



THE METTLE BEHIND THE MERIT

The Steve Pisanos Story

EDUCATION KIT

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What's "Mettle"? Steve Pisanos had it!

The word Mettle describes personal characteristics that play a large role in determining success — courage, resiliency, determination (to name a few). To say that someone "has mettle" means that person is someone who can persevere under challenging circumstances.

Steve Pisanos was a remarkable person who proved his mettle in many ways. As a little boy in Greece, he became interested in airplanes and vowed to learn to fly. However, poor grades and lack of opportunity held him back. Knowing that America was a place where dreams could become real, he arrived without money or even a place to live.

Yet, through a positive mindset, high integrity and desire to seek out friends, Steve established himself and learned to fly. Upon hearing of the Nazi German invasion of his homeland, he joined the British Royal Air Force as a way to help fight back (it was impossible to return to Greece at the time). During WWII, he achieved his American citizenship. However, when his airplane crashed in France, he was forced to join the French Resistance as a guerilla fighter against the German army and Gestapo secret police.

After the war, Steve worked as a jet test pilot, flew dangerous supply missions in Vietnam and later, in the 1970s, helped the Greek Air Force buy and use the most powerful fighter airplane on earth at the time, the F-4 Phantom.

Steve's Mettle provided a way to receive great Merit

FROM THE FILM:
What's your
greatest
dream?

Steve's mettle helped him overcome great challenges! But when he was asked about his secret to success, Steve replied, *"America gave me a chance to be free to pursue my dreams. So, I did! And look what I've accomplished! Not everyone can do this. But those who take advantage of their freedom, work hard and keep their dreams, they can do just as I did."*



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Steve Pisanos in 1938 (age 19)
next to a Piper Cub aircraft

SPIROS PISANOS - "The Flying Greek" BACKGROUND AND FACTS

Birth name: Spiros N. PissanOS (after WWII changed to Steve N. Pisanos)
Birthplace: Athens, Greece
Birth date: November 10, 1919
Died: June 6, 2016 (age 96)
Occupation: Military pilot, salesman, author

FACTS:

- Came to America in 1938
- First job in America was as in a bakery
- Lived in Plainfield, New Jersey
- Knew only four words of English when he arrived in U.S.A.
- Became a licensed pilot at age 20
- Preferred making friends to making enemies
- Became the first American citizen naturalized on foreign soil
- Shot down 10 enemy airplanes (double ace)
- Fought with the French resistance
- Fought in the Vietnam War
- Retired from the military in 1974
- Wrote his life story, "The Flying Greek"



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Several nations helped make Steve an American



Steve Pisanos was determined to become an American citizen. He was the first to take the oath of citizenship in a foreign country.



Greece is one of the oldest countries on earth. Steve appreciated Greece's history and heritage. He loved his nickname, "The Flying Greek."



Great Britain was in WWII before the United States. Many went to help Great Britain in their fight against the Nazi Germans. The British accepted Steve as a pilot. When America joined the war, Steve became a citizen.



Steve's P-51B fighter crashed in France. He was nearly killed by the crash and German soldiers. However, he was rescued by the French Resistance and fought alongside them until he could return home.

Steve made the choice to be an American

FROM THE FILM:
Why do you think
Steve saw "freedom"
in the American flag?



Steve wondered what it would have been like if he had stayed in Greece. He probably wouldn't have been able to accomplish as much as he did as an American. To him, the American flag symbolized the great gift of opportunity. But he knew that the opportunity had to be earned, and once earned, respected. "I love the flag!" he said. "It means dreams can come true!"



Before America entered WWII, Eagle Squadron pilots wore Royal Air Force uniforms. The patch design at left distinguished them and helped instill a spirit of camaraderie



American Eagle Squadron pilots flew the British Spitfire Mk.V in combat against the Germans — "XR K" was actually flown by Steve Pisanos



Steve Pisanos was awarded many medals. Some of the most meaningful were his five DFCs (Distinguished Flying Crosses).

When the military awards multiple medals, many times they don't issue another medal. Instead, they provide a small pin to place on the ribbon. This saves space on the uniform and doesn't weigh as much!

The official U.S. Army Air Force and U.S. Air Force citations are available as part of this kit - they're quick to read and pretty interesting!



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Lasting success isn't the same for everyone...



