Alex C

Category 2: Ages 12-14

OPERATION DESERT SHIELD.

This is the story that my grandpa told me about how he served in the military to make him into a better man and to keep this beloved country safe:

I was lying in bed after a normal day of drills as a Captain in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait a few months before and we had all been nervously watching the news. Suddenly, the phone started ringing. It was twelve o'clock at night and I could not imagine who it could possibly be. I got up and answered the phone and they said, "Captain, the Reserve is live. Dress and prepare for briefing." After that day I began the greatest highlight of my career. I would be gone for weeks at a time. We would fly into Kuwait with barbed wire and fly out with coffins. I still remember how devastatingly humbling it was to see all those coffins. It was really sobering to think about how each one of those boxes contained a person who gave his life for the country he loved. I wondered how many more I would bring back before it was over. For a few more months, Operation Desert Shield (that's what they called it back then) continued. We were flying C-141s and were constantly afraid of being hit with Iraq's latest weapon, the Scud missile, so we stayed in the clouds so no one got hurt. We lived off of MRE's and one time had to spend the night in tents and boy, let me tell you, the people who sleep in those things daily are better men than me. A few months later, we had freed Kuwait and I could head home and see my family again. It had turned out that Iraq had been nothing more than a paper tiger so I set course for home. I got a medal and was congratulated for completing Operation Desert Storm but all I wanted to see were my wife and two young kids.

My dad was five years old when my grandpa had to leave him for weeks at a time to serve his country. Each time he left, he had no idea if they would see him again. My grandpa's service in the Air Force kept America safe by preventing Saddam Hussein from invading and conquering the rest of the Gulf. By defending Kuwait and securing oil access for the U.S., Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm protected America by keeping the tanks, jets and jeeps and all the other engines of the military running properly. Without them, America would be vulnerable to the rest of the world's powers.

Without the sacrifices of America's brave men and women of the Air Force, Army, Navy and Coast Guard, we might not be celebrating our 250th birthday today. So cheers to another 250!

Allie B

Category 2: Ages 12-14

Being a military child means a lot of things.

Being a military child means missing someone before you even leave.

Being a military child means making friends fast because you don't know how long you'll get to keep them.

Being a military child means being resilient before you even learn what the word meant.

But being a military child also means being proud.

My dad serves our country. He fights for our freedom. He wears a uniform that means something bigger than any one person. And even though it means packing up everything we got used to, I'm proud of him. I'm proud of the sacrifices he makes, and I'm proud of the ones we make too, even if no one sees them.

People say, "Well, you must be used to it by now." But how do you get used to leaving family behind?

Strength and responsibility is something military kids like me learn early. It's not the kind of public strength people cheer for, but the kind that's hidden. The kind that shows up when you sit by yourself at groups. The kind that tells you it's okay, even when you're saying goodbye to friends who feel like family. The kind that helps you pack up your room even though you just finished unpacking it. The kind that teaches you to be there for your siblings when times are tough.

Last year, I moved to a different country for the first time—Australia. I remember stepping off the plane with a feeling of weariness about how different everything could be. Because we were only here for a year, I told myself not to get attached. To keep friends at arm's length so it wouldn't hurt as much when we moved again.

But Australia surprised me. I loved it more than I expected. The people, the wildlife, the way the sky looked at sunset—it was all so welcoming.

I made friends who felt like they'd been in my life forever. The kind you laugh with until your stomach hurts. I met so many different people and learned so many things I never expected.

So I'm glad I came here, even though we're already moving again. I'm glad I let myself make friends like them. I'm really blessed.

And even though I've moved countless times, some friends have stayed. Maybe not physically, but they're there. No matter the moves, no matter the time zones—we still talk, check in, visit, care. That bond means more to me than I can explain. It reminds me that not everything gets left behind. Friendships survive distance. Friends and family stay, even when everything else changes.

Being a military child means living a life most people don't understand. It means carrying pride, responsibility, and bittersweet memories at the same time. It means being strong, even when you feel anything but. But most importantly, it means learning to grow without roots, to bloom wherever you land.

It's not easy, but it has made me who I am—someone who can walk into a room full of strangers and find her place. Someone who can start over again and still accept new beginnings with open arms.

And maybe that's the real gift hidden inside all the hard parts: I've learned that no matter where I go, I have support that encourages me to stay strong. Wherever you go, you will grow.

Anna J

Category 2: Ages 12-14

My Dad, My Protector.

