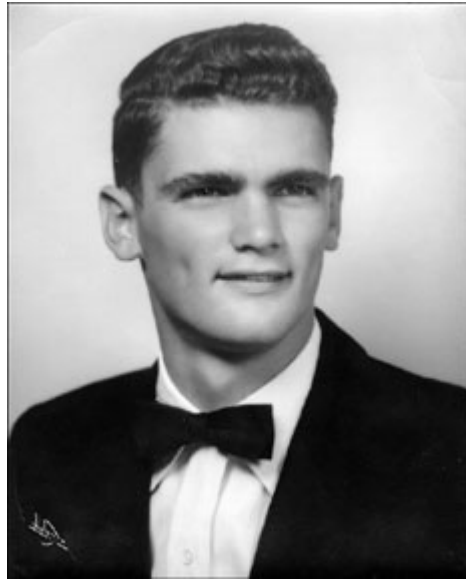


# Remembering “Bob” Mette



1956 Graduation Picture

Robert Allen “Bob” Mette was the first member of the 1956 Landon High School Graduating Class to die. He received his Landon Diploma on June 8, 1956 at the George Washington Hotel in Jacksonville, Florida and died 65 days later on August 12, 1956 at the US Naval Hospital in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

The news of Bob’s Death shocked and saddened all Landonians. He was such a high-profile athlete that sports dominated his remembrance. Teammates and opponents alike respected Bob as a true sportsman: he played hard, he played fair and he played to win. Bob was more than a “Jock;” he was active in his church, coached little league baseball and participated in social groups at school.

## EARLY LIFE

Robert Allen Mette was born on August 27, 1938, in Jacksonville, Florida. He was the oldest son of Robert H. and Cora B. Mosley Mette. Bob had two younger brothers, Linnine and Richard. Bob lived all of his life at 3608 Stanley Street, which intersected Spring Park Road near the old Jacksonville city limits. Bob attended Spring Park School for grades one through seven and transferred to Landon for the eighth grade in 1951.



**Bob and Dad – About 1942**

**Bob, Mom and Linnine – About 1942**

I first met Bob when I transferred to Spring Park School in 1950. We were in Mrs. Henderson's 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Room. I remember Bob as being a very fast runner when we played outdoor games during recess. He was always competitive and friendly. Bob was a member of the School Boy Patrol at Spring Park School.

## **MAYFAIR BAPTIST CHURCH**

### *Softball*

Bob and I were in the same Sunday School Class at Mayfair Baptist Church where we played for Coach Warren Williams' fast-pitch softball team. Bob's talents were evident early: he was our best hitter and the only outfielder who could catch a long fly ball and then throw to home plate in the air. I remember several games when Bob actually threw the ball over the catcher's head and into the backstop from deep left field. Opposing players who tagged up and attempted to score from third base on a short fly ball to Bob were usually thrown out at home plate.

## **LITTLE LEAGUE COACH AND MENTOR**



Bob wanted to share his talents and teach young boys the game of Baseball. He was the coach of the championship Little League San Souci "Satans."

## LANDON HIGH SCHOOL

### *Organizations*

Bob's talent and accomplishments at Landon were recognized by all who knew him. His 1956 *Landonian* yearbook information relates that information. It read:

*This boy so tall, straight and slim, we all like, because it's him.* – SFC, JBC; Boys' Chorus 2, 3, 4; Boys' Double Quartette 3, 4; Inter-Club Council 4; Gamma Hi-Y 2, 3, 4; Junior Hi-Y 1; Key Club 4; "L" Club 3, 4; Senior Mixed Chorus 3, 4; Student Council 2, 3, 4; Football Varsity 4; Football JV 1, 2, 3; Basketball Varsity 3, 4; Basketball JV 1, 2; Baseball 3, 4; Track 3, 4; Junior Chorus 2, 3; Stage Crew 4.

