



A Debt of Gratitude

The 11th hour... of the 11th day... of the 11th month.

I recall with vivid clarity the first time I heard that phrase spoken with distinct, dignified, clear enunciation. The desired effect was achieved as I sat up and took note of the Veterans Day program words that followed.

Decades later, I'm still enthralled with the stories shared by our country's veterans. I'm quite sure I will never completely grasp the complexity of the dedication and sacrifice required of our U.S. service-persons. But my admiration continues to escalate.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, an armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, was declared between the Allied nations and Germany in World War I.

Veterans Day, now celebrated on Nov. 11 each year, pays tribute to all American veterans—living or dead—but especially gives thanks to living veterans who served their country honorably during war or peacetime.

In an effort to acknowledge the service of veterans in the Holyoke area, the Enterprise staff started making calls to obtain brief service information from any and all who would share.

I could have spent extensive time listening to each person's stories, as the passion behind their service was evident in their recollection of details.

And yet there's a respect for those whose memories of war action are too grueling to even

discuss. My uncle falls in that category.

Veteran tales are an eye-opener about the duties and destinations in a stint in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines or National Guard.

But the stories contain so much more. They're about the family and community lives affected by wars which called many of its young men to active duty.

"We wondered how Mom and Dad got along—all that ranchwork," said Max Jinkens, when relating that he and his brothers were all in the service. He was one of 52 young men who left town on a bus, heading to start their duties with various branches of the armed services.

That's a lot of young men to take out of a small community at one time.

Monse Conde was rejoicing in the birth of his oldest daughter, Angela, in 1970. He went home that night to find his draft notice in the mail. Two weeks later, he was headed to basic training.

Jason Greenman is currently missing the hands-on development of his young daughter as he serves his country overseas.

Neal Prussman was a prisoner of war, captured in Southern Luxembourg Nov. 5, 1944. His memories of wartime emphasize sacrifice and suffering in a huge way.

Kenny Heermann's older brother died in World War II in 1945. Having only sketchy details of his brother's death, Kenny vowed to research it once he retired.

Nearly 50 years later, Kenny learned his brother was killed in a plane accident near Troy, Ore. It snowed 30 inches after the crash and took a week to find them.

Scoop'n the News

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Two survivors had parachuted out. Kenny actually coordinated a reunion of the two in Oregon in 1994. He also attempted to find families of the other plane crash victims to give them peace of mind about what happened.

Jean Brown's brother's plane went down in a bombing mission from Italy to Austria Nov. 11, 1944 when he had only three missions left before he would have fulfilled his Army Air Corps duty.

Holyoke Navymen John Zeiler Jr., James Lindsey and Richard Owens all lost their lives in Pearl Harbor.

My dad was number two on the Selective Service list in Morgan County. But only one was called that month, in 1954. The next month, volunteers and college students moved to the top of the list, and Dad was never drafted.

Peacetime service to the USA is significant, as well, and sometimes developed into more.

A family friend was serving the National Guard and was called to active duty in the Gulf War in the early 1990s, 10 years after his youngest child graduated from high school.

I recall the draft lottery in the early 1970s. While I wasn't a boy and I wasn't quite old enough, I sure knew when my birthday was and what my lottery number would have been.

I look at my son's high school classmates from the 2010 graduating class, as well as schoolmates from earlier classes, and I'm proud of their desire to serve their country. I pray for their safety.

Serving one's country covers generations in many families and is a strong source of pride.

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George Browning served in the Navy in the Korean conflict. His dad Homer was a WWI Army vet and his brothers Chas and Ralph are WWII Navy vets. Son Richard spent four years in the Navy, starting in 1979 and grandson Christopher is currently in his fourth Navy tour in the Gulf.

Serving the USA in its military forces requires a huge sacrifice to preserve the freedom that can so easily be taken for granted.

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who have served and those who continue to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

This Veterans Day, let's honor our veterans for their patriotism, love of country and willingness to serve and sacrifice.

Thank you, veterans.