

Opinion: Saying thank you to veterans

By Ted Gaines

In 1943, an 18-year-old Bob Gaines left California and months later found himself a world away, flying as a tail-gunner on a B-17 bomber on 35 sorties across Europe. The combat was consistently terrible and terrifying, with white-hot anti-aircraft fire and clouds of heavy flak clogging the sky.

He lost many comrades and had one close call where flak grazed so close under his chin that it severed the communications wire of his headset, leaving him unable to communicate with the cockpit, who assumed he was dead until they touched ground for a happy reunion.



Ted Gaines

Bob Gaines, World War II tail-gunner, is my father, and on this Veterans Day I want to thank him and all the other brave men and women who have similar stories of risking their lives to keep America safe and free.

My dad fought in Europe, but the legacy of the American soldier is stretched across time and across the globe, from the frigid winter camp at Valley Forge to the blazing deserts of Iraq, to the steaming jungles of Vietnam and the arid mountains of Afghanistan. Wherever threats to American security arise, the warriors of freedom answer the call.

But regardless of when or where they served, our veterans are united in their commitment to their country. Theirs is not a shallow, fair-weather patriotism. It is expressed by their willingness to fight and sacrifice so we can all enjoy the liberty that is promised in our Constitution but guaranteed by our military.

They all deserve our profound respect and gratitude. On Veterans Day, I encourage you to offer your thanks to any and all veterans. They have earned it. If you have a chance, take the extra time to do something – anything – to show them that you understand the depth of sacrifice they were prepared to make on your behalf.

And don't forget about the families of active duty military, who serve right along with their loved ones as they spend many lonely, nervous hours waiting for them to come home from outposts around the world. Helping these families, however you can do it, is another way of letting our veterans know that they are not forgotten.

I am hosting my 3rd annual Salute to Veterans Pancake Breakfast, free for veterans and their families on Nov. 11 from 8:30-10am at the Veterans Memorial Hall in Roseville. I hope to see hundreds of people there enjoying a little hospitality from me and my staff. It is my small way of recognizing their service.

To the men and women of the greatest military the world has ever seen, I say once again, thank you.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento and Sierra counties.