Some time in late 1944, Steve poses for an Army Air Force photographer in his P-47 Thunderbolt fighter

"Success" means different things to different people: technical achievement, financial security, awards & records and being part of a winning team are just some ways to measure the outward sign of success. But true success always begins in the "inside" where others don't immediately notice.

Success is what happens when many different qualities come together to achieve a purpose. Though Steve succeeded in military life, it's quite likely that he would have been successful in anything he chose to do.

Steve started his success by **deciding to be **Excellent** at his dream of flying**

...but the qualities that support it are!



Gen. John P. McConnell pins the Legion of Merit medal onto Steve's uniform on November 29, 1967

The following are qualities that helped make Steve Pisanos successful:

EXCELLENCE	NO GRUDGES	CURIOUS
GOAL FOCUSED	CONFIDENT	INCLUSIVE
OPTIMISTIC	KIND	PROUD
FRIENDLY	HOPEFUL	DISCIPLINED
HONEST	WISE RISKS	EAGER

Some day, people may say the same about you, too! But you have to have faith that **good choices today will pay off later.**



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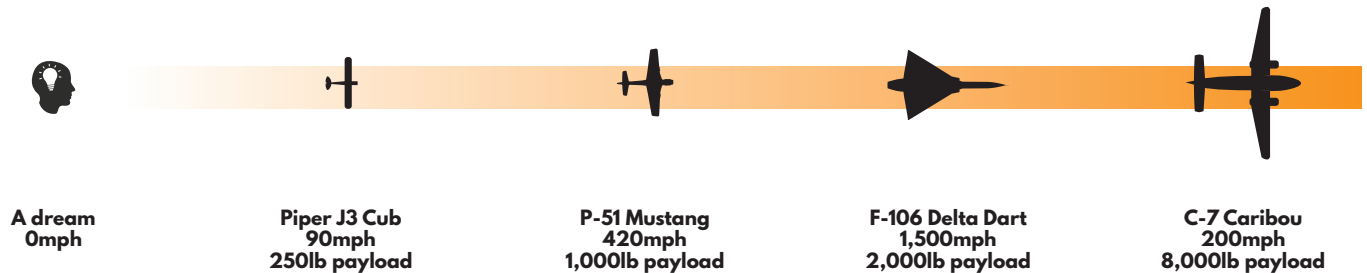
Can you mirror Steve's mettle? (Merit moments from the film)

	JUST A THOUGHT: No one succeeds alone. Find people who support your dream.		FROM THE FILM: What advantages did Steve have in selling the F-4 Phantom?	
JUST A THOUGHT: If you could be better at one thing, what would it be?		JUST A THOUGHT: Your true character is shown when the pressure is on		JUST A THOUGHT: When you succeed, help someone else succeed, too.
Steve had poor grades, no opportunity. What did he do?	Steve had no friends and no education. What did he do?	Steve's airplane crashed and the enemy was attacking. What did he do?	Steve was given a hard job and had tough competition. What did he do?	Steve lived a big life and wanted to encourage others. What did he do?
 02:40	 03:24	 10:50	 15:18	 17:50
Write a book, tell your story!	Accepted challenge, didn't quit.	Ran fast, fought back.	Made friends, learned the language.	Studied harder, moved to opportunity.

Steve was born in 1919

Steve died in 2016

Steve's dream of flight changed a lot! (Think a dream of your own. Which airplane represents where you're at?)



All great achievements begin with a dream! But, dreams go nowhere without action to get them moving. What dreams do you have?

A Piper "Cub" is a small, slow airplane. But it's perfect for beginners! Dreams require beginner-steps too. What's a beginning step to realize your dream?

A P-51 Mustang symbolizes many pilot's dream airplane. When you think of realizing your dream, what object or experience comes to mind?

With a top speed of Mach 2+, the F-106 remains one of the fastest airplanes ever flown. Sometimes dreams become far bigger than imagined!

Few dreamt of flying the C-7 Caribou but to those that depended on it, it was a dream come-true! Be prepared for dreams to turn out differently (but good!)



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What was it like for Steve to fly a Spitfire in combat?

Donald Nijboer

Most Second World War fighter cockpits, like the Supermarine Spitfire, were cluttered, claustrophobic affairs and creature comforts were nonexistent. The only thing that separated the pilot from the harsh environment at 30,000 feet was a thin sheet of aluminum and glass, and for many, the cold steel that surrounded them became a fiery coffin.

