

Essay Contest - Why Are Veterans Special?
By: Anna Kammeyer

By definition, a veteran is: a person who has served in a military force, esp. one who has fought in a war: *a Vietnam veteran*. By definition, that is the soul quality that makes someone a veteran. By my personal definition, being called a veteran implies much more than that.

It means a life-long unwavering dedication to ones country. Serving in a military force is only the beginning. It is obvious that they risk their lives in battle, but we need to remember that this risk is ongoing.

The tragedies seen during warfare can only be described and truly remembered by the people that were there when they happened. We can analyze and study them, trying to remember all the facts, but they will not and can not be forgotten by the people that participated in them. These tragic events are forever burned into their memories, and countless veterans suffer mental illnesses because of it.

People disrespect veterans because of their political views, and their views on the war or the wars these people participated in. This is morally un-just and incredibly wrong. People need to set their political views aside, and if nothing else think of these former soldiers as dedicated people trying to do the right thing, and stand up for everything they believe in, because simply put, that is what they are.

Veterans have honored our country with their service, and continue to honor it as long as they are living. They fought one, if not more of our country's wars, and they fight the day to day battle of coping with the after math of a war. Wars take a tremendous toll on the people that help fight them. Simply recognizing the fact that there are people out there that actually want to jump in and take this burden, often knowing they won't get the recognition they rightfully deserve, is half the battle. The other half is going out and thanking one of them, after all, they sacrificed themselves for you.

Brighton Mirtsching
October 3, 2007

Veterans

A veteran, by definition is: a person who has served in the armed forces. The armed forces, by definition is: the military forces of a country. Put those two together and the result is someone who has served in a country's military forces. Serving in the military requires a huge amount of bravery, selflessness, and risk. These people are the bones of the country; they fight for the safety and beliefs of this country.

Let's talk about soldiers first, because veterans came to be because at one point they were soldiers. Soldiers give up the life they know, to serve in the army, navy, or air force, knowing what the risks are, even if it means death. Not just a fast death, but possibly a slow horrible, drawn out death. These men and women still give up everything to serve their country. And what they do for their country is remarkable. Traveling to foreign countries, sleeping in jungles unknown, trudging through mud and water with cuts, bruises and gashes are all in the job description. These soldiers represent the people of their homeland, they represent their beliefs, and these soldiers defend the rights of their people. The fortunate few who make it home, are rightfully given the title of veteran.

These veterans have lived to tell their tale, of long days and nights in battle, with little food and water and substandard living quarters. They have lived to tell the stories of those who did not make it, the ones lost in battle. Veterans are the pride of a country, the brave ones who deserve to be recognized.

Why Are Veterans Special?
Simply America

What is the difference between the veteran and those that die during war? Could it be, ever so simply, the luck of the situation? Perhaps a stray bullet in the right direction, if there is ever a path considered "right" with a death in mind? The lives sacrificed so that others may live? All of these, while having a very negative connotation, may very well be true. But does it make a veteran any more special than those of everyday life?

Perhaps, then, it's not the battle, the war, the blood that they fight in that marks their strengths. Perhaps it's the simple strengths that we always look over. The fight against oneself, to leave loved ones', their homes, their lives in general, all so that they may sacrifice for a deeper purpose. That seems far more noble and extraordinary. To simply surmount their fears of death is one particular strength, to be sure, but to overcome their fear of life is another thing altogether. To come back with blood on your hands, and live on in everyday life is a far greater path and takes far more vigor.

With the sins of mankind fresh on the hands of many, it's only a matter of finding those that have more qualities that we find ourselves preaching about. Veterans have seen first hand the sins and conquests of the world. Are they more special than every human being in the world? Perhaps not. Is it right that we group them together and pronounce that every single veteran in there is more spectacular than the rest of the world? No one knows. But we are a nation of acts and deeds, and we have seen the sacrifices veterans have made for their efforts, for us.

Indeed, they are special, but perhaps we look too deep into the word. The acts of veterans are not particularly unique or exuberant, but perchance, that's what we are missing in this country. The simply extraordinary. The modestly noble. It isn't about the flash of glory or how many men they killed. It's fathers and sons, husbands, family... coming home after fighting for their rights. It's simple. It's beautiful. It's what America should be about.

HONORABLE MENTION
HIGH SCHOOL

A Stream of Colors: Red, White, and Blue

By: Samantha Hentschke

Veterans, rather, all soldier are important to the us as a nation. I believe I have a fairly different perspective on this whole situation than most people, though. To put it simply: I'm completely anti-war. If born in the sixties, I would have been a flower-child that declared naïve romances of 'make love not war.' But, beyond that, I am an intelligent person, and I realize that, without war, there would be no freedom of speech to even declare such a belief, and even more tragic, there would be America.

