

Alyssa Feliciano
Senior High Division

Veterans Day 2017

Veterans Day has always been a day a celebration throughout America, big parades with flags waving high in the air, arrays of refined uniforms marching down the street in perfectly calibrated rhythm, crowds of citizens of every age holding posters, a sea of red, white and blue lining the streets. All this festivity is in tribute to the fearless defenders of our country throughout our history and there is good reason to honor these men and women. I am extremely grateful for all they have done for me and my country.

Having been raised in a military family, I am very familiar with its demands. Though my father retired when I was seven, I still experienced the challenges every military child has, like the frequent moves and separations due to deployments. My father served in the Army for 11 years as a combat medic and 10 years in the Navy as a nurse. His retirement from the military in 2008 was on the beginning of a brand new journey. In 2012 we packed up and moved to Germany because my dad got a civilian job as a nurse working at a US military hospital in Germany. Although my parents had moved many times, this was the biggest move of my life. After serving in Germany, in 2014 we moved back to Jacksonville. To this day he continues to serve our veterans working as a nurse at the Veterans Administration outpatient clinic here in Jacksonville.

I feel my family background has greatly influenced my views on Veterans Day. We, as well as my dad, take great pride in his accomplishments and have much respect for the military and our veterans. The well-known motto of the U.S. Military Academy, "Duty, Honor, Country", is the embodiment of the hard work these men and women put into the job. Americans value this phrase and all it stands for, but to get to the root of what it means, it needs to be broken down by each word.

While serving in the military, you must be willing and able to do your duties, as dangerous as they may be, for the good of your comrades, the mission and the good of your country. These duties often require a lot from military troops. For example, because it was my dad's duty to serve, he spent months away from me and my family. This was his duty and though it was hard for me to handle, I knew that I had a duty as well to support him and be understanding of the reasons why he sacrificed so much. Even when he retired and moved out of the country, I had to be supportive of his desire to serve although I was leaving my life in America behind. To my dad, as a veteran, duty means a commitment to do what you feel is right regardless of the risks and sacrifices. Through my eyes, as his child, duty means responsibility and willingness to do your part for the greater good.

My dad takes much pride in his work and he has great appreciation for veterans. Through his experiences he is aware first-hand of how challenging and demanding it can be. Honor to him is

having pride and a strong belief in what you do and why you do it. Though I really don't know what it is like to have been in the positions he has, I can tell how it has affected him and the fact that he gives so much for our country is why I honor him and all veterans. My father shares the same respect for his fellow veterans and greatly honors their work. Honor is a feeling of privilege and pride you have toward your duties.

A country is the unifying of citizens as a whole. This word truly speaks volumes for why our soldiers do what they do. The whole purpose of a military is to protect the country. To my dad and other veterans, country is many things at once. It is their purpose, their home, and their loved ones. When he was out on the field tending to the wounded, he was driven by the idea of going back to a stable home with his family safe. I lived in the United States for all my life until four years ago, and when I moved I couldn't cope very well, but what I realized was that when I was on the military base, it still seemed like my home country. I understood then that country represents more than just the land you were born in. Through my two years in Germany the base helped me find comfort when I was suffering from home sickness or culture shock. For me, my country is my stability and my source of strength and inspiration.

The understanding my dad and I have for everything veterans represent comes straight from our experiences. Me being the daughter of a veteran and his being a veteran and working with them to this day. We both find that the sacrifices we make are part of our duty and we owe it to our country. My dad and I take honor in the part we each play. To us our country is home and it is the place we feel most safe and secure. By breaking apart this phrase word by word we have a better understanding of what it means as a whole. "Duty, Honor, Country" means to serve with integrity for what you believe is worth the risks. For America's veterans, this is the force that drove their desire to work and to give their lives honorably for this country.