

# Why Are Veterans Special? ESSAY CONTEST



## Honoring America's Veterans CASH AWARDS

Open to all Columbia Public Middle and High School Students

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Sponsored by Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital

Contact your Principal, Writing Coordinators, English, Social Studies or Special Education Teachers for official guidelines and instructions.

- 250-500 words typed, double-spaced, on white paper, with your name and title on each page.
- Essay must be stapled to an official entry form with proper signatures.
- Deadline for submission is October 15, 2013.
- Questions may be referred to L. Stephen Gaither, VA Public Affairs Officer at (573) 814-6308 or [L.Gaither@va.gov](mailto:L.Gaither@va.gov).

# First Place - Middle School

## Veterans Are

By Meredith Asbury

*Veterans are brave.* They looked hard times in the eye. They took risk to protect others. They stood when no one thought they would.

*Veterans are loyal.* They stood by their family, friends, military brothers and sisters, and by their country. They never stopped believing in freedom.

*Veterans are strong.* They built a family and keep going no matter what life throws at them. They stood strong, ready for the battle, as they do so today.

*Veterans never give up.* They worked hard to support themselves, their families and to keep the nation going.

*Veterans are smart.* They learned how to survive in some of the toughest situations when so many others died.

*Veterans are team players.* They watched out for one another on and off the battle field. They learned how to work together so that they could have a better chance to survive.

*Veterans are heroes.* They live by us and work by us yet we do not even know who some of them are. Some are old and served in WWII, while others are young and served in the Iraq War.

*Veterans are compassionate.* They always are willing to lend a hand.

Veterans Are By: Meredith

*Veterans are Patriots.* They love this land we call America and everything it stands for. They love the freedoms we give people. They were willing to lose their lives so that you and I can have these freedoms.

Veterans are special because of the sacrifices they made and were willing to make for me and you. They are special because of the virtues they hold. Veterans are special because of the love they have for family, friends, and this nation they call home.

## Why Veterans Are Special

By: Nancy Diallo

War. It is something we all hear about, but we fail to comprehend. It's a violent practice that is won, not by weapons, but by soldiers. There have been a great many wars in the history of The United States of America, and these loyal, hard-working and aging soldiers have come to be called veterans. These veterans are memorable, worthy of our praise and contemplation. In our appreciation of their brave service, we recognize that war veterans are of a special group.

When a war starts, many are afraid. Many of our veterans were afraid as well, but they answered the call of duty, and rose up to fight for our nation. Many had to endure hunger, loss, pain and desperation, but still they fought and won the wars. They are special because of their dedication and self-sacrifice that was needed to aid America in those violent times. Though they are now older and frail, we acknowledge their service and do well to remember them. Why should we? We do so because they are our history, our real-life heroes and models for the nation. Though we may be afraid in the future, we must remember the veterans and imitate their noble actions.

We now realize why veterans are special. They dedicated themselves to defending our nation, at great risk. Furthermore, they endured many hardships that we could never understand. They set a glowing example for the youth who rise in their shadow, in their bravery and servitude. Finally, we see that they are not ordinary- they are real-life heroes that have shielded the American people from powerful threats. Now and forever, we want to remember veterans and always believe in one fact- veterans are very special indeed.

# Why Veterans Are Special

By: Dalton Nunamaker

I can't imagine a world without veterans, the freedoms lost, the patriotism missing from our hearts. When I think of veterans, the obvious depiction is of heroes in the heat of battle, fighting for our country. However, I think that being a veteran is much more than that. Being a veteran is just as much about the kind of person you are off, as well as on the battlefield. Here are the two main reasons I believe veterans are special.

First, veterans are people who have spent part of their lives, from a few months to many years, serving our country in the military. This is very important because it means that without veterans, we wouldn't have the freedoms we often so carelessly enjoy. I am so grateful for the veterans in this world who will protect and keep us from harm without a second thought. It's through these great people that we have been blessed to live our lives in safety and comfort.

Another reason that veterans are special is because they are heroes off the battlefield as well. When I think of a veteran, I think of men or women who will be the first to help an elderly lady across the street. I also think of someone who will

defend everyone, regardless of their race, age, gender, hair color, or other discriminations. I think of someone who will treat authority with respect and will leave themselves battered and bruised for the benefit of others. Veterans honor the citizens that they have so bravely protected.

To me veterans are very important people in our world and I am proud to live in a country where so many of these great people exist. I love that I can go to bed knowing that people will risk their lives for my rights and freedoms in the blink of an eye. I may not know great tyranny because I live in such a wonderful country, but I know that I'd rather be here with all these special veterans than anywhere else.