War is dangerous. War is when you don't know if you are going to live another day because there's rapid fire and you don't know if one of the bullets is going to hit you. War is a crazy thing that my dad truly experienced. On his first deployment, him and 1,000 U.S. Marines went to Afghanistan with a mission to secure and enable Afghan national security forces and to destroy Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This deployment had many hardships. He didn't get to experience me being born, instead he watched it over Skype. My dad wasn't around his wife and daughter for multiple years, and he conducted continuous 24-hour combat operations while deployed. Additionally, the enemy blended in with the local Afghan people, so the Marines didn't know who the enemy was. There were difficult rules of engagement which prevented the U.S. Military to kill more enemy. Lastly, he experienced difficult weather conditions of 115 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer and brutal cold in the winter that included snow. He was stationed in Helmand Province and there he ate at the chow hall, MRE's, care package food, and local food. His sleeping quarters consisted of big and small tents, sleeping on the ground, and in things called Cans which had a couple of beds that was half the size of a small living room. While he was in Afghanistan, he traveled in MRAP's or (mine resistant ambush protected vehicles) and in helicopters. During the deployment, three U.S. Marines were killed that he knew and over 40 were wounded. On his deployment, my dad traveled from Camp Lejeune, to Kyrgyzstan, to Afghanistan. On his redeployment, he traveled from Afghanistan to Romania, to Ireland, and back to Camp Lejeune. On his second deployment, his mission was the same as the mission on his first deployment. His sleeping quarters, eating habits, and hardships were like the first deployment. This deployment was with 400 U.S. Marines and a Green Beret Team. One of the Green Berets that he knew committed suicide during the deployment. On this deployment he traveled around in Helos as well as MRAP's. He deployed from Camp Lejeune, to Ireland, Kuwait, and then into Afghanistan. On his redeployment, he traveled from Afghanistan to Kuwait, to Germany, and then back to Camp Lejeune. At the end of all of this, in his own words, my dad felt "Forever changed by war." He also felt anxiety, fatigue, high stress, and sorrow for the fellow Marines lost in combat. I didn't know how bad war is but now I do and I thank God every day that my dad is safe at home with me and my mom.

Bruce C

Category 1: Ages 10-11

How My Family Protected America.

As our country celebrates our 250th birthday I want to write about my family who served in the U.S. military. I am grateful for my military family. Those who served are a Great Grandfather, 3 Great Uncles, 1 Grandfather, and my Grandmother. My family served in World War II, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Cold War, the Afghanistan War and the Iraqi War.

My Great Grandfather served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He flew the B-24 Liberator in the South Pacific and saved us from being ruled by the Japanese.

I have 3 Great Uncles who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War The oldest one was a ground soldier. One was a truck driver who delivered supplies. The youngest uncle flew airplanes close to enemy lines. The Vietnam War was a civil war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The United States fought to stop the spread of communism. We did not want communism in our country.

My Grandfather flew C-141 airplanes in the Cold War. The Cold War was after World War II when the United States and Russia became enemies. In 1983 he flew in the invasion of Grenada to keep out Cuba and Russia. In 1989 my Grandfather flew in Operation Just Cause to get General Noriega, the Panama leader. The Air Force flew the leader back to the United States for trial. In 1991 my Grandfather flew in the Persian Gulf War because Iraq attacked Kuwait. The United States and allies pushed Iraq out and Kuwait is free. Kuwait is very grateful to America.

My Grandmother served in the Air Force for over thirty years She also was in the Cold War. Her job was logistics and aircraft maintenance. She worked on C-130 airplanes, C-141 airplanes, C-17 airplanes and C-5 airplanes. She also managed jet engines, tanker airplanes and bomber airplanes. She supported the Persian Gulf War. On September 11, 2001 our country was attacked and my Grandmother was at Air Mobility Command. She was part of a team to plan our nation's reaction. She was sent to the bases in Europe to check our ability to support the airplanes and protect America. She did a lot more in Oklahoma and worked in logistics at the Pentagon. After 30 years she retired at the Pentagon.

As you have read my family has done so much to protect the United States. I am proud to find out this history and share it with you.

Caleb G

Category 1: Ages 10-11

Life With Parents In The Military.

By Cal G

My essay will be on me and my siblings life with parents in the Air Force. So it all started in Texas when my Mom and Dad were instructor pilots in the T-6. They worked with Euro- Nato Joint Jet Pilot Training. During that they met European families. I also got to know them and made friends with Norwegians, and Netherlanders. They were protecting America by training good fighter pilots. A few years later with three siblings we moved to Washington.

Here they flew C-17s. C-17s served by transporting or dropping troops, missiles, missile defense systems, anything big or heavy. They are super big and strong airplanes. My Dad was an instructor pilot in them and my Mom was an aircraft commander. Over the years my Dad went on two big deployments to Germany and Antarctica, those were recently as in the last two years.

Germany was really fun, for three months we were in Ramstein for my Dad preparing crews going into war. Next, we went to New Zealand and stayed there while our dad went to Antarctica. He took supplies and scientists to the Mcmurdo base down there so we can understand the climate situation more. In total they have gone on ten deployments, eight before I was born and two after. Mom and Dad are currently in the Air Force Reserves.

Diego R

Category 2: Ages 12-14

How My Family's Military Service Has Helped Protect Our Nation.

