

KANSAS HONOR FLIGHT – WAMEGO HIGH SCHOOL: SERVICE AND SACRIFICE,
PROMISE AND POTENTIAL

by

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Abstract

The Honor Flight Network is a national non-profit organization based out of Springfield, Ohio, with the mission to “transport our heroes to Washington D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials.” Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School pairs high school students from the local chapter of the National Honor Society with area veterans. This experiential service-learning project provides America’s next generation the opportunity to connect with and learn from America’s “G.I. Generations.” Veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Viet Nam War are accompanied by student-guardians who serve as their assistants and guides. The avowed mission is accomplished with students first and foremost providing service for their veteran through the duration of the trip. Yet, the promise of the journey is realized when the student-guardians are able to witness the memorials through the eyes of those who exemplified courage, fortitude, patriotism, service, and sacrifice – flesh and blood representatives of civic virtue. Similarly, the veterans behold the beneficiaries of their sacrifice providing respectful service; virtuous acts voluntary, not obligatory. Different generations of constitutional stakeholders – those who actively preserved the republican experiment, others preparing to be engaged participants therein – experiencing hope for the future as well as gratitude for those who came before.

This report includes a narrative of the inaugural mission of Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School. Using said narrative as exemplar of following flights, the report chronicles the creation of bridging social capital through implicit reciprocity and the emergence of intergenerational trust-building. The spanning of generations is discussed through the sharing of enduring republican principles. Heroes are democratized as witness is bore by the soldier who lived to tell the tale.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Self-government at the molecular level presupposes the ability of individual citizens to morally govern themselves, relying on reason to mitigate passion and civic virtue to override servile vice. Self-government writ large depends upon a political community of the morally self-governed willing to place public good before private interest when necessary. Thomas Paine, in his famed circular *Common Sense*, advised that when planning for posterity “we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary” (Paine, 1975). James Madison, in *Federalist 51*, furthered that, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary” (Madison, 2001). Self-government, then, must be cultivated through the promotion of key civic virtues.

The cardinal Aristotelian virtues of self-restraint, prudence, fortitude, and a sense of justice lie at the heart of a self-governing constitutional republic. The aforementioned republican virtues require refining through education – a civic education provided by family, church, and voluntary associations. These are pillars of a civil society. In modern society, public schools also play an integral role in civic formation. Accordingly, civic education in the United States consists of four interconnected components: 1) knowledge, 2) cognitive skills, 3) participatory skills, 4) civic virtues and dispositions (Patrick, 2006).

Schools can promote frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, provide arenas for debate necessary for proper inquiry and reasoned discourse, afford avenues for voluntary community participation preparing self-reliant citizens to seek solutions to local concerns; all of which help to instill civic virtues and dispositions. Civic education may be formal and informal; academic and experiential. However schooling, often, relies on that which can be contrived and controlled. Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School holds informal, experiential, and intergenerational educational promise. The one-to-one interaction between veterans and student-

guardians provides a learning experience reciprocal in nature. Pairing an elder veteran with a young student-guardian helps dispel age-related misconceptions. Similarly, it makes the “hero” accessible, democratizing duty and decisions made for the common good making civic renewal more readily possible.

The Honor Flight Network is a national non-profit organization based out of Springfield, Ohio, with the mission to “transport our heroes to Washington D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials” (Home, 2015). The Honor Flight Network has flown 138,817 veterans to our nation’s capital since its inception in 2005. Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School has met the mission for 34 veterans – 11 WWII veterans and 23 Korean War veterans – since its inaugural flight in the spring of 2013. Veterans are accompanied by guardians who serve as their assistants and guides. Kansas Honor Flight - Wamego High School pairs high school students with veterans creating life-changing opportunities for guardians and veterans alike. This experiential service-learning project provides America’s next generation the opportunity to connect with and learn from the “Greatest Generation.” The avowed mission is accomplished with students first and foremost providing service for their veteran through the duration of the trip. Yet, the promise of the journey is realized when the student-guardians are able to witness the memorials through the eyes of those who exemplified courage, fortitude, patriotism, service, and sacrifice – flesh and blood representatives of civic virtue. Similarly, the veterans behold the beneficiaries of their sacrifice providing respectful service; virtuous acts voluntary, not obligatory. Two generations of constitutional stakeholders – one which actively preserved the republican experiment, another preparing to be engaged participants therein – experiencing hope for the future as well as gratitude for those who came before.

The report examines Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School for its promise in developing civic virtue and dispositions. Included will be a discussion of the possibilities for a bridging form of social capital to emerge through shared intergenerational experience; shared experience allowing for reflection upon a common civic identity for both the veteran and the student-guardian, along with the possibility of fostering norms of reciprocity and trust for project participants. Written and photo narrative of the inaugural flight will be utilized as a means to introduce interaction and provide insight into educational possibilities. Potential exists for production of new scholarship concerning the impact and meaningful consequences of the honor flight program for participants – those honored and those serving. Post-flight interviews have not been formally undertaken in a systematic fashion. Recording of individual veteran experiences for the U.S. Library of Congress via the Veteran’s Oral History Project on the part of student-guardians is also logical follow-up for posterity sake. For the sake of this study, the report format is utilized.