### *Senior Class Prophecy*

Bob's Sr. Class Prophecy appeared in the Class of 1956's final edition of the *Lion's Roar*. It read:

**BOB METTE finally gave up sports**

**And became an engineer**

**He still works with younger boys**

**Sports still to his heart are near.**

### ***Sports***

**Bob Mette was a three-sport star at Landon. During his Senior Year, he played center on the basketball team that won the Big 10 Conference Championship, played several positions on the football team that won the Co-Big Ten Championship and pitched on the baseball team that won its District Championship.**

### ***Baseball***



**Bob was a regular in the pitching rotation and played first base. His specialty pitch was his “Fastball.”**

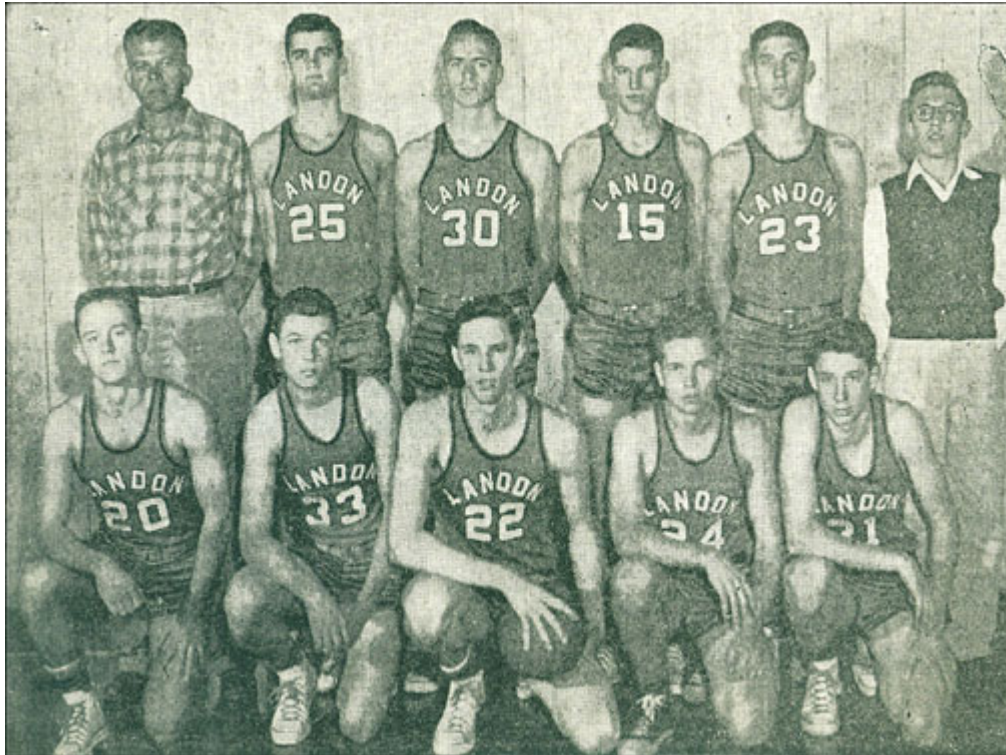
**Bob’s started playing organized baseball at a very young age. His first organized experience was in the Tad Pole and Pee Wee Leagues. While attending Landon, Bob also played baseball for the “Post 88” Team in the American Legion Baseball League.**

**One of Bob’s options after graduation was a chance to play professional baseball. I remember his telling me that a scout from the Brooklyn Dodgers had watched him pitch and wanted him to try**

out for their farm system. This was before the invention of the Radar Gun for timing pitches, but knowledgeable baseball coaches had estimated Bob's "Fastball" to be in the 90 MPH range.

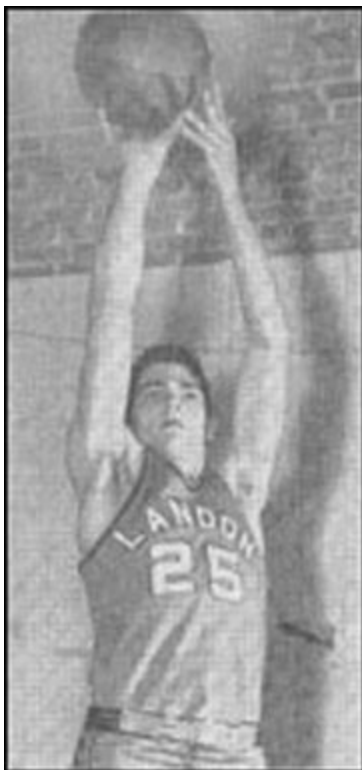
## *Basketball*

### The 1955-56 Landon Basketball Team



Players pictured above are, front row, left to right: Bob Swindell, Ray Schultz, Eddie Cone, David Hicks and Ray Swain. Back row: Coach Warner, Bob Mette, Harold Zellner, James Carter, Darrell Leake and Ray Swain, Mgr.