My family's military service has helped protect our nation by serving others, keeping people safe, and helping the military stay strong. Both of my parents served in the United States military for many years. Their service has taught me the importance of helping others, working hard, and putting your country before yourself.

My mom, Captain Zohe Quintero, served for 21 years in the Army and Air Force Reserve. During her military career, she had many different jobs. She worked as a supply specialist, instructor, translator, and transportation officer. She helped make sure military members had the supplies and equipment they needed to do their jobs. She also trained soldiers and helped prepare them for missions. My mom served in many places around the world, including Japan, Korea, Bulgaria, Norway, Colombia, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic. She worked with military members from different backgrounds and helped support important missions. After the September 11 attacks, she helped train soldiers and prepare units that were protecting our country. Her work helped make sure military members were ready when they were needed.

My dad, Sergeant First Class Jorge Rosario, served in the Army for 29 years. He joined the military because he wanted to help support his family. During his career, he worked as a supply sergeant, drill sergeant, recruiter, and in other leadership positions. He trained new soldiers and taught them how to be responsible and prepared. As a recruiter, he encouraged people to serve their country. As a drill sergeant, he helped turn civilians into soldiers. He worked hard to make sure soldiers had the skills they needed to protect our nation. My dad also served on humanitarian missions where he helped people in need. Even after getting injured during his military career, he continued serving until retirement.

Military service is not always easy. My parents spent long hours working and sometimes had to be away from their families. They made sacrifices so they could serve our country. Their service helped protect the freedoms that people in the United States enjoy every day. Because of people like my parents, our military is prepared to respond when our country needs help.

As a 13-year-old boy with autism, I sometimes struggle with social situations and understanding other people's feelings. Watching my parents serve others has taught me important lessons about kindness, responsibility, and helping people. They have shown me that being strong does not always mean being the biggest or fastest person. Sometimes being strong means helping others, doing the right thing, and never giving up.

I am very proud of my parents and all they have done for our country. Their military service has helped protect our nation by training soldiers, supporting important missions, helping people around the world, and making sacrifices for others. They have inspired me to work hard, help my community, and always do my best. Their example reminds me that one person can make a difference, and that serving others is one of the greatest ways to help our nation.

Elijah M

Category 1: Ages 10-11

Steady Hands: My Dad's Powerful Military Service.

By Elijah Mitchell

An ear-shattering BOOM splits the air and slowly fades away, as an F-16 accelerates and speeds into the distance. Playing on a grassy soccer field at recess, I can see the exhaust from the dark gray outline fading into the clouds. This is an everyday event living six thousand miles away from America, at Osan Air Base, in South Korea. Many people are surprised when they hear that my dad is not a pilot or a mechanic, but a dentist. By treating dental injuries or preparing for a serious medical emergency, my dad helps military members stay healthy while staying 100% ready for war himself.

Dressed in his blue scrubs, my dad treats a high-ranking commander who is sitting in the dental chair. This commander needs maximum strength and health in order to lead a squadron of twenty F-16 pilots. From the plane mechanic to the intel worker, my dad helps military members stay healthy so they can focus on their duties. During intense base exercises, he prepares for the worst while dressed in his gas mask and MOPP gear, running towards the clinic as if an attack has just started. When he gets to the clinic, he immediately seals the clinic doors with a steel blockade, and starts helping patients as a triage lead with all sorts of pretend injuries. They act like they just came from a chemical attack, wearing fake bandages and screaming or moaning like they are going to die. This makes the orderly dental clinic look like a hectic emergency hospital. As the red lights flash and everyone quickly works, the sound of the alarms blare, “Exercise, Exercise, Exercise,” switching from English to Korean. Even with all the chaos, my dad grabs his tools and calmly practices treating a wound with steady hands. Since everyone on this base lives at the front lines, near the North Korean Demilitarized Zone, airmen at Osan have to be constantly alert and ready for danger. Whether it is fixing a tooth or practicing an exercise, my dad is always ready to support and strengthen airmen so the base can continue to run smoothly and stay safe.

By helping airmen at Osan, my dad bravely defends 51 million people in South Korea, so that one of America’s strongest allies can continue to stay safe from North Korean communists. I am so proud that my dad is one of the elite airmen ensuring that America can reach this historic milestone, its 250th birthday. Living in Korea, I realize that we Americans often take our liberties for granted. Our family has been learning about the Constitution and our rights as American citizens. As I watch my dad and learn about the Founding Fathers of America, I have realized that it takes hard work and awareness to preserve freedom. God bless the USA.

Emilia P

Category 2: Ages 12-14

I will always remember the last time my father deployed. I was so young, standing at the airport early that morning, trying not to cry. He hugged me and told me to be strong and help Mom, then he walked away. In that moment, I felt a huge void in my heart, but I also knew he was leaving to help protect our country.