When strapping in for the first time, the Spitfire pilot would find the cockpit extremely cramped, especially when wearing winter flying clothing. The throttle and propeller pitch controls were located on the left and within easy reach. The control panel was anchored by the 'basic six' panel in the centre which held the airspeed indicator, altimeter, turn and bank indicator, rate of climb indicator, artificial horizon and direction indicator. The rest of the flight instruments and controls looked as if they had been thrown in and fallen where they may, with no real thought or planning.

Fighter pilots have often described 'bonding' with their aircraft—sitting snugly in the cockpit and having the feeling of being one with their fighter. That snugness, however, had more to do with the structure of the aircraft and not the cockpit design. A streamlined Spitfire with its liquid-cooled Merlin engine had a slender fuselage and thus a tight cockpit. The P-47, on the other hand, with its giant R-2800 Double Wasp radial engine, had an enormous front office.

For a young fighter pilot flying his Spitfire at 30,000ft, it was a constant challenge. The ear-splitting noise of his engine and sub-zero temperatures numbed the senses. But constant vigilance was the key to survival. Pilots quickly learned to keep their eyes outside of the cockpit, scanning the sky for enemy planes and not inside looking at his instruments.

Most World War II fighters were equipped with fully enclosed cockpits, which restricted the pilot's view forward, to the sides and especially to the rear. While the Spitfire had a slightly bulged clear canopy hood, the view directly behind the pilot was almost nonexistent. The term 'check you six' was the mantra during the war. Pilot's used the face of a clock in which to identify the direction of approaching enemy aircraft. 'Enemy planes 12 o'clock high' meant there were fighters directly in front of and above you. Anything in your '6 o'clock' position meant an enemy fighter was about to shoot your tail off.

Success and survival in aerial combat often came down to the simple act of spotting the enemy first – a significant advantage.

"The pilot who sees the other first already had half the victory."
Luftwaffe ace Eric Hartmann

According to a tactics report written by Lt. Col Mark Hubbard USAAF, ninety percent of all fighters shot down never saw the pilot who hit them.

Fighting in a Spitfire required a varied skillset: knowing the capabilities and limitations of your aircraft, tenacity, aggressiveness, keen eyesight and teamwork. The basic flying unit was the fighting pair or 'element'. As one fighter did the shooting, the other served as a 'wingman' flying behind his leader to cover him from any enemy attack.

Once enemy fighters were spotted (Messerschmitt Bf 109s or Focke Wulf Fw 190s), each Spitfire pilot would ready themselves for battle. Radio silence would be broken with each 'element' given their specific task. Weapons would be cocked, gunsight turned on, engine and fuel mixture set to maximum boost, oxygen mask secured, and finally goggles slipped on and straps tightened. As the young Spitfire pilots closed in on their unsuspecting enemy, an old companion would rear its ugly head...fear. Every fighter pilot was scared. Controlling that fear was what separated the great fighter pilots from the mediocre ones.

During World War II the most successful form of attack was diving from above on an unsuspecting enemy formation. This gave the attacking fighters the advantage of speed and surprise.

Diving into the attack, the Spitfire pilots would pick out their individual targets and wait for just the right moment. Hurtling in at over 400mph and holding your gunsight on target meant each pilot had only a few seconds to score.

The Spitfire was armed with two 20mm cannon and four .303-inch Browning machine guns. A short, accurate burst was more than enough to shoot down a Bf 109. Pressing the gun button unleashed a torrent of cannon and machine gun shells. The recoil from the heavy cannon would slow the Spitfire by as much as 10 miles an hour. The acrid, metallic smell of cordite fumes would fill the cockpit, stinging the eyes. If everything went right, the enemy would be struck a mortal blow, burst into flame and crash to the earth. With victory in hand, the smart Spitfire pilot would continue with his dive, avoid enemy attack and use his speed to zoom climb back up to high altitude.

These slashing attacks were efficient and over in an instant. Air combat in the Second World War was often cold and clinical and far from the romantic image of individual pilots locked in a twisting turning dogfight. Speed, height, and seeing the enemy first were the keys to aerial victory and to the best way for a young Spitfire pilot to live and fight another day.





