



## **VETERAN SPOTLIGHT: Betty Jo O'Brien**

### ***Double Duty: The Air Force Veteran Fighting for Caregivers on Two Fronts***

*Betty Jo's double-duty service reminds us that the best warriors are made by deliberate choice—whether choosing military structure at 23 or choosing to fight broken systems in hospital rooms. Her mature self-awareness became the foundation for policy revolution helping thousands of military families today.*

Betty Jo O'Brien serves double duty—once as an Air Force veteran who chose military service at 23 to get her life on track, and now as a fierce advocate whose warrior heart rewrote federal caregiver policy to protect military families nationwide.

## The Self-Aware Decision That Built a Warrior

Unlike many who enlist straight from high school, Betty Jo made a deliberate choice at 23. *"I felt like I was going down the wrong road,"* she reflects. *"I felt the Air Force would give me the structure and direction I needed to get my life on track."*

That mature self-awareness—recognizing she needed change and taking decisive action—would become the foundation of her warrior spirit. The Air Force didn't just give her seven years of service; it forged the discipline and determination that would later save her son's life and transform federal policy for thousands of military families.

*"That is when our lives changed."*



## The Call That Changed Everything

Years later, that same decisive spirit emerged when Betty Jo got the phone call that would define her second tour of duty. *"I was out at a movie theater when I got an urgent call from my daughter. She was yelling into the phone: 'MOM! You must come to the hospital NOW!'"*

When doctors initially dismissed her son's months of severe symptoms as "drug withdrawals," Betty Jo—drawing on that same self-awareness that led her to military service—demanded the CT scan that revealed the brain tumor. Her Air Force training had taught her to assess situations clearly and take command when others failed to act.

## The 105-Day Campaign That Rewrote History

Without hesitation, Betty Jo picked up her life in Connecticut and moved to Boston, leaving everything behind without a backward glance. For 105 grueling days, she lived in hospitals, fighting not just for her son's life, but discovering every gap in the system that failed military families.

*"Gathering up what little strength I had, coupled with my lifetime relationship with God, I managed to forge my way through the challenges while learning how to navigate through and improve the process."*

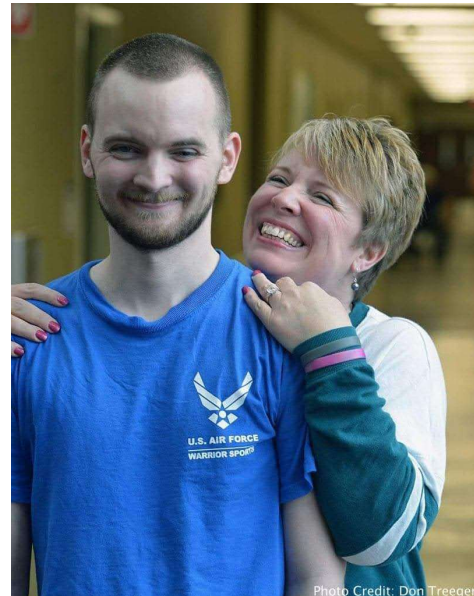
Her First Victory - The Fisher House Revolution: During those exhausting months, Betty Jo discovered families sleeping in hospital waiting rooms when Fisher Houses were full. Her relentless advocacy led to a groundbreaking policy change—families can now stay in hotels when Fisher Houses reach capacity. Thousands of military families no longer sleep in cars because of Betty Jo's fight.

## Fighting on Two Fronts: The System's Ultimate Betrayal

Here's where Betty Jo's double duty became crystal clear. As her son's caregiver while he was active duty, she was authorized and paid for her caregiving. The moment he became a veteran, the VA yanked that authorization because he had an illness (brain cancer), not an injury.

Betty Jo's response? Just like at 23 when she recognized her life needed direction, she assessed the situation clearly and took decisive action. She didn't accept it. She didn't complain about it. She changed it.

