

# VETERANS DAY

## What is a veteran?

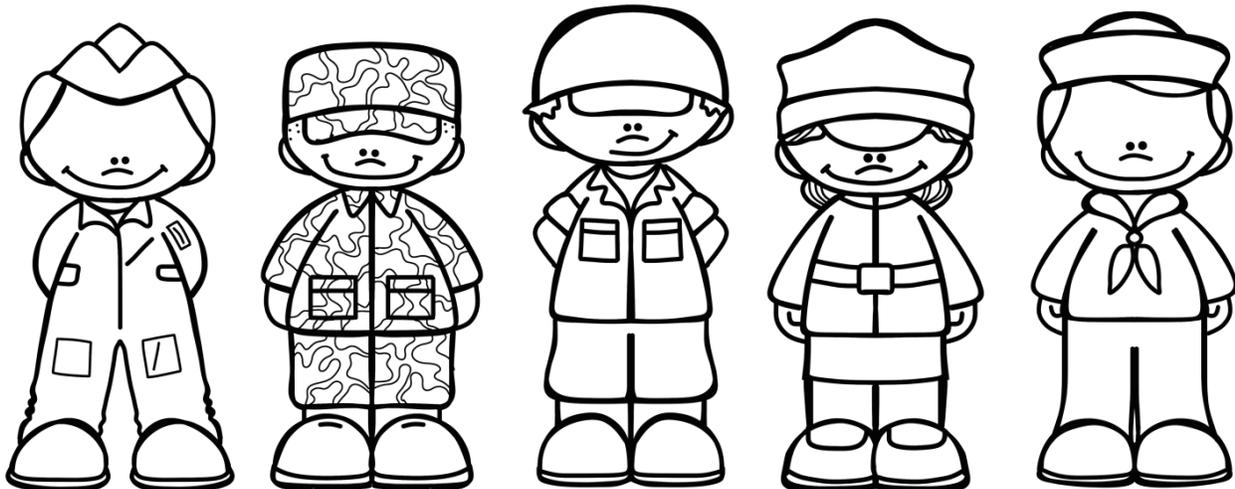
A veteran is someone who has served in the armed forces. They may have been in the Army, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, or Air Force. They bravely served our country so we could remain free. While they served our country they missed many birthdays, holidays, and other family events. Both the veterans and their families give up a lot to protect our country.

## What is Veteran's Day?

Veteran's Day is a day we honor all those who served in the military. We celebrate Veteran's Day on November 11 each year because the fighting of World War I ended on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in the eleventh hour.

## How do we honor our veterans?

On this day veterans are honored in many different ways. Some people may write letters to veterans, others may attend a community service that thanks those who have served our country. Many schools, post offices, and government buildings are closed on November 11 in honor of Veteran's Day.



# The **IDITAROD** connection to **VETERAN'S DAY**

At first thought you may think there is no connection between the Iditarod, a dog sled race in Alaska, and Veteran's Day, a day that honors those who have served in our country. However, there are a few different connections.

First, the term veteran is used in the Iditarod as well. In the Iditarod, a musher is considered a veteran once they have completed the race and made it to Nome.

Secondly, a few mushers are military veterans. For example, musher Roger Lee has served in both the British Army, and is on a one year sabbatical from the United States Air Force which allows him the opportunity to train and race in the 2017 Iditarod for the first time. After the Iditarod, he will return to active duty as a US Air Force, Biomedical Sciences Corps, Bioenvironmental Engineering Lieutenant Colonel.

Lastly, one musher, Rick Casillo, has dedicated his life to helping our war veterans. Casillo has finished the Iditarod six times, but his kennel has more than just a goal of racing the Iditarod. His kennel, Battle Dawgs, has the added goal of raising awareness of combat veterans. The mission of Battle Dawgs is to help combat veterans and empower them through therapeutic and exciting experiences in Alaska's beautiful landscape using the healing power of sled dogs.

Casillo invites veterans up to the kennel to participate in various camps and day trips. One of the camps is the "Iditarod Camp" in which veterans have the opportunity to help Rick prepare for the race, attend the start of the Iditarod, and fly out to a checkpoint along the race. Casillo's wife, Jennifer, is a combat veteran herself and she is still active as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Alaska Air National Guard.

## **Sharing Gifts and Talents**

Rick Casillo shares his talent and passion of mushing to help and honor the veterans of our country. He gives of his time and makes certain that each veteran who visits his kennel feels loved and appreciated. He helps them heal from the emotional toll of war, and allows them to experience Alaska and Iditarod in a most unique way.

Rick is an outstanding example of how each of us can use our gifts and talents to help and honor our country's veterans. Take time today to reflect on ways you can give back to the veterans in your community. Can you make them cards? Share your gift of art? Share your gift of song? Perhaps read them a story you wrote. How can you make a difference in a veteran's life?

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