While he was gone, there were many changes in our house. I picked up extra chores and focused on school because I wanted to make him proud while he was out serving and defending America. I counted down the days until we could video chat, always waiting for his call. On holidays and my birthday, we kept a place for him at the table to remind ourselves that even though he was far away, he was still part of our lives while protecting others.

Even though I missed him, I never forgot why he was gone. My dad works in the medical field. He told me a lot of stories about how Soldiers were injured and what he had to do to keep them alive. This was the first time I ever heard what an IED was and how badly they injured so many people. I understood that my dad had an important role in protecting life. He also helped treat Soldiers so they could get back with their unit and continue to fight. He told me this was called a force multiplier. Knowing that made me realize how important his role is in protecting our country and its people.

I learned valuable lessons from my father's military service. Not only did I have to step up at home while he was gone and help my mother, I also learned how to treat people better in school. I wanted to protect people like my father was doing. If I saw someone being bullied or made fun of, I would stick up for that person. My father's service to the country served as an example of how I could also serve my community. In my small way, I was trying to create a more cohesive and friendly place to live.

I am very proud of my father and his service to our country. As America turns 250 years old, I have had the chance to look back on my experience while my dad was deployed and learned that real strength comes from sacrifice, courage, and the willingness to protect others.

Emma S

Category 2: Ages 12-14

The Protector.

Having a parent in the military is like having to be a quarterback or a point guard. They require constant adaptability, mental agility and resourcefulness. The main points that I will be emphasizing are deployment and what it is like for the family, deployment and what it is like for the one deploying, and how our courageous forefathers helped pave the way for us today and what we can do to continue what they started.

Deployment is crucial to the protection of our country. Some people might think deployment only affects the one who is deployed. Almost every military child or family has been there. I know I certainly have. Living in a military community, I have had the experience of my friend's parents deploying and have been there for them. My dad recently deployed and it was heartbreaking for me, especially because he had not left since I was born. I count this as a blessing, but it was still incredibly difficult. I know my friends are here to support me, even though this is a challenging time. I like to think of it as just a hurdle in the race, and we can all help each other through it.

I know many men and women who have deployed for the sake of our country. My dad is one of those people. He volunteered to go into a war-torn, poverty-stricken, dangerous, and unpredictable country to protect our great nation. This amazes me because many men and women in the military do this. It takes courage and bravery. The sacrifice they make to go places away from their comfortable and safe lives is incredibly honorable.

My dad always said, "Nothing is truly free." It is true. We are not one of the most safe and powerful countries because of idly sitting around and wasting away. We got to the place we are now because of our courageous forefathers, and for that I am eternally grateful. We can continue their courageous and patriotic works by supporting those who have a loved one gone. We can do this by helping them, encouraging them, and being a rock in hard times. We can also support those who are overseas by sending them care packages and uplifting words of encouragement.

I am so grateful for all the wonderful soldiers, sailors, marines, pilots, and guardians. What these individuals have done for the United States of America is beyond courage and bravery. It is love for their nation, family and friends.

"This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave."

-Elmer Davis

Griffin G

Category 2: Ages 12-14

My Family: A Tradition of Service.

Throughout my entire life, I have been surrounded by examples of selflessness and sacrifice. My father has been serving in the United States Army for 19 years. He began his career as an infantry officer and today is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Corps of Engineers. He has completed two deployments to both Kuwait and Iraq, and gives his time regularly for drills and training. Both of my grandfathers have also been in the Army, with one being a Green Beret officer, and the other being both a Special Operations pilot and a Foreign Area officer in South America. The military tradition was also carried on by all of my dad's brothers who, at one point, were all either in training or deployed for the US Army. The legacy extends even further to my great-grandfathers who served in World War II in both the European and Pacific theatres.

Whether it's avoiding boa constrictors in Panama, making emergency landings in the Arctic, or chugging hot sauce to stay awake in Ranger School, I love hearing stories from my family's Army service. I believe these models of altruism inspired my father to begin his military career, and they continue to inspire me. The contributions made by my family to the US Army gives us a deeply-rooted sense of patriotism and pride for our great country. Being surrounded by so many great examples has instilled in me a desire to serve our nation however I can. As a high school student I can be active in my community, speak out for what I believe in, and when the time comes, exercise my voting rights or even consider serving in the military myself. Expressing heartfelt gratitude for everything our veterans have done is another important part of honoring the United States Armed Forces.

In celebration of America's 250th birthday, I am grateful for my family's military heritage. Their willingness to put their lives on the line is vital to everything the USA stands for and to the safety of its people.

Hannah U

Category 1: Ages 10-11

My Military Family.

As far back as anyone in my family can remember, one of my grandpas or great grandpas, or great great grandpas have always served in the military. Both of my parents served in the military. They met as teens in the Air Force, and served all over the world.