### Why Are Veterans So Important?

You may know a few. They are living among us, average citizens, quiet heroes, living quietly, continuing to make the world a better place. They fought for our country with great bravery and reverence, and are willing to do so again in the name of freedom and justice. These are our veterans of this great nation, the United States of America, who are one of its closely treasured people.

Throughout history there have been many veterans who became famous, due to their leadership and acts of bravery. Many veterans became famous after their service in the military, because of success in the careers they chose. A perfect example is Audie Murphy, who was the most decorated soldier of World War II for his act of bravery. (He received 33 medals in total), including a medal of honor, the highest recognition a soldier could ever dream of. Although he is not alive today, he has made an impact on American living.

“Over time, Veteran’s Day has come to be a day that we recognize veterans who are still alive and we try to turn to them and thank them for all that they have done and for their service and their sacrifice...” says the Missouri Veteran’s Commission director Larry Kay. “And I would like to take that a step further and recognize their families...” He continues to a Missouri.net reporter, explaining the importance of Veterans Day, and why we should keep them in our prayers. Families that support their soldiers can be included in a special organization, helping out the families including individuals that need financial, educational, and emotional support, called National Military Family association. According to their demographics from 2011, about 5,390,167 people are involved, and 58.1% are family members- *outweighing* the military personnel; showing that veterans have a huge impact on their personal lives.

One problem that should be addressed for our veterans is the fact that 529,000 - 840,000 of them during the year are surprisingly homeless. According to Veterans Incorporated, they are twice as likely to become streetwalkers due to their lack of services, because of a war-related injury and/or mental health

Why Are Veterans so Important?

issues from previous combat, weak social connections, and lack of educational skills (especially for young soldiers coming from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries in war.)

It would be proper, if we, as a country served our veterans justice, as they do to us, and help them through their post-war life. After all, if we celebrate them, what is the purpose of not helping them afterwards as well? It is our duty towards them to defend their rights as theirs to protect us and ours.

Veterans do a whole lot more than just protect our rights, they suffer through the protecting- veterans have seen their army mates on the brink of life and death, and might have gone through this themselves. They undoubtedly deserve the recognition, even in post-war conditions.

"The willingness of America's veterans to sacrifice for our country has earned them our lasting gratitude." – Jeff Miller

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# First Place - High School

My Grandfather's Lesson

Sara Ashbaugh

I had always seen Alzheimer's disease as something slightly comical, even trivial, consisting only of losing keys and forgetting what day of the week it was. However, the reality is much more frightening. "I'm Sara, remember? Your granddaughter." I said those words dozens of times, and yet each time we came to visit my grandfather, Jess Messina, seemed to have forgotten. He paced around the house forlornly, seeming lost, repeatedly asking me who I was and sometimes wandering down the street with no concept of where he was going. The memories that he had made up who he was, and it was almost unbearable to watch him slowly losing his personality to disease.

One of my greatest regrets in life is that I did not make the effort to get to know Jess Messina before he could no longer remember who I was. I have very vague, early memories of sitting on the couch, listening to him read a book, nestled into the crook of his arm and feeling enormously content. But although I knew him before he had Alzheimer's, I never took the time to learn his story. It is only now, from my parents, that I have a sense of who he was; a devoted husband, father, entrepreneur, and during World War II, a member of the United States Navy. I could have benefitted enormously from learning about the struggles he faced, but by the time I realized the value of memories, his were already gone.

However, that does not mean I have not learned a valuable lesson from him. I learned that it is the responsibility of each generation to take time to learn from the last, so that their legacy can live on long after they are gone. It is my opinion that it is especially important to learn from those men and women who have had the unique experience of serving in the United States military. Their contribution to society does not end when they return home. The struggles they have faced can inspire those around them to appreciate and improve their own lives. Veterans have priceless advice, advice that stems from the attitude, atmosphere, and courage of

military work. The importance of camaraderie and optimism, the value of "home" and human life, and how to face fear and work as a seamless team are only some of the qualities a military background can provide. These are all qualities that are not only important for military work, but are also applicable to every aspect of our lives.

My grandfather died in 2008, and since then I have come to admire him much more than I ever thought I would. I will always wish that I could have heard his memories from military service and the lessons he could have offered me based on his experiences. Veterans are special, not only for the amazing courage and selflessness they exemplified by serving in the military, but also for what they have to offer the next generations.

# Second Place - High School

Whitney Cravens  
"Real Superheroes Don't Wear Capes"

## "Real Superheroes Don't Wear Capes"

Some of the most memorable moments of my summer were from the week I spent as a delegate at Missouri Girls State. Missouri Girls State is a program sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary that teaches junior girls who are leaders in their school and community about state government and our veterans. I walked away a new citizen with an intense appreciation for our veterans.

