress. He was from Oklahoma – He used to claim he was American Indian. I don't doubt it. After one of his displays he did at a party at HQ claiming to be Indian and wearing his headdress. I went up to him and said you are from OK and have Indian blood and I asked what tribe? He didn't answer and I asked how much blood – and I told him I was ¼ Choctaw. He turned and walked away and didn't talk the rest of meeting. Even today, I do not use the title of General very much. Don't think it is necessary most of the time, although I am proud of it, have a star flag and American flag in office.

I also flew planes fighting forest fire, in Idaho, Utah, and Washington. This was done flying a military aircraft. We were down flying about 100 -150 ft above the treetops.

My friend and I nearly crashed fighting a forest fire.

One of my nicknames is Indian Joe, General Joe, Smokey Joe. I was proud I was Indian.

How has covid affected your life:

Not much except concerns when several of my family became infected.

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