My mom deployed to Afghanistan. She was a medic and counselor. She helped Americans and Afghans. While she was there, there was a lot of combat. She had to be very brave.

My dad deployed to Afghanistan twice. He worked on fighter jets. He worked very hard in the hot sun on the flightline. He also went to college while he worked in the Air Force.

When my dad found out he had to go to school in Texas to become a Physician Assistant, my mom found out that she was pregnant with my older brother Isaac. My mom had two choices. First she could stay in the Air Force and live in Georgia. My brother would not get to see my dad very often. Second, she could get out of the Air Force and move to Texas with my dad. She made the hard decision to get out of the Air Force.

My brother was born one week after my dad got home from Afghanistan. After about a year they found out they had to move to Nebraska and were going to have another baby. That baby was me!

When I was six months old, we had to go to Arizona. We lived in Arizona for what felt like a long time. I made some very good friends. After four years the day came and we had to move again. It was very hard saying by to all my friends but I did and we moved to New Jersey.

My mom was a nurse and worked a lot during COVID. When the Afghan refugees came to base she helped them.

My dad had to deploy to Niger. I was so sad I could not stop crying because I missed him so much, but I knew he had to go for a good reason. After six months he came back and I was so happy. After the two years we were in New Jersey flew by. We had to move again, but this time to Montana.

When we got to Montana we stayed in our camper for over four months waiting for our base house. Soon we got our house and it took me a while to make friends, but finally I got some. My dad now does a lot of search and rescues as his Air Force job. Sometimes I get scared when he has to go especially at night. I am so proud of him that he saved a lot of lives and was even on TV. I am so proud of my military family and I am working hard to do my part too!

Jerry Z

Category 1: Ages 10-11

Every Day is Memorial Day.

At school, Memorial Day is always a special day to celebrate. We decorate our classroom with small American flags and sometimes eat star-shaped sugar cookies. There is red, white, and blue everywhere, and everything feels cheerful and bright. To many kids, it feels like a fun school day mixed with learning about history, but for me, celebrating the past is just as important as celebrating the present.

Before Memorial Day, it was called Decoration Day in 1868. Since then, our country has always honored heroes in remembrance of those who put others before themselves. I know this sacrifice firsthand, as I am a proud son of an active duty officer who has been serving in the military for over 21 years. Because of him, I pay close attention to the news and understand things about service that most fifth graders don't have to think about. At times there may be concern, but I know my dad is a faithful American who takes part in the betterment of our history. As a military-connected child, I feel a special bond and connection to my country, the United States of America. My father's dedication and service inspires me every day, and I hope to serve my country one day and be part of a greater cause.

Combining my curiosity of space and serving American citizens, leads to dreams about the Apollo Program. President John F. Kennedy dreamed that America would land on the moon, and this goal was achieved with Apollo 11. This historical achievement taught me that when Americans commit to something bigger than themselves, they can achieve it. It also showed me that serving your country doesn't always look the same.

There's even a Space Force branch in the military now, which means someone who loves space could serve that way too.

No matter how you serve, it means you're willing to put others before yourself. My dad does that. The heroes we remember on Memorial Day did that. And one day, I hope I will too.

Every day is a Memorial Day for me.

Justice W

Category 1: Ages 10-11

The Hero I Call Dad.

As America celebrates its 250th birthday, it is important to remember the people who have helped protect our country and its citizens. My father is one of those people. He began his military career as a Combat Military Police Soldier in the Army National Guard and now serves as a Military Police officer in the Army Reserve. Through his service at home and overseas, he has demonstrated the courage, dedication, and commitment that have helped keep America strong for 250 years.

One example of my father's service was his deployment to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a Combat Military Police Soldier, he helped train Iraqi and American soldiers. He also conducted route reconnaissance missions, checking roads for bombs and other dangers before military vehicles traveled through the area. These commitments helped keep soldiers safe and required courage and dedication.

My father also served his community in Georgia through the Army National Guard. During the winter storm known as "Snowmageddon" on January 28, 2014, roads became blocked, people were stranded in their vehicles, and many children had to spend the night at school. My father worked alongside first responders and other National Guard Soldiers to help people and support emergency operations during the crisis.

Today, my father continues his military service as an officer in the Army Reserve. His career shows a commitment to helping others, whether he is serving overseas, responding to emergencies at home, or leading other soldiers.

For 250 years, Americans have served their country and their communities. My father has continued that tradition through his service in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve. Whether helping people during emergencies in Georgia, serving in Iraq, or leading soldiers as an officer, he has shown courage and selflessness. As America celebrates its 250th birthday, my father's service reminds us that the strength of our nation comes from citizens who are willing to serve others.

Kennedy E

Category 1: Ages 10-11

250 Years, My Family's Support.

My dad is active duty Air Force and that makes me a military BRAT. Military children are brave, resilient, adaptable, and tough. I have always known deployments and far away moves. My dad has missed many birthdays, school concerts, awards, and athletic games. We never know what next year will look like and we never know what place we will call home, but what we do know is that our family will be there to support my dad every step of the way.