*"Experience alone was not enough to further my advocacy. The education I now have has helped give credibility to my voice."*



## Arming Herself for Policy War

While caring for her son 24/7, Betty Jo went back to school—because she understood that passion without credentials wouldn't change federal policy. That same self-awareness that led her to the Air Force now guided her educational mission:

- 2016: Associate in Business Administration, Holyoke Community College

- 2018: Bachelor's in Business Administration, Bay Path University (4.0 GPA, Pathfinder Award)
- 2021: MBA with Project Management concentration (100% Patriot Scholarship)

### **Her Double-Front Battlefield Victories**

#### Front One - Policy Revolution:

- Elizabeth Dole Foundation Fellow (2017) - Hidden Hero for Massachusetts
- Legislative Ambassador - American Cancer Society (2015)
- The Illness vs. Injury Revolution - Rewrote VA caregiver rules so illness-based disabilities qualify for caregiver support
- Fisher House Hotel Program - Policy change helping thousands of military families

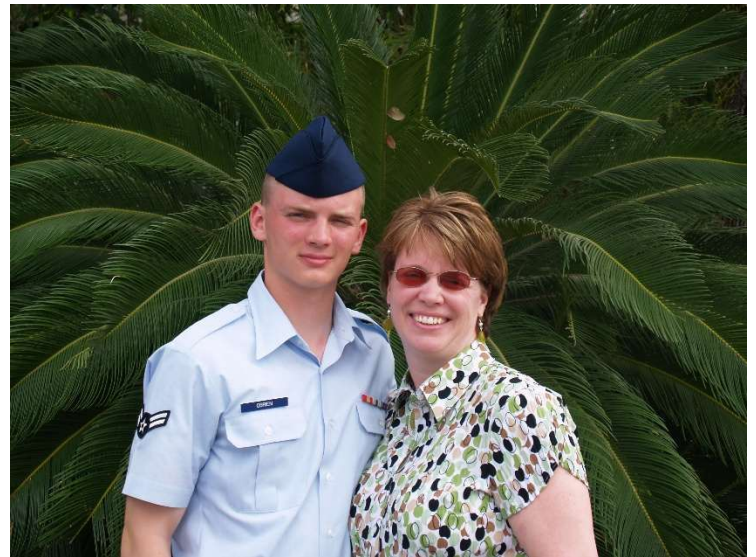
#### Front Two - Personal Victory:

- Command Overreach Victory - Fought military attempts to access her son's medical records as "government asset"
- Son's Transformation - From near-death brain cancer to Air Force Warrior Games Torch Bearer
- Family Resilience - 105-day hospital vigil that became a policy revolution

### **The Inspiration Behind the Double-Duty Warrior**

*"Most importantly, through all of this, I was able to witness God's healing power and reaffirm that He is the foundation of the strength that helped me overcome all the obstacles in our path."*

Betty Jo's faith became her foundation, her Air Force training became her discipline, and that same self-awareness that guided her at 23 became the driving force that transformed personal tragedy into policy victory for thousands.



## **Her Mission Continues on Both Fronts**

Today, Betty Jo continues her full-time advocacy work while writing "Scars & Miracles" (May 2026). She enjoys photography, writing, traveling, and watching professional football. Her next personal mission? Running a marathon—because apparently, fighting on two fronts and rewriting federal policy wasn't challenging enough!

## **The Boots 2 Benefits Connection**

Betty Jo embodies everything our "Operation Caregiver" book represents—a warrior who made deliberate choices to transform herself and then transformed the system for others. Her double duty makes her the perfect guest author for families facing similar battles.

Bottom Line: Betty Jo O'Brien proves that some warriors choose their battles twice—first recognizing at 23 that military service would give her life direction, then using that same self-awareness to fight broken systems in hospital corridors. Her mature decision-making, combined with Air Force discipline and unwavering faith, transformed her son's brain cancer battle into a policy revolution. Every military family who gets caregiver support for illness-based disabilities owes a debt to Betty Jo's double-duty warrior heart.

*"This is our story... a journey of tragedy, transition, and transformation."*