2026 JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL VETERANS DAY ESSAY WINNER



Calan Ashton
Grade 8
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BIO

Born in Anchorage, Alaska, beneath the brilliant glow of the Northern Lights, Calan's life has been an adventure from the very beginning. As a military child, he has called seven duty stations home, attended four elementary schools, and had the opportunity to explore the world, visiting 11 countries and 30 states along the way. After a childhood filled with new places and fresh beginnings, his family hopes to make Utah home and give Calan, and his younger sister, the opportunity to put down lasting roots.

A natural athlete and avid outdoorsman, Calan enjoys year-round sports: football, lacrosse, wrestling, skiing, hunting, hiking, and fishing. His recent athletic accomplishments include placing 4th in the Davis School District Wrestling District Finals 2026. Beyond his athletic abilities and adventurous spirit, Calan is known for being a loyal friend who has a unique gift for making others feel welcome and included. His experiences growing up around the world have helped forge a young man who is brilliant, adaptable, strong-willed, curious, compassionate, and always ready for the next adventure.

ESSAY

America 250 and Me

While other kids count down the days until summer vacation, my family counts down the days

until our next PCS orders come to move again. I moved around the world to support my dad in what he does to protect and save this country. My dad is currently at Hill Air Force Base as the 388th MXS commander. He is an aircraft maintenance officer and a Major. Moving every two to three years has helped me learn skills like adaptation and resilience.

Being a military kid is hard and cool at the same time. I get to see all over the world, like when I lived in Korea for two years and got to visit 8 other countries while I lived there. Every time I moved somewhere, I made a friend that I will have for life. But I can never get to know them and live near them for too long. I feel like I'm to the point where every time I make a new BFF, it's time to move already. I'm lucky enough where my dad has served 20 years and he can use the retirement button now when Uncle Sam asks us to move.

It's also given me some things that I've been able to do that a lot of people don't do in their life. I've been to two countries and six states just because of just moving, not counting the vacations I've gotten to do. A really cool thing I've done that lots of people don't believe is that I was an international model when I lived in Korea. They looked on the base I was at for boys that could model, I was chosen to do it, and that made me money for a car in high school. My parents like to joke that it's a really good 2-truths-and-a-lie.

America's 250th year of being a country is more than just a birthday celebration to me. It means that our veterans, like my dad, have served and risked their lives to protect this country for 250 years. We have been through a lot through the last 250 years, and people died in wars just protecting our country. This country is still going strong 250 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed. It also means that kids that have parents that served or are still serving have been kicking for 250 years. And I'm proud to be one of those kids.

So yeah, I have lived everywhere but I don't fear change or a challenge, not anymore. Being a military kid has made me not afraid to make a friend but embrace it. As America looks forward to its next 250 years, I know that whatever changes come, my military journey has given me the resilience to help shape our country's next great chapter.