I love this country more than anyone could possibly imagine. And, I believe this love stems from the fact that it's so free. We have the right to dislike the government and speak up against what causes our unsettled feelings. We have the right to leave the country at our leisure and we're welcomed back with open arms. And, above all, we have the right to be an individual—something assured to us by the constitution.

Rights, such as these, aren't earned without hard work and dedication though; and that's what veterans give us. They are a blanket of protection that covers this country with nothing but love and sacrifice. And these sacrifices, sadly enough, comes with horrible consequences. These horrible consequences are what makes our veterans so beautiful. What they do for this country is wonderful...what they let go of and what they risk are things that I would be too scared or weak to give up. And, I admire strength in people and strength is exactly what our veterans exhibit.

Regardless of race, religion, sexuality, gender, or creed, our veterans are beautiful people. They come from all walks of life and sacrifice things I could never even dare to

sacrifice. What they do for our nation is more than any other job. They protect us. What is a country that is not protected? Nothing. With this, I humbly salute and admire the men and women who protect this country with such honest resolve and integrity.

Storytellers, Heroes, Veterans

I have been blessed with an incredibly unique and enlightening gift that few can say they have experienced. My grandfather served in the 1st Marine Division on the island of Okinawa. He has charged beaches, slept in pits of mud and rocks, weathered a typhoon, and navigated enemy-filled caverns with only a flashlight, his gun, and his fellow soldiers for company. And he survived it all to give you and me the opportunity to enjoy a freedom and independence that millions in the world can only dream of.

As a young child, however, I never appreciated what my grandfather's service really meant. Yes, he was a veteran, I knew that much. Yet I never realized that he had stories about his experience that were just waiting to be told, and it was my duty to uncover them, listen, and retell them.

I recently visited my grandfather at his apartment in Chicago. We talked about school, football, and the usual niceties that we exchange during our visits. Then our conversation drifted to the war and his experiences as a marine. We ended up talking until three in the morning. He told me what it was like to enlist as a marine, how it felt to traverse the Pacific in a giant aircraft carrier, and the sensations he felt as he stormed the Japanese beachhead at Okinawa. He told me he remembers hearing the explosion of the first atomic bomb ever dropped on foreign soil. He told me about the plethora of emotions he felt as when he finally came home.

Through this, I realized my grandfather is a hero, as are all veterans. He laid his life on the line; he left his family, his friends and his life behind; he encountered danger that most normal citizens will never face, all to protect the liberty and sovereignty of every person who calls themselves an American. This is what makes him special. This is

what makes every veteran special. These soldiers of wars past have tales of their service that will never be told if we as citizens do not take the initiative to uncover and listen to them. These veterans put each and every one of us above their own personal safety, risking their life to protect the values that our founding fathers envisioned for our nation, and this is why I can say I am proud of my grandfather. This is why I can say that all veterans are not just special, but extraordinary.

A Veteran's Story
By: Kristen Williams

The sun rays shone on her loose, chocolate curls of hair as her glowing face gazed up at the man with an expression of wonder.

"*You* were in a war?" asked the amazed girl. The man's eyes twinkled as he scooped the girl into his lap.

"Why, yes I was. About fifty years ago, actually," the man responded. The girl's expression grew concerned. It was November eleventh, Veteran's Day, and the teachers had been in a buzz about what veterans are and how many of the children in the class probably had a veteran in their family. The man noticed his granddaughter's concern and put on a grin showing his mangled teeth.

"No, no. Don't worry. I was never ever hurt, but I do have lots of war stories for you," comforted the chuckling man. He started off with his stories, talking about trapping the enemy in the hole where the soldiers relieved themselves, and about stunning the enemy with his good looks long enough to escape their attack. The girl giggled at the silliness of the stories as he went on and on.

Although I know that not all of his stories were true, I do know that his service to our country was a sacrifice.

My grandfather, just like the many others who serve in the armed forces, gave up everything in his life to protect our country, including family time and all of the personal life they once had. Their bravery and mental, as well as physical, strength explodes as they put themselves in training and in a position where their life is ultimately at stake. They are all special in that way - that they can possess such an amount of civic virtue as to forget about their own

desires to protect our country, even if that were to mean experiencing things many could never comprehend. Elmer Davis once said, "This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave." Thanks to all of our brave veterans, the United States of America has remained the land of the free. As I learn about the Constitution and the freedoms I am entitled to through that document, I have begun to appreciate those freedoms more than ever. What I appreciate even more, however, are the veterans who have given up their time protecting those freedoms, not just for me, but for everyone.