Military children may not be the ones that wear a uniform, but our family serves in all the things we do. We often have to adjust to calling somewhere new home, and face long months without my dad, but we continue to support and stand behind him. For eleven years, I have had the honor of being a part of these missions through my commitment as a military BRAT. My sisters, my mom, and even my dog (Barkley), are important pieces of the puzzle that make up my dad's daily support system – our support encourages him each day as he then supports and stands behind the missions of the United States military. My dad is always mission ready, keeping America's airmen fit to fight, protecting the USA.

Not many children can say that they are a piece of the American military puzzle and they are not familiar with the sacrifices that military connected families make. This unique experience has taught me that we are all part of something bigger, and in the case of supporting my dad, supporting his missions, each day I get to be an active part of protecting the United States of America.

Kenzie S

Category 1: Ages 10-11

How My Family Serves the Military and Helps Keep America Safe.

Most people know the Military helps in many ways, but don't know that there are lots of parts in the Military, and they all serve as one. In this essay we will learn about one of its parts and a family who serves it.

My father, Sergeant Stewart, is a mechanic.That means he works on big vehicles, such as cargo trucks. And he used to work on tanks. Me and my six siblings like hearing him talk about what he works on.

Mechanics are very important in the Military. For example, you're in a hurry to get the weapons to some soldiers. You jump in the truck and go.You're half way to your destination when the truck stops and turns off. Just then, a tire pops. You get another truck to get you and one to get the bad truck. You load up into the new one and watch the bad one be loaded onto a trailer. The mechanics will work on it and fix it.

We've learned that mechanics are very useful to the Military. I hope you know that the Military keeps America safe.

Kolbie S

Category 1: Ages 10-11

How My Family's Military Involvement Helps Keep America Safe.

Almost everyone in the United States knows that the military keeps us safe, but they don't think about how families like mine help our military be stronger. Even though we are not all enlisted, we can help in our own ways. This essay will show you the ways my family pitches in.

First, my father, Sgt. Stewart, is a military mechanic. Being a mechanic means that he works in a shop, which is basically a very, very large garage, and works on Humvees and wheeled vehicles.

Personally, I think his job is very important. I think this because without mechanics there would be no vehicles in working order. The men and women on the front lines would have to use broken and possibly dangerous vehicles. The vehicles would be dangerous because an experienced mechanic had not checked to see if the vehicles could actually be used safely.

Next, my parents, my six siblings, and I visit our USO (United Service Organization) for activities. Sometimes they will do events, like trunk or treats and easter egg hunts. They are fun and can bring together friends who would not see each other on a normal basis.

Although, it isn't as dramatic as taking a big sum of money and donating it all, it is inspiring to see a patriotic family as large as mine. The ladies who set up our USO events are usually so excited to see us.

Also, going to these on-base activities can expand our knowledge of the Mississippi National Guard. Usually, they will have areas that teach about the DOW (Department of War), along with coloring books.

At last we reach our conclusion. Being a safe country requires happy, patriotic citizens and strong, safe soldiers.

Liam S

Category 1: Ages 10-11

The Courage of One Man.

Part of my inspiration for this essay was a book that I borrowed from the public library near our house. The book is called, “The Story of D-Day,” by Bruce Bliven. It is one of the best books I have ever read. As soon as I started reading it, I was hooked because every word is written with such thoughtfulness and detail. The whole thing is told in exceptional depth and from a perspective entirely unknown to me beforehand.

Right now, my dad is deployed. My dad is not part of an invasion fleet that could turn the tide of a global war or anything that big, but the courage of a single soldier can make a big impact. Individuals may not think that one man is able to create much of a difference in the grand scheme of things, but they would be wrong. I am going to list a few names and stories from the D-Day book so that you can understand how significant the impact can be from one man.

Lieutenant William D. Moody is a good example. When the rest of his comrades were demoralized and exhausted from running through water and over sand (not to mention the German gunners), he found a way up the cliff and off the beach. He found a crevice and jammed his bayonet into it so he could climb up. Another man was Private Ingram E. Lambert. He needed to run out into the open and blow a hole in the barbed wire that was blocking their route. He was the only man brave enough to do the job. Unfortunately, he was shot and killed by a Nazi machine gunner. Although his efforts were short-lived his team’s action was not. I believe one of the key character traits to all of this is courage. Like these men, my dad also has incredible valor.

Bravery and courage are a special thing. Having courage is being brave and doing the right thing even when you are scared. When my dad deployed, it was one of the hardest things he has had to do to protect our country. It takes courage to go away from your family and to another country, but my dad has what it takes. He has courage.

Lilah E

Category 2: Ages 12-14

My Family's Mission.