Bob wore Jersey No. 25 and was the starting center for the basketball team.



**“Bevo”**

**This picture of Bob making a jump shot appeared in the June 7, 1956, Edition of the *Lion’s Roar*. His towering height of 6’ 4" made Bob’s offensive skills tough to defend.**

**I think Bob’s first love was basketball. I remember his adopting the nickname “Bevo” after a high-profile college basketball player named “Bevo” Francis scored 115 points in a game for Rio Grande College.**

**Jacksonville University verbally offered Bob a full Basketball Scholarship, but this never materialized because of his untimely death.**

### ***Football***

**The 1955-56 Landon Football Team**

Players pictured above are, front row, left to right: Glenn Johnson, Glenn Sharp, Bobby Purser, Jim Couch, Jim Gilmore, Bob Harris, Wayne Rhodes, Al La Faye, Johnny Carraway, Fred Nelson, Rae Marks, Billy Carroll, Jerry Adams and Tommy Muhlbauer. Middle row: Bill McKinney, Allen Neville, Gene Manning, Art Lloyd, George Story, Jay Newbern, Mickey Dechman, Bill Boss, Bob Hutchinson, Bill Coalson, Dana Austin, Ricky Guttery, Larry Cicale, Sonny Giles and Norwood Redding. Back row: Larry Ebersol, Homer Lewis, Ronald Gardner, David Whitehead, Jim Searcy, Darrell Leake, Van Fletcher, Fred Weinberg, Joe Smith, Ed Porch, Chuck McKinney, James Carter, Jerry Hartz, Robert Mette, Tony Fekany, Joe Larson, Ed Cone, Billy Altman, Bill Carlton and Bob Swindell.

In the back row of this picture, Bob is wearing jersey No. 60. Bob played center, end and kicked-off on the football team.

**CONCERNED CITIZEN AND STUDENT**

# THE PUBLIC PULSE

## OVERFLOWING SCHOOL

Dear Journal:

For the past several years we, the students at Landon High School, have been promised a new high school in South Jacksonville. Candidates come and go, elections are held, but Landon continues to burst at the seams.

I am now a senior at Landon,

so possibly I should no longer be concerned about the situation; but I know that each student who graduates this year will be replaced by four or five eighth graders. I'm almost sure that the principal and teachers at Landon must become weary assembling this giant jigsaw puzzle every year. Master craftsmen that they are, we cannot go on expecting miracles from them.

I honestly believe that it would be very beneficial to both Junior and Senior High students to have separate schools. That appears to be the policy in the other sections of the town, and I can see no reason why we should be the exception. Without a doubt, Southside is growing by leaps and bounds and our need for a new high school can no longer be ignored.

Your paper has aroused the public in the past about all aspects of the school situation, and I would really appreciate your efforts in behalf of my younger classmates and friends who will soon be overflowing these classrooms and halls.

BOB METTE.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Terry Parker High School in Arlington will be ready for occupancy by next school year, thereby taking some of the pressure off Landon).

Bob wrote this article to the *Jacksonville Journal* during his Senior Year. It addressed overcrowding at Landon High School.

## 2ND AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR CO., U.S. MARINE CORPS

### *Summer Training*

On December 22, 1955, Bob joined the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Co., U.S. Marine Corps based in Jacksonville. One of Bob's obligations as a US Marine Corps Reservist was to attend two weeks of active duty training each summer. The designated training base for 1956 was Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. The middle weekend of Summer Camp was always a time for young Marines to enjoy liberty.



# DEATH

## First Sign of Trouble

On Saturday afternoon, August 11, Bob and some friends went to Jacksonville, North Carolina for liberty. Later that evening, Bob became ill and disoriented. His friends summoned medical help from the Navy Shore Patrol. No one was sure what to do for Bob. The Shore Patrol took him into protective custody until they could find a ride for him back to the base. Bob passed into a coma, and the Shore Patrol took him directly to the US Naval Hospital at Camp Lejeune. During the night, Bob's condition worsened.

