

For Student Veterans, Nov. 11 is Not Just Another Day

"...a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace..."

Thursday, November 14, 2013

•
•
•



When Cassie O'Brian was a kid, Veteran's Day just meant a day off from school. For some people, that's still what it means: no school, no work.

O'Brian sees it differently now. So does Joshua McGraw. But after two tours of duty in Iraq, he can't talk about it except to say it's not just a day anymore. He still goes to the parade but something has changed, he says.

Both O'Brian and McGraw are attending UNH on the GI Bill. Both enlisted right after high school, McGraw in the Marine Corps and O'Brian with the Army. McGraw was stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. O'Brian served four years at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas.

A junior, O'Brian is studying environmental conservation and sustainability. McGraw is in his first semester at the Thompson School, pursuing a forestry degree. Once a week, they meet with a few of the other 250 student veterans for a brown bag lunch sponsored by the UNH Office of Military and Veteran Services, looking forward, they say, to being with people who understand their history.

"It's great to meet with other veterans. I'm almost a decade older than the students in my classes—it's hard to mesh," O'Brian says. "The lunches give me a sense of place here at UNH. At first, I felt like an outcast. It's good to have a sense of belonging. You're sharing stories with people who are like family. You already have a connection."



McGraw agrees.

"It's good to have a group of people who understand your situation. It's good to have someone you can relate to," he says. "Sometimes, when you meet someone who finds out you're a veteran, they ask you strange questions—they think war is like what they see in pop culture. Being with other veterans, you won't get that."

The Thursday lunches are just one

part of what the [Office of Military and Veteran Services](#) offers former and current soldiers. Staff members focus on programming and outreach, coordinating resources on campus and in the community. There are resource fairs where veterans can find

information on educational and career opportunities as well as health and wellness programs. Academic services include tutoring and a mentoring program.

“I am grateful for opportunities like our weekly lunches that allow student veterans to interact not only with us but also with each other to help foster a sense of community on campus,” says Karen Gilbert of the Office of Military and Veteran Services. “These lunches and other programs that the Office of Military and Veteran Services offer are invaluable to student veterans and service members providing them a strong social networking foundation that helps them to be a successful student at UNH.”

She also is grateful for Lonni Sattler, veterans’ coordinator, and Karina Locke, assistant veterans’ coordinator, of the UNH Veteran Affairs Office, who are responsible for the GI certification process, easing the way so students can focus on their schooling. McGraw has benefited from their expertise.

“The support I’ve received has been amazing,” McGraw says. “I thought it would be all red tape and complications but they just took my paperwork and said, ‘Okay, you have to be to class on Tuesday.’ That was it. Everything is so great, it almost makes me feel guilty. Like, why do I deserve this?”

Some would say because he served. That’s something he is still trying to process. He does say this: “People who have not been to war have no idea what it’s about. No idea.”

O’Brian knows she’s lucky: she spent her four years at Fort Bliss, working as an animal care specialist. That may, in part, be why she now thinks of Veterans’ Day differently.

“I realize now how much our military members have sacrificed and what their families must sacrifice for the freedom of this country. I realize that without these sacrifices, we could not enjoy all the other wonderful things in life that so many take for granted,” she says. “Veteran’s Day for me now is a much more humbling, emotional day. Every word of thanks finds a way to dig deeper than before and pull on those heart strings you never thought you had. Every year I become increasingly aware of the true meaning of Veteran’s Day.”

Visit the [Office of Military and Veteran Services](#) for information on services available to veterans and members of the military.

Originally published by:

UNH Today

GLOBAL REACH



University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.

The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234

Copyright © 2021 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)

[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)