Chapter 2 - Enduring Principles

HERE IN THE PRESENCE OF WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN, ONE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FATHER AND THE OTHER THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PRESERVER OF OUR NATION, WE HONOR THOSE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICANS WHO TOOK UP THE STRUGGLE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND MADE THE SACRIFICES TO PERPETUATE THE GIFT OUR FOREFATHERS ENTRUSTED TO US: A NATION CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY AND JUSTICE.

- Engraved in the Ceremonial Entrance to the National WWII Memorial (Brinkley, 2004).

Ineffaceable, save by the erosions of time, the engraving speaks from stone to the preservation of the American experiment. And, yet, centuries come and go and are no more. Memories fade. How, then, are the gifts of justice and liberty passed down as cherished familial heirlooms to the next generation? How are these keepsakes kept dear? More importantly, perhaps, how are the sacrifices made to secure these treasures remembered and perpetuated as part of our shared history? The “nineteenth century preserver of our nation” had similar questions.

Abraham Lincoln, in his 1838 speech addressing The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions, spoke to the necessity of steadfast endurance against seizing erosion; the need to fortify the “pillars of the temple of liberty” against the “silent artillery of time” (Lincoln). Lincoln lamented the impact of the loss of the Revolutionary generation on the young republic while questioning the necessary actions of succeeding generations:

The consequence was, that of those scenes, in the form of a husband, a father, a son, or a brother, a living history was to be found in every family – a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received, in the midst of the very scenes related – a history, too, that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned. But those histories are gone. They can be read no more forever. They were a fortress of strength; but, what invading foeman could never do, the silent artillery of time has done; the levelling of its walls. They are gone... They were the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now, that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall, unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars...

How can the struggle against the ravages of time and remembrance become our striving for the remains of the day?

Public education was one way in which Lincoln saw the “proud fabric of freedom” tailored into an ongoing tapestry complete with its binding virtues and tight-knit dispositions. In making the case for a civic education, Frederick M. Hess (2011) stressed: “It is crucial that schools help students understand the sacrifices and efforts of previous generations of their countrymen so that they judge their nation with appropriate sympathy and respect for its continued struggles and traditions” (Hess, 2011). Experiential service learning through Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School provides an opportunity for the veteran’s story to remain; staving off a time where “longer and longer shadows will obscure them, until their Guadalcanal sounds distant on the ear like Shiloh and Valley Forge.” Their story is our story. Our collective experience is rewritten with each successive generation, with our republican values in need of persistent renewal. An essential way this necessary civic renewal takes place “is through the transmission of values from one generation to the next.” Who better to help instill the needed

virtue than those who displayed the necessary dispositions through their lived and living history? Who better to receive the lesson than those next to live their histories in the collective republican experiment? How best to tell the story than with a story? The narrative that follows acts as an introduction to the honor flight as well as an illustration in time.

Chapter 3 - Inaugural Flight Narrative

Spring 2013

TUESDAY, MAY 21st

0230 CST: Depart Wamego High School by bus

Our mission was acknowledged by the moon and stars – “zero-dark-thirty” as one veteran later put it. I wanted to be early, as this was our initial flight. Many of the veterans had similar designs. Nearly all veterans were present and accounted for by 0200. The student-guardians weren’t far behind. Although the students had spoken with the veterans twice on the phone – first, for introductions and second, to answer questions and finalize plans – this was the first time most would meet in person. All of us were still in the dark.

The plan was to grab a bite for breakfast, pass out hats and t-shirts to the veterans, load carry-ons, and make last minute checks before departure. We only had to give a wake-up call to one student and retrieve one forgotten item. We said our goodbyes to those who we would see again the next evening and began to load the bus. Veterans were seated toward the front over the wheel-wells, students sprawled in the back; this proved the last time that generations would separate them.

The ride to the airport in Kansas City was relatively quiet with the only stop at Topeka to pick up the two remaining veterans of our inaugural nine. Our group was to join 15 veterans from the Lyndon High School hub to round out our Kansas Honor Flight. Lyndon was to act as our mentor hub for this, our maiden voyage.

The guardians’ first true opportunity to serve was met upon arrival at Kansas City International Airport. Students off, unload, gather, organize, and assist. Prior to our trip we were able to procure a wheelchair for every veteran. The men were now asked to have a seat,

regardless of need, to expedite the security check. This request proved the groundwork for later in the tour when pride could have prevented prudence regarding the use of the chairs. We packed light, only what we could carry onboard saving us time at the luggage stations. Airport security was wonderful, speaking briefly with and thanking each veteran; some of which who were taking their first flight since being shuttled back from their respective theaters of war. While the bus ride had been uneventful, the plane ride surely would be even if it wasn't.

Once through the checkpoint we amassed near the gate as we were to have preferential boarