Veteran's Day Essay

As high school students, we often look ahead to graduation, thinking about college or the careers we want to pursue. However, veterans remind us of a different path, one driven by choice, to protect our freedom and country. Their selflessness reminds us why we take a moment on every Veteran's Day to remember those who have fought or those who have passed while serving. By stepping up to defend our nation, veterans ensure a better future for generations to come.

What is Veteran's Day? First, a veteran is anyone who has served in the armed forces. Veteran's Day is a U.S. national holiday, celebrated on November 11th of every year no matter what day it falls on. It was first observed as Armistice Day in 1919 to commemorate the end of World War I. This offically ceased fighting on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. We honor this with a moment of silence, at 11:11 a.m., but in our time, at 2:11 p.m. It lasts for two minutes, and it encourages everyone in the world to pause, to honor and remember those who have fought or sacrificed their life in service for our country. In 1954, following World War II and the Korean War, the president, who at the time was Dwight D. Eisenhower, offically changed the name to Veteran's Day.

What does Veteran's Day mean to me? It is a reminder to take a minute to look around and realize that our everyday life is a gift. Everytime I see an American flag or the military flags, or see the mini American flag next to the headstones of veterans who have passed, I remember that because of those people who fought for our country, I have what I have today. I now realize that I take many things I do every day for granted. If it were not for the veterans I would not live in a free country or live the life I do now. The rights and freedoms I enjoy today are possible because veterans have sacrificed their safety and, in some cases, their lives for me and others around me.

My grandpa Wittingen joined the Marines after graduating from high school because he wanted to serve and believed they were one of the best and most prestigious branches of the military. His training lasted 13 weeks, including 9 weeks of boot camp and 4 weeks of IRS training. His training was challenging, with little downtime and a lot of discipline. After training he went on to serve as a military police officer and spent time on gate duty.

My grandpa remembers riding the bus to boot camp. He said it was a very scary experience because the bus driver went really fast on the curves. Once they arrived, he had to immediately stand on yellow footprints, while sergeants were already screaming and demanding things at him and everyone else, even calling them ladies. One at a time, they

Once boot camp started, he had little to no downtime. If he did get downtime he would spend it polishing his boots or writing letters to family members at home in his barrack. At night, my grandpa always prayed, asking God to help him get through the night and make it to the next day. During his time in the marines, my grandpa also made two friends named Mark and Jim. They supported and encouraged each other through the challenges of military life. Having friends who understood what he was going through helped him get through difficult times and reminded him that he was not alone.

One memory my grandpa shared with me was when a drill sergeant said "hey private get of my grass." The funny part was there was no grass, only dirt, but the drill sergeant still called it his grass. At first, my grandpa did not realize the drill sergeant was talking to him. As a result, he was made to do a Marine Court Chair, which is a wall sit on your tip toes with your arms held straight in front of you. He had to hold that position for what felt like forever, and he remembers shaking a lot. Another memorable experience was when President Nixon came through the gate, where my grandpa was stationed, on his way to go golfing. My grandpa saluted him, and President Nixon shook his hand and thanked him for his service.

After serving in the Marines, my grandpa returned home and adjusted to civilian life without much dificultly. He said he simply went back to normal everyday life. However, his time in the military taught him valuable lessons about teamwork, discipline, and respect. His experiences helped shape the person he became and gave him memories that he can look back on today. Hearing his stories helped me better understand the sacrifices and experiences of veterans and why it is important to honor them.

Veteran's Day is more than just a holiday on the calander. It is a day to remember the sacrifices veterans have made and to appreciate the freedoms we sometimes take for granted. As I look ahead to my own future, I am grateful for those who have served our country and helped make those opportunities possible. Veterans deserve our respect and gratitude not just on Veteran's Day, but on every day.