2026 HIGH SCHOOL VETERANS DAY ESSAY WINNER



Sophie Dunn
Grade 12
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BIO

My name is Sophie Dunn. I am a senior at American Fork High School where I serve as the treasurer for my FFA chapter. This year I will receive my state degree recognizing my membership in FFA for the last 3 years.

I love anything to do with the outdoors whether it's hunting, fishing, camping, or just being in the backyard.

My current passion is for shotgun shooting. I shoot competitively with Wasatch Wing & Clay in Cedar Fort, Utah, and I am on the youth committee for the state representing my team. I compete throughout the state and in the western region for USA/UTYESS.

My goals for the next few years are to have graduated from my phlebotomy course at Mountainland Technical College and American Fork High School. After graduation I plan to shoot collegiate for at least 1 more year. Then I plan to find a job working as a phlebotomist.

I would love to be able to one day help coach kids in shooting sports. I am so lucky to have found such a great community and learn the values it has taught me, and I hope to pass that on.

ESSAY

America 250 and Me: What my Military Connection Means to Me

When I think about America I don't immediately think about a flag or a story from a history book, I think about my brother JT. To anyone else JT is just another infantryman, but for me he will always be my big brother. Watching my brother choose to serve our country has taught me more about sacrifice, patriotism, and the true meaning of being an American than any textbook could have.

After speaking with my brother about his service I realized that the values protecting our nation are the same values that strengthen our families and our communities. Discipline, loyalty, teamwork, and selflessness are ideals that are not just military principles, they are the foundation of a nation that depends on people looking out for one another. JT has shown me that his service does not begin or end in uniform. It begins with his willingness to sacrifice for more than just himself.

Two hundred and fifty years is so much more than a number. It represents generations of people who have left their families, faced uncertainty, and chose to serve something much larger than themselves. Being in the military has not been easy for JT. Long hours, physically, and mentally demanding challenges have pushed him, yet he continues to believe in his purpose. He understands that his title of infantryman means being a part of something much greater than himself.

My brother's service has also helped me understand a side of sacrifice that you can’t always see. Behind every serviceman is a family that experiences waiting, worrying, missed birthdays, and hoping for the day that their loved one gets to come home. Patriotism is not always loud, or hung out in the open like our flag. Sometimes it is shown in the quiet strength of the people who serve and their families who support them. Their sacrifices have reminded me that the protection of our country and its future often comes at a personal cost.

As America celebrates the 250 years it has survived, I think about the many people who served before JT, the people who serve with him now, and the people who will serve long after to protect this great nation. I may never know all of their names, but I know one.

He is my brother.