As the United States prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday, I am able to recognize the unique circumstance of having a front row seat to see the impact of those protecting our country each day. Military families make up a small population. Within those military families are military children, making up an even smaller group. Being a military child is more than countless moves. It is more than deployments and often having to overcome diversity. It is more than daily demonstrations of resilience and constant change. It is being able to recognize the importance of how our military is actively keeping our country free. It is knowing that each person, every member of the military, comes from a family, friends, or a community that is impacted by their service.

My family is an active duty Air Force family. My childhood has been shaped by deployments, moves, and many new adventures. Although these changes can be difficult, they have helped me grow into a more independent and flexible person. I have learned the value of sacrifice, service, and supporting others through challenges. The location of our family may sometimes change. My dad's military mission may sometimes move. But what does not change and what remains constant, is our family's constant support for my dad. It is our family's job to support and keep the home front strong. It is our family's mission to keep things constant and enable my dad to do what he needs to do during his military service, protecting the United States of America.

Each and every mission has many moving parts, big and small. Our family is one piece of the puzzle, getting to actively take part in keeping airmen fit to fight, protecting the USA. My dad's impact, and our impact, are side-by-side. As my dad's mission is to protect the United States through fulfilling a role that is part of a much more complex operational puzzle and our mission is to support, adapt, and stand behind him every step of the way. No matter where life takes us, the strength of our family and our commitment to supporting our country will always remain constant.

Nathan K

Category 2: Ages 12-14

His Absence, Our Protection.

Growing up, I remember wondering why my father never seemed to be at home. It appeared that every time I looked out the window, my friends' dads were at home playing outside and enjoying time with their families. My dad's absence never made sense to my 4-year-old brain. In fact, I often became extremely frustrated with him. I can still remember receiving a card from him on my fifth birthday expressing his wishes to be home to celebrate with me, and for me to eat extra cake just for him! One of my most impactful childhood memories was when I asked if I could hug my mom's iPhone while Face Timing with dad, even though I knew it could not fill the void. I just wanted to understand why he was never home with me.

As a result of the oath my dad took when he commissioned into the United States Army, he was regularly separated from our family. This commitment required his presence in distant countries, frequently sending him across the Atlantic. As I grew older and began maturing, I recognized that my dad was gone so often because he was serving our country. When my father was deployed to third world countries, he battled alongside other brave American soldiers in the War on Terror.

This Global War on Terrorism took place against terrorists and supporters who orchestrated suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon buildings on September 11, 2001. Driven by a fierce extremist ideology, Al-Qaeda launched these attacks against the United States in opposition to America's democratic principles. My father's service as a Special Forces (Green Beret) officer protected America by holding Al Qaeda responsible for the terrorist attacks they executed on American soil. Our military's combat capabilities prevented the United States from being attacked again. My father was often deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan for many months at a time because the War on Terror occurred mainly in these countries. This conflict, which lasted twenty years, has helped prevent other terrorist groups from attacking America. A quarter millennium after its founding, the United States remains a democratic republic, and its constitutional foundation still endures today. Thanks to the brave men and women, including my father, who risked their lives battling in faraway countries, each American citizen is able to celebrate our country's 250th birthday in unity and protected peace.

Ruby G

Category 1: Ages 10-11

A Legacy of Army Service.

My family has contributed to the protection of America by their willingness to serve the country in various ways. First of all, my dad is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves but has been deployed on active duty to the Middle East twice. Sometimes it was a challenge for my mom, five siblings, and I but we are happy to support him. My mom's dad is a former Special Forces Army officer and served in lots of places throughout America and Panama. My dad's dad is a retired Army Special Operations Pilot. He also helped create peace between Latin American countries as a Foreign Area Officer. Also, all three of my dad's brothers have served in different parts of the Army. At one point, my dad, grandpa, and uncles were all serving in the Army at the same time. I love to hear the stories they tell about their experiences in the military. I have grown up surrounded by the legacy of brave people volunteering to protect our great country. This makes me feel blessed to live in a place that people are willing to protect. I am proud to have a family that has protected such an amazing country. I know I am lucky to live in a nation that has freedoms that many other countries do not have. Celebrating the 250th anniversary of America has made me realize how important it is to recognize those who have dedicated their time to serving our country.

Sealin M

Category 2: Ages 12-14

Finding a home.

Reflecting on the 250th anniversary of America, I am reminded of the challenges and benefits of being a military brat. My father has been serving in the Army and Army reserves for the past 23 years. Although I have lived in 3 places in the world, I've spent 10 years of my life living in Italy. Living in different places is challenging but it teaches you skills that you would have never learned without it. It allows you to grow and see in the eyes of different cultures. My story includes finding a home in Italy, then the struggles of having to leave your home so your family can serve the country.