Just the way, when I was so young, I saw my grandfather as a superhero, I also see all of our veterans today as an army of superheroes, defending my liberties in this country I call home. Their passion and love for our country make me want to make a difference in our country as well. I sincerely thank all of our veterans for making an impact on America. Their patriotism makes me proud to be an American.

Why are Veterans Special?

By Sean Harper

"Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives." - John Adams.

Veterans are defined as people who have served their country in the armed forces, but they to me are much more than that. A veteran is someone who makes a sacrifice to leave home and fight for something they believe in. Veterans have faced situations of life and death and have fought no matter what the odds. To serve is one of the best ways to repay your country for what it has done for you. From the Gettysburg to Baghdad in the past and in the present they have and will protect our interests and lives at home and abroad.

"In war, there are no unwounded soldiers." - José Narosky. To face what many have faced across the world on countless battlefields must be truly terrifying; in a crowded street, in a bloody field, across a mud torn wasteland. To fight on not knowing if you will win or even if you will live to see the next sunrise is a daunting task. Courage is defined as the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, and suffering without fear. To me a veteran has courage. To love so much that you will kill and die for those that you don't even know takes an understanding and principles of steel. During the battle of the Bulge the 101st Airborne was stuck. The German army fully encircled their position. When asked to the surrender the American Commander replied "NUTTS". Bastogne was never taken.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me, Shall be my brother;" - William Shakespeare. Veterans are special because of their comradery. Only men and woman who have suffered on any front during war or peace can understand the people who stood beside them. Only people who have been in

the midst of tragedy can understand what it was like. Many people criticize war, many protest, but they don't stop to think why, they don't look beyond the surface. Veterans witness the reasons that we are at war. They see the dead, the dying and the miserable. During the battle of Guadalcanal thousands of U.S. Marines were surrounded. They were baptized by fire and died by the scores. When abandoned they fought on. Why? Because of the brave men around them, veterans, they banded together and when it seemed they could go no more they got up and fought again. Characteristics like these are what make veterans.

"I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." -Nathan Hale

The final act of devotion that many veterans have given is what sets them apart. Death on the battlefield is one of the greatest acts a person can bestow upon their country and because of this veterans are special. A person of great character, devotion, one full of love, knowing they could die is a veteran. During peace or war they have served. During peace and war they have died, and during peace and war they have lived and fought for something greater than themselves. Because of this they are special.

**We sleep safely in our beds because rough men stand ready
in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.**

— George Orwell

Why Are Veterans Special?
By Erin Foster

Veterans are very special people. Our founding fathers had a dream of a country based on freedom and equality. But this freedom comes at a price, paid for and only made possible by the willingness of our veterans to fight and to die for the many freedoms that Americans daily take for granted. Veterans are a group of diverse people who come from all walks of life to serve our country through military service, but they all share common character traits; veterans are all courageous, committed, and selfless. I know these things from personal experience.

When I think of a veteran, a vivid picture comes to mind. I think of a man or woman who has laid everything on the line to stand on a battlefield and fight for my freedom. In order to be willing to make such a large sacrifice and take on a task of this magnitude, they must possess a large amount of courage. These servicemen and women realize that exercising their patriotism in this way might even be the last thing they do.

Before the brave military men and women even leave our soil, they must live out a life of commitment and must endure intense physical training to get and stay ready for deployments. Then once they are away, the conditions are often grueling. Also, they spend large amounts of time separated from their families and loved ones. Despite all of these hardships, though, they remain committed to their cause and show us a true example of selflessness.

The most important common characteristic of all veterans is that they are not concerned about themselves as much as they are concerned about their country. Dangerous conditions, loss of comfort and convenience of home, and extensive time away from their own families do not stop them from protecting us, the American citizens. Their love for America and for what America stands for is the reason that they fight.

Why Are Veterans Special?
By Erin Foster

Thus, there is no more honorable profession or calling than being a part of the armed forces.

In conclusion, veterans are the backbone of our country. Veterans are selfless, committed, and courageous; they are true patriots. Without them, there is no America. I am grateful to all the veterans I don't personally know and especially to the ones I know well; my dad has been in the U.S. Army for the past 26 years and has served honorably in several armed conflicts. Veterans are responsible for my freedoms, and to them all I am forever grateful.