## Bad News

<b>CLASS OF SERVICE</b> This is a fast message unless its delivery character is indicated by the proper symbol.	<b>WESTERN UNION</b> <b>TELEGRAM</b> W. P. MARSHALL, President	<b>SYMBOLS</b> DL = Day Letter NL = Night Letter LT = International Letter Telegram
The time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.		1201
AA069		55)
A JNA083 XV GOVT PD=NS JACKSONVILLE FLO 12 849AME= R H METTE= THREE SIX ZERO EIGHT STANLEY ST JACKSONVILLE FLO= 121229Z I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON PVT ROBERT ALLEN METTE USMCR IS CRITICALLY ILL AT THIS HOSPITAL DUE TO ACUTE MENINGITIS. YOU MAY VISIT HIM AT ANY TIME. YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY CHANGE IN HIS CONDITION= NAVAL HOSPITAL CAMP LEJEUNE= 2/a FL 91330 Cc 929a 7/10/56 Jette		
THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE		

Sunday Morning, August 12, about 10:00 a.m., a Western-Union Telegram was delivered to Bob's home from Camp Lejeune stating that Bob was critically ill due to acute *meningitis*, which is another name for *Spinal Meningitis*. The Mette family quickly departed for Camp Lejeune to be with Bob, but their trip was in vain. Hospital officials met them on the front steps of the hospital and informed them that Bob had died.

An autopsy on Monday confirmed Spinal *Meningitis* as the cause of Bob's Death. Camp Lejeune was immediately put under partial quarantine and many non-essential personnel were not allowed to enter or leave the base.

### *Trip Home*

Morris Busbia was chosen to be the lone Honor Guard who would accompany Bob's coffin home to Jacksonville. Clad in his Marine Dress Blue Uniform, Busbia oversaw Bob's coffin from the base hospital until its arrival about 4 a.m. on Tuesday Morning, August 14, at Jacksonville's Union Station train depot where a somber crowd of students and friends were gathered.

### *Death News*

# Landon High Athletic Star Mette Dies

## Spinal Meningitis Hits Youth While Serving with Marine Group

Bob Mette, an outstanding football, basketball and baseball player for Landon High School, died of spinal meningitis Sunday afternoon while serving with the Marine Reserves at Camp LeJeune, N. C.

Mette, who played center on the basketball and football teams and pitcher-first base on the Landon baseball team, collapsed while on liberty at Wilmington early Sunday morning and was rushed to the Camp LeJeune hospital.

His parents were notified during church services Sunday morning but their son was dead when they arrived at the hospital.

A six-four, well-coordinated athlete, Mette was one of the City's leading rebounders in basketball and was praised by Coach Barney Searcy for his football play in the line. He was considered a professional prospect in baseball as a pitcher.

Leaders of Landon's graduating class of 1956 said they are proposing that the class give a memorial in the form of a basketball and tennis court to the church Bob attended, Mayfair Baptist.

Bob Williams, president of the class, will accept contributions from any Landon student or organization wishing to offer one.

Mette was a member of the 2nd Amphibious Tractor Company of Jacksonville which was at Camp LeJeune for the annual two weeks training program.



**BOB METTE**

Bob Mette, a three-sport star at Landon High School, died Sunday of spinal meningitis while training with his Marine Reserve company at Camp LeJeune, N.C.

This newspaper article appeared in the Sports Section of the *Florida Times-Union* on Tuesday, August 14, 1956.

**FUNERAL**

On Wednesday, August 15, at 4 P.M., Bob's funeral was held at Mayfair Baptist Church on Atlantic Blvd., near St. Nicholas, and not far from his final resting place in Greenlawn Cemetery. The church was filled to capacity. Outside, people sat and stood on the church's steps and around the windows.

Motorcycle Officers from the old Jacksonville Police Department escorted Bob's funeral cortege to the entrance of Greenlawn Cemetery on Beach Blvd. The officers dismounted their motorcycles, snapped to attention and saluted Bob's flag-covered coffin as it passed by. Following the hearse and family limo, there was a seemingly endless stream of cars with headlights aglow.