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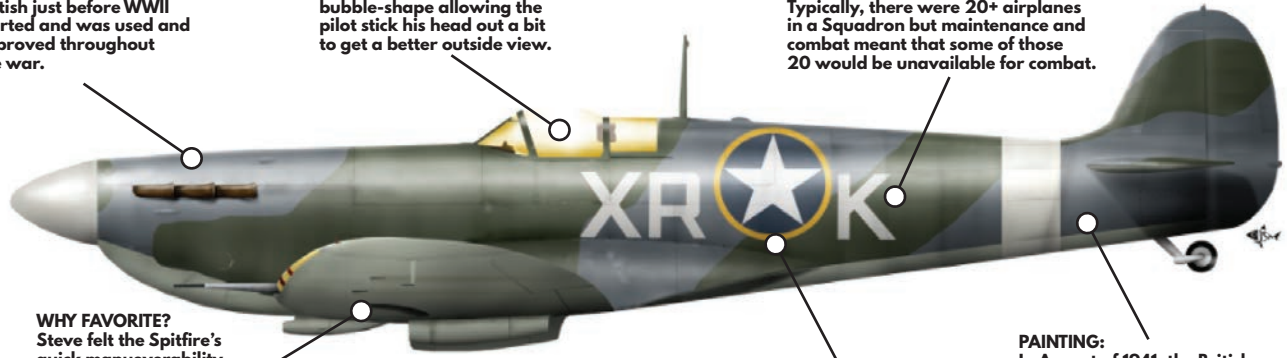
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Steve's favorite airplane (among many!)

NAME:
This airplane is a Supermarine Spitfire Mk.V. It was designed by the British just before WWII started and was used and improved throughout the war.

COCKPIT CANOPY:
The cockpit was covered by a thin plastic canopy that slid backwards. It had a slight bubble-shape allowing the pilot stick his head out a bit to get a better outside view.

LETTERS:
"XR" indicates the Squadron while "K" indicates the particular aircraft within the Squadron. Typically, there were 20+ airplanes in a Squadron but maintenance and combat meant that some of those 20 would be unavailable for combat.



WHY FAVORITE?
Steve felt the Spitfire's quick maneuverability and smooth flight were better than any other fighter he'd ever flown. Today, historians like to argue whether or not the Spitfire was the greatest fighter plane ever made.

MARKINGS:
The British "Roundel" was typically applied to a Spitfire. But, Steve's Spitfire was loaned to the American Army Air Corps because America didn't have enough high-quality fighters available, hence the American "Star."

PAINTING:
In August of 1941, the British changed their standard camouflage colors of green/brown to green/gray. The painted band at the tail was typical of British paint jobs; Steve's was white but most other British tail bands were light blue.

ATTACK	BOMBER	OBSERV.	PURSUIT	CARGO	TRAINING	MISCELLANEOUS
A-36	B-17	L-4	P-47	C-78	PT-13	SNJ-4
A-26	B-25	O-59	P-51	C-47	PT-17	Harvard
		L-5	P-40	C-45	PT-18	Tomahawk
			P-59	C-54	BT-13	T.Moth
			P-80		BT-15	Hurricane
			P-78		BT-16	Milesmaster
			P-61		AT-6	Spitfire
			P-63		AT-8	Lancaster
			P-39		AT-16	Spartan Ex
					AT-17	Harlow
					BC-1	Fairchild
						F-6
						Typhoon
						● FW-190
						● ME-109
						● Zeke

Pilots record every hour they fly. But this log book can be large and inconvenient to carry around.

Steve's test-pilot status gave him opportunity to fly many more aircraft types than most pilots. He kept this little "type log" in his pocket for when people asked him how many airplanes he had flown.

Notice the three airplanes with a red ● next to their listing. These are "enemy aircraft" that Steve was able to fly while stationed at Wright-Patterson AFB after WWII.

Steve Pisanos flew nearly 50 different airplanes in his career. This is an important point because every aircraft "flies" differently. Being proficient in one does not necessarily mean being proficient in another. However, the diversity of aircraft Steve flew contributed to a greater knowledge of flight that raised his capabilities as a pilot, exponentially. This is why many successful people have played a variety of supporting roles within a single career or chosen field.



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©Dan Patterson. He's been taking pictures of things for over 50 years. If you had 50 years to practice doing something, how good could YOU get?



Think about...
Why is there a rear-view mirror? Why
are so many switches and levers Red?
How did pilots know what all those
buttons and dials did?

