

# Senator John McCain's letter to Sisters students

To the Students of Sisters High School:

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you why Veterans Day is an important holiday for every American.

All of you represent the very best of America's most precious resource — her youth. Today we honor the men and women who have fought to preserve the very best of America's most precious ideal — our freedom. For 240 years, the safeguarding of our freedom and the defense of our democracy have been bestowed to young men and women like yourselves, who were called to our nation's service with the understanding that the values we hold dear must be protected, and that each one of us can meaningfully contribute to ensure the safe passage of these precious liberties to coming generations.

Some of you might be considering enlisting in the military, and I will tell you that it is not a decision you should take lightly. Our lives and our security depend on those who wear the uniform. This responsibility is theirs for every waking minute of every day in the service.

When they forget their duty, others will suffer. They live by the code, "If you dishonor yourself, you will dishonor the service." In other walks of life, human failings may pass unnoticed. In the military walk of life, their consequences are almost always devastating. If you decide that this is the life you want to live — a life of honor, courage and commitment — then I commend you. Hold high the torch of liberty.

The triumph of freedom in the world today is a direct consequence of the blood shed by those who have gone before in battles too numerous to mention. Their sacrifices protected more than a narrow definition of our national interest. They served, in Lincoln's words, as "a beacon of liberty" to the most oppressed societies on earth.

As soldiers, we learned to dread dishonor above all other temptations. Soon after I became an involuntary guest of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, my hosts tried to persuade me to make a tape recording in which I would denounce my country's cause. When I resisted, they entreated

me to do so by promising that no one would know of my disloyalty. I responded, "But I would know. I would know." Virtually all of my comrades who shared my situation responded the same way.

You see, I have spent time in the company of heroes. And I was raised on tales of surpassing courage and selfless devotion to duty. I have seen and heard of Americans who overcame extraordinary challenges on behalf of their country in struggles almost mythic in their dimensions. I have seen aviators hurled off the decks of pitching ships, fly powerfully into grave harm, vastly beyond the bounds of normal human caution. I know well the gunners' stories of having choked back horror to face bravely the attacking kamikaze. I have heard the tales of men, fathoms down, blind to the rest of the world, prowling the treacherous battlefields of the ocean depths in combat so terrifying it passes much of human understanding. I stood on the deck of the carrier *Forrestal*, and watched

the crew of that magnificent ship answer their summons to heroism as one hundred and thirty-four of their number perished while fighting a fire that nearly consumed the ship.

As an adolescent, I heard men talk in whispered awe of a bleak, frozen terrain where Marines of the First Division had struggled yard by yard, endured the sharp bite of Siberian winds to smash through seven enemy divisions. Their determined ferocity ranked their retreat from the frozen Chosin in the first order of honored American battles.

I have met the fierce warriors called SEALs, whose desperate fights occur beyond the reach of their nation's artillery and beyond the limits of human endurance. I have watched men suffer the anguish of imprisonment, defy appalling human cruelty until further resistance is impossible, break for a moment, then recover inhuman strength to defy their enemies once more. All these things and more, I have seen.

I will go to my grave in

gratitude to my Creator for allowing me to stand witness to such courage and honor. I will be forever grateful for having their example to guide my own conduct. God blessed me with the company of heroes, and it has made all the difference in my life. On a day like today, it is fitting to honor all our sung and unsung heroes alike. Their contributions to our way of life are as innumerable as the price many of them paid to guarantee it. May God bless every American Veteran, living and deceased.

Sincerely,  
John McCain  
United States Senator

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