By Lori Pankonin

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Veterans Day marks an important day set aside to pay respect to all veterans who gave a valuable gift of service to our country.

History shows the idea originating with the peace from World War I designated at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. Nov. 11 eventually became a federal holiday to honor all veterans.

A special day is appropriate although the appreciation we owe to our veterans and to our fellow Americans currently serving should be present year ‘round.

We were checking luggage at an airport in Alabama about six weeks ago when I saw a young man in military camouflage. Conversation with airport officials made it evident that they were attempting to give clearance to family members to continue with him to his gate. Three people, his parents and girlfriend were allowed.

We meandered on, making it through security, grabbing some breakfast and arriving at our gate. Passengers began boarding when I noticed that young man again.

It really tugged at my heart to watch his mother clutch him with tears streaming down, obviously a difficult moment for her to let go. The girlfriend awaited her chance for a hug as Dad looked on.

I’ve thought of families of military folks many times, especially the families that I know. But watching the moment of actual separation hit me and I found myself in tears.

This young man and another of his fellow soldiers ended up a couple rows in front of us. I was touched by the fact that the airline acknowledged their presence on our flight, thanking them and wishing them well.

A month later, I found myself in other airports and made a point to go up to every young man and woman dressed in the same military garb to shake their hands and thank them for their service. Each and every one responded positively, none of them showing any signs of regret for what they are doing.

I think back to Memorial Day when we attended the military memorial service at Mount Hope Cemetery at Imperial. Our grandson, Austin, gazed at the veterans in awe as they performed the military salute and as we stood in our own silence to the sound of Taps.

After the service, he insisted on stopping at his house before we went to other cemeteries to pay respect to loved ones. In he ran, returning shortly in his fighter pilot suit, holding his camouflage gun.

The rest of the day, he imitated the veterans as he stood at attention, marched, shot his gun and relived the ceremony again and again. In the eyes of a child, these folks were saints. And in my eyes, they truly are heroes.

Thank you to ALL who have dedicated your lives to protecting my American freedom! God bless you!!