

Why is the Veteran Important?

By: Evelyn Fisher

What makes America great? It is the land where all men and women have an equal voice. It is the land of freedom. What made America free? Or perhaps a more relevant question might be who made America free? Freedom was not always guaranteed, not even in America, the land of the free. We remember the Liberty Bell, that famous symbol of American freedom and we hear Martin Luther King Jr.'s refrain of "Let freedom ring..."¹ Occasionally we take for granted this freedom, but there was a time when the Liberty Bell was silent, waiting for the day when the peals of freedom could ring out over all the land. Our freedom had to be purchased, and it was purchased with blood. Yes, our freedom was purchased by the blood and sacrifice of those who willingly gave their lives to freedom's cause. The men and women over the centuries who fought for the ideals, respect, and independence of our nation are the reason America is the land of freedom she is today. This freedom set the stage for the opportunity, invention, and ingenuity that make America great. Veterans are important. Because of our veterans, freedom rang for the first time in the history of the world, and it still rings today.

Before the founding of our nation, the colonies were crying out for freedom under British rule. Their cry was not one of fear but one of defiance. They recognized the need for a new and independent government, a government that would be like no other. The pens of the patriots formed great ideals of freedom and liberty. However, the artful words on paper alone could not make freedom a reality. It was the minutemen, the farmers, and the soldiers who united to answer that call of freedom. They risked everything so that one day our nation would be free.

These soldiers, these veterans, were the people who made freedom a reality. These men answered the call of freedom with one of courage and defiance. Without the courage of the patriots, the colonies would still be subjected to foreign rule, and freedom would only be a dream. Because the veterans fought, the bells of freedom rang out.

Through the following years, great men and women toiled, labored and strove to establish the foundation of our nation. However, our nation was young, and our freedom was not secure. There were those who would try to silence the peals of the Liberty Bell. Soon after its formation, our nation's freedom was threatened in the war of 1812. Britain and the rest of the world did not respect these newfangled notions of freedom and liberty. Indeed, the respect of the world had to be purchased as well as liberty, and as before words were not sufficient to bring these ideals into being. America won the battle for the respect of the nations, but it was our veterans on land and sea who paid the price. As long as there are men and women willing to answer the cry of freedom then America will truly be the "land of the free and the home of the brave."² It was the veterans who made this idea a reality yet again. They answered the call, and freedom rang.

America won the respect and independence from foreign countries. Those who were looking for freedom, opportunities, and a fresh start heard the sound of the Liberty Bell and flocked to America's welcoming shore. Our nation grew and flourished, but freedom had to be purchased again and again. Blood was an expensive currency, but Thomas Jefferson predicted it would be necessary when he declared that "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots..."³ In Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address, he commissioned the world to never forget the deeds of the soldiers who gave their lives on the battlefield. He was right in doing so. Yes, veterans are important, both those who lived and those who died. We have a duty to remember, to respect and to live lives worthy of their sacrifice. Because of these veterans, freedom rang and still rings today.

Why did they do it? Why did our veterans fight and die for my freedom? In J.R.R. Tolkien's novel *The Two Towers*, he declared, "Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding on to something. That there is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for."⁴ I am thankful for our veterans because they did not turn back but kept going. They held on to the hope of the good in our world which they were fighting for. Long ago, veterans purchased my freedom. They believed my future was worth fighting for. Because of them, I can hear the peals of the Liberty Bell. It rings for me. I have the opportunity to dream, to learn, and to work for my own future. Because of these veterans, freedom rang for those who came before me, freedom rings for me, and freedom will ring for many generations to come. Yes, veterans are important. They answered the call, and freedom rings.

1 Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC.

2 Key, Francis Scott, 1779-1843. "The Star Spangled Banner."

3 From Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 13 November 1787. Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0348>.

4 Tolkien, J. R. R. 2005. *The Two Towers*. London, England: HarperCollins.