My story begins in Missouri as we quickly moved away when I was 2, to a country I soon called home for 10 years. Living in Italy I experienced multiple cultures, as at home I spoke in English and lived an American lifestyle, while at school I struggled to communicate with peers and teachers from lack of knowing the same language. As each day went by I started to experience eye opening friendships and a sense of community I never thought could happen by living in such a new and different place.

After thinking I was home, my dad got an offer to spend a year at a military course back in America. Although facing the fear and terror to move to a different country again after thinking my heart was home, I knew it was a growth opportunity. Moving to where I am now, I re-learned lessons and convinced myself that change is hard but you can call anywhere in the world a home if you face the benefits, not just the struggles. Soon I adapted to a new lifestyle, although never forgetting the one I had in Italy, I faced the acceptance that you can always find good people and friends anywhere you go. Now I view each place I live as a different chapter of my life, because I always know there will be another.

While living in Italy and the U.S. my dad worked with lots of different countries' militaries such as Zambia, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire. My dad would leave on week long trips about once a month. My favorite part when he would get back was hearing his stories of the different cultural experiences he had. Even though being separated from my father for weeks at a time was difficult, I felt happy that he was serving the best he could for the country.

I think being a military brat allows you to walk in the shoes of other cultures. You learn that everywhere you go you face challenges but you experience a lifestyle no other kid could. Finding a home can be hard, but you can make a home anywhere, when you know that your father is helping in any way he can to serve our country and the world.

Teanne M

Category 2: Ages 12-14

Defending Liberty, One Filling at a Time.

Picture a missile blasting through the air and smashing onto a battlefield littered with smoldering rubble. On the front lines, thousands of heroic soldiers are risking their lives for our beloved country, America. Now picture a quiet dentist's office, where my dad is diligently performing a filling on an anxious patient. At the surface, it may seem that these two professions are worlds apart; but in truth, even a military dentist protects our nation by ensuring American troops are entirely battle-ready. This guarantees they execute their duties without distraction.

Each day, my dad walks into his dental office to fight a different kind of battle: the battle against infection and pain. If an F-16 pilot is suffering from a throbbing toothache, he can't fly safely into a combat zone to fight in the struggle for our liberties. This is where my dad plays an enormous role in protecting our rights. Throughout my life, I have realized how wonderful our freedoms in America are. This year, my dad taught our family about the Constitution. We learned about rights that our nation assures, including freedom of speech, religion, and the right to petition the government. Through reading books about historical events like the Berlin Wall and learning about current events happening in North Korea, 60 kilometers north of my house, my eyes have been opened. Seeing many people have their freedoms stripped away has led me to have a deep gratitude for our country and the precious rights we are blessed with. Freedoms are preserved through people who dedicate their hard work and time to protect them.

My dad, along with other dentists, fix military personnel's teeth and by doing so, fight the wars in their own way. To support this mission, my dad had to devote much time and effort, such as moving our family with eight kids across the world to Osan Air Base, South Korea, or going to eight years of schooling. Along with helping others respond to duty, he is also ready at any moment to be deployed and assist in any way. Although he may not be able to see the direct impact he is making, given that the combat is thousands of miles away, he still has a job to safeguard our homeland no matter what his profession is. Through this, we can see that even the little, everyday things we do make a large difference.

The freedoms that America protects are well worth fighting for, and through hard work and perseverance, my dad and many others do just this. My dad stays ready to respond to the responsibilities asked of him by staying physically fit, mentally strong, aware of the rights he protects, and spiritually grounded. The hard work of men and women all around the world is the reason that we, as Americans, have the freedoms and rights that we possess now and always.

Vera J

Category 1: Ages 10-11

It Is.

It is wartime, my dad is somewhere in New Jersey, Germany, or maybe Jordan. It is wartime, and my mom is extremely busy. It is wartime, and I miss the way it used to be. It is today, and Iran drives my mom crazy. It is right now, and I still have food, water, and everything I need. Three generations of my family fought for our country in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, maybe I will be the fourth generation of my family protecting the Constitution and serving this country.

First, they said May 12th, then they said July 1st, what date will they say next? Too many birthdays, holidays, and celebrations have been missed. And I will be devastated if my dad misses my birthday. That's how I feel every day, but people need to make sacrifices for their country, their community, and their family. My dad is one of those people.

It is not World War I or Il, where every able-bodied man was drafted to fight, such as my Great Grandpa George, it is a choice made. A choice my Grandpa Dan made when joining the Navy. A choice my Uncle Sam, Uncle David, and Auntie Anna made when joining the Army. A choice my mom and dad made when joining the Air Force. My dad is protecting this country by flying people, weapons, food, and supplies to where it is needed, and my mom is protecting information and presenting threats to our pilots. I know every single second passed is one second closer to my dad coming home, for my mom to relax, and go back to what was considered "normal."

And where am I in this mess? I am being me, staying right here, and managing myself by keeping calm and carrying on, because that is the way it is.