At "MGS" I was in Stephens City in Scott County. There was an award that my counselor, Miss Jessica, mentioned at our first "city meeting", called the Best Banner award. She said she had won this award five sessions in a row. We had to win again. The first task in this adventure was to come up with a mascot and a motto for our city: a theme that could propel us to victory.

We thought hard and ultimately the most important thing for us to recognize in our mascot, we decided, was not some cool animal but something real and meaningful. It finally came to us: we would be the Stephens City superheroes, and our motto would be: Real Superheroes Don't Wear Capes. It was our way to give a special thanks to our veterans and to incorporate what were we being taught at Missouri Girls State.

It came time for the Banner Parade and Stephens City was ready. Picture this: it's ten at night and 40 girls are dressed in army green. We march in carrying a poster that states: Stephens City Superheroes: "Real Superheroes Don't Wear Capes". We halt. Silence. And then, I begin to sing, "And I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free," and Stephens City belted with me, "and I won't forget the men who died, who gave that right to me...And I'd gladly stand up next to

Whitney Cravens  
"Real Superheroes Don't Wear Capes"

you and defend her still today, 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land...God bless the U.S.A."

By the end of our performance, the crowd of 800 citizens, staff, the American Legion Auxiliary, and our counselors had eyes glistening with tears. I choked on my words as I said, "We would like to thank our veterans, because we know in Stephens City that *real superheroes* don't wear capes. God bless them and God bless America."

We were taught at Missouri Girls State that our veterans fought for our freedom and for our rights, and without them, we would know nothing we know today. But it was in this moment, once Banner Parade had finished, that it really hit me how special our veterans are. Our veterans enabled me to sing that song. I was at Missouri Girls State because of them. It didn't matter from there on out whether or not we won Banner Parade: in fact, we didn't. What mattered was its immense patriotic effect it had on me, and I will cherish the value of our veterans and will be proud to be an American for the rest of my life.

### Why Are Veterans Special

When I think about what it means to be a veteran I think about all the rewards my family has received from the United States Military. The honor my great grandfather received from serving in World War 2, the skills my father received in the Special Forces, and the protection I receive from their and other veteran's servitude. Without veterans in my life I would not be the person I am today, because most of my influence comes from the heroes around me.

I have always valued my father's integrity, reverence, and honor. My mother told me once that the army is what turned him from a boy to a man. From being airborne, to mastering land navigation, my father became a versatile adult that could accomplish anything. With the skills he learned in the army he went to college and then to be my father. Not only did my father use the values he was equipped with in the army in his own life, he instilled those values in me. Without the influence of my father's service my father would not have been the dad I know and love.

When reminiscing about his time in the Special Forces he always smiles, which is a rarity in his other stories about his past. While working around our family home I can often hear my father whistling, the Ballad of the Green Beret. I am nearly positive my lullaby was: *Silver wings across their chest is our men Americas best, one hundred men will test today, but only three win the green beret.* I have only come to this conclusion because I can sing the Ballard but I am not sure I have ever actually heard the song other than in whistle form. Somewhere this tune was ingrained into me just like the morals of the military.

To me being a veteran is about the legacy you bring and leave behind. I am who I am because of my father and he is a proud veteran. There is not greater impact than that of an veteran, they are the real heroes of our world.

## Honorable Mention - High School

Blake Hausman

In September of 2001, when I was six years old, I looked up at the television screen after I got home from school to see a big news headline about the world trade center's North and South towers going down. My mom looked at me and told me, "Blake, that's where your cousin is right now." My second cousin was in New York City the day of 9/11. He saw firsthand the devastating events that occurred that day. At the time I didn't think much of it, because I really couldn't comprehend it. Now, thinking back on it, I wonder how I would have felt if my cousin was one of the many people who died that day. How I would have felt if I was never able to see his face again. What would I have filled the hole in my heart from his loss with?

When I read the prompts question of why veterans are special, the first things I thought of were all the typical reasons like, bravery, spirit, etc. Then I realized none of those things are special by themselves, because any person can have any of the attributes listed. What truly makes veterans special is this. By risking their lives every day that they were on duty, they courageously fought not only for the freedom of their country, but more importantly for all the strangers in America they didn't know. To make sure that the average American citizen would never have to have that horrible feeling of losing a very close loved one, like I would have felt if I would have lost my cousin the day of 9/11. Veterans are special because they make sure Americans don't have to die without peace on the very soil that they were born. They're not special because of the attributes they have, but they awesome way of which they use those attributes by fighting for their fellow citizens in war.