A military funeral is an awesome spectacle. The Marine Funeral Honor Guard from Jacksonville NAS, formally clad in Dress Blue Uniforms, was waiting at the cemetery for the hearse to arrive. Once Bob's family was seated at the grave site, six Marine Pall Bearers took their place behind the hearse and slowly removed the casket. The sight and muffled cadence of the solemn Marine Honor Guard carrying Bob's casket hushed the crowd. At the gravesite, Bob's Pastor from Mayfair Baptist Church read a few verses from the *Bible*, which was followed by a prayer and silence. The Sergeant-in-Charge ordered "Firing Squad, Present Arms" to his seven-man detail; "Ready, Aim, Fire," he ordered three times: a 21-gun salute. A distant bugler played the haunting sounds of "Taps." The white-gloved Marine Honor Guard gently folded the 48-Star US Flag that had draped Bob's Coffin. The Sergeant-in-Charge presented the folded flag to Bob's Mother, gave the flag a final salute and the Marine Honor Guard marched away. Pvt. Robert Allen Mette, USMCR, had been buried with full Military Honors, the highest tribute paid to a fallen warrior.



Bob's is buried in the Mette Family Plot in Greenlawn Cemetery, next to his Mother and Father.

## MEMORIALS

It seemed everyone wanted to do something to preserve Bob's Memory. Bob's Classmates agreed that a memorial at his church would be appropriate.

### *Mayfair Baptist Church*

A basketball court at Mayfair Baptist Church was named in his memory. Mayfair is no longer a church, the building is vacant and the basketball court is now a parking lot with two single light poles and a lone basket at one end. The plaque that once memorialized Bob has disappeared. This picture was taken in 2008.



### *Landon High School*

The first plaque to memorialize Bob was given by his Class of 1956. For years, It was located inside the school near the north Thacker Ave. entrance and was attached to the wall. When Landon was remodeled, the plaque was taken down and lost. At Richard Mette's request, the Duval County School Board agreed to purchase a plaque. The new plaque is located on the ground, between two cement benches, on the front side of the school.

**New Plaque Location**



### **New Plaque**



**The two icons at the top of Bob's new plaque are a basketball and a cross.**

### **In Memoriam**

**Robert "Bob" Allen Mette**

**1938-1956**

**An active student in Landon's Class of 1956,**

**Bob participated in sports, student government and academic clubs. He was a valued member of the community, coaching Little League and being an involved member of his church.**

**Bob joined the Marine Corps Reserve after graduation and died while in training at Camp LeJune, North Carolina.**

**Bob's Plaque has two errors: Bob joined the Marine Corps Reserve before graduation and "LeJune" is correctly spelled "Lejeune."**

### ***2nd Amphibious Tractor Company***

**There are two awards given each year in Bob's memory: The Robert A. Mette Memorial Plaque and the \$1000 Mette Family Scholarship.**



### **FIRST MEMORIAL AWARD**

Marine Pfc. Bobby Taylor of 521 Ninth Ave. S., Jacksonville Beach (right), last night was awarded the first Robert A. Mette Memorial Plaque. The plaque will be awarded annually to the member of the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Company, USMCR, who shows outstanding leadership, sportsmanship and initiative while attending annual field training. It is in memory of Pvt. Robert A. Mette, who was stricken with meningitis while in summer training with the unit. His father, Robert H. Mette (center), watched Capt. John Lanahan make the presentation.

**Jacksonville City Councilman John Lanahan was Bob's Captain in the 2nd Amphibian Tractor Company. He is shown presenting the first Robert A. Mette Memorial Plaque in October 1956. Bob's Memorial Plaque is an annual award for an outstanding Marine.**

**Since 1999, the \$1000 Mette Family Scholarship has been presented annually by Richard Mette on behalf of the Mette family. It recognizes one Marine for academic achievement.**



## Richard Mette



**Richard Mette is a special guest at the annual Marine Ball where the two awards are presented.**

**Bob's only surviving brother Richard is fully involved in his brother's memory. He donated the Robert A. Mette Memorial Plaque for many years, and in 1999, he established the \$1000 Mette Family Scholarship to compliment the Robert A. Mette Memorial Plaque. These two awards are presented annually to two Marines in the Jacksonville based 4<sup>th</sup> Assault Amphibian Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division.**

**The Landon High School Class of 1956 will always remember Bob Mette.**

**Jim Webb,** Editor