COCKPIT: P-51B Mustang— Steve flew in a P-51B when his airplane crashed in France on March 5, 1944.

PHOTO: Dan Patterson

The average person may be confused at the sight of all the gauges and switches of a WWII aircraft. However, pilots and aircrew had a simple tool that helped them understand them all: progressive repetition! Pilots started with airplanes of just a few gauges and gradually, continually worked up to airplanes of greater complexity. In time, with practice, pilots became so familiar with the airplane, flying one was "easy."



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©Dan Patterson Dan not only takes great photos, he makes films! How is filmmaking similar/different than taking still-photos?

Think about...
The F-106 was a lot faster than a P-51!
How is the F-106 cockpit different/similar?
Do you think "1944 Steve" had any idea
he'd be flying 1,400 mph in 1962?"



COCKPIT: Convair F-106 Delta Dart — In 1962, Steve flew over 1,400mph in an F-106, almost 4 x faster than a P-51 Mustang! (but 18 years later!) **PHOTO:** Dan Patterson

By 1962, aircraft technology was way beyond the WWII P-51. There are (probably) just as many switches and gauges as in the P-51 but some of them were located in different places and in different groups. This is because airplane designers were continually applying lessons learned from the past to improve the pilot's ability to fly the airplane. Nothing is ever "perfect" but "continuous improvement" brings about long-term success.



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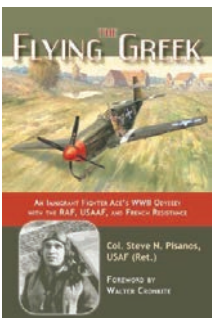
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LEARNING MORE ABOUT STEVE PISANOS



PHOTO: Bill Crump

Steve Pisanos, in his formal military uniform with all of his medals, taken when he was 85 years old.



The Mettle Behind the Merit
Educators Kit
<http://www.dfcsociety.net/Pisanos>

The Flying Greek
Biography
Amazon.com and TheFlyingGreek.com

The Distinguished Flying Cross
Medal
<http://www.dfcsociety.net>

The Mettle Behind the Moment
Film
<http://www.dfcsociety.net/Pisanos>

Steve Pisanos
Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Pisanos

Steve Pisanos' medals
LEGION OF MERIT- with two oak leaf clusters
DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS - with four oak leaf clusters
PURPLE HEART
MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL
AIR MEDAL - with silver oak leaf cluster and three bronze oak leaf clusters
KING'S INSIGNIA OF THE EAGLE SQUADRON
AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL
ARMY COMMENDATION MEDAL
PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION - with silver oak leaf cluster
AIR FORCE OUTSTANDING UNIT AWARD
AMERICAN DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL
AMERICAN CAMPAIGN MEDAL
EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN MEDAL
- with four bronze stars
WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL
NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL - with bronze star
AIR FORCE LONGEVITY SERVICE MEDAL
- with silver oak leaf cluster and one bronze oak leaf cluster
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM SERVICE AWARD RIBBON
- with three bronze stars
FRENCH LEGION OF HONOR - Chevalier
FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE - with silver star
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM MEDAL HONOR MEDAL - first class
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM GALLANTRY CROSS - with Palm
BRITISH DEFENSE MEDAL
BRITISH AIR CREW EUROPE STAR
BRITISH WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL
BRITISH 1939-45 STAR
ROYAL AIR FORCE MEDALLION
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM CAMPAIGN MEDAL

The Mettle Behind the Merit Educators Kit contributors

John Mollison, writer and producer
Dan Patterson, photography
Bill Crump, photography
Donald Nijboer, writer
Jeffrey Pisanos, photos and editing
Bruce Huffman, editing
Becky Tolly, editing
The South Dakota Air & Space Museum, production
Maj. Robert Groman (ret.), research

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The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military medal awarded to individuals who demonstrate heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.

One of the missions of The Distinguished Flying Cross Society is to share the heroic stories of its members with the world. Though especially remarkable, Steve Pisanos' story is just one of many. If you have any interest in learning more about how ordinary people can prevail under extraordinary challenges, the DFCSociety.net website is a great resource. Thousands of DFC citations are available to read.

On behalf of the DFC Society, may Steve's story inspire you to demonstrate your own mettle in a positive way for the good of our country and fellow citizens.

Bruce Huffman
Chairman, 2019