

Scotland Stewart  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Franklin County High School  
VFW Voice of America Essay – Why Are Veterans Important?

Honor. Integrity. Loyalty. Service.

These are simple words to most of us, but to our nation's veterans, these are their core values in life. These words sustained them as they defended us.

With many organizations and charities like the Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Stars for Stripes taking rise across the nation in the past few years, many may sit back and wonder, "Why are veterans important?" "What significance do they hold within our nation?" "Why should we expend so much effort for so few people?"

Like trophies in a case, pictures in a frame, or statues in a museum, veterans serve as a key living piece of remembrance of our nation's history. Their lasting battle wounds tell stories of war, their scars resemble our nation's fight for freedom, and their medals represent their lasting commitment to defending America. With revisionists attacking our nation's history and inalienable rights, veterans provide the personal stories of valor and sacrifice that remind the next generations of the true positive impact their service to America has had. These courageous men and women literally placed their lives on the line in an effort to eliminate foreign threats against our nation, something most others do not have the ability to comprehend or declare. Veterans do this, not for fame or fortune, but for America and her future generations. In a day where our nation's children and young adults turn to entertainers and celebrities as their potential role models, veterans serve as a moral compass of the virtues of sacrifice and giving to a greater cause. Our veterans' sacrifices represent loyalty, integrity, and honor, and their service to our nation should not be ignored.

Unfortunately in America, respect and remembrance of our veterans has declined beyond an acceptable level of where it should be. The plight of our veterans, once returning home, is disgraceful. An estimated 1 out of every 4 homeless men have served in the United States military, and over 500,000 veterans each year remain without a home. Every single day in America, 22 veterans commit suicide. Unfortunately, because of shameful truths like these, those willing to step forward and serve our nation are becoming rarer. The percentage of Americans who can claim veteran status has declined from 18% in 1980 down to 7% in 2018. With the sacrifice these brave men and women have made for our nation, those statistics are unacceptable. To have to live under these conditions and remain unrecognized and uncelebrated after doing something that requires a supreme amount of bravery and integrity should embarrass our politicians and should instill guilt on those who have done nothing to help with their cause. Although these statistics show the negativity occurring towards our nation's veterans, they highlight just how important it is to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

So why are veterans important?

These brave men and women fight the battles abroad so that we do not have to fight here at home. They provide the very liberty that allows us to enjoy the rights guaranteed in our Constitution, while placing themselves in harm's way to do so. Imagine waking up every day knowing that day may be your last, having no certainty of your survival, with the possibility of being involved in a battle that may leave you dead or permanently injured. Consider constantly wondering if you will ever see your spouse or your children again. Understand that in order to return to the safety of your own home, you must first survive an enemy assault intended to kill you. This horrifying scenario is the daily life of an active duty military member. In a day and age where we bow down to singers

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and athletes, the very least we can do is thank and respect those who placed themselves in said scenarios. We as a society should contribute to causes and charities that help our nation's veterans, as well as vote for individuals that prioritize the needs of those who selflessly sacrificed their lives for us.

Veterans of the United States military are important because they risked their lives on the battlefield so that we can safely live ours in the shadows of peace. In return, we owe them that same honor, integrity, loyalty, and service we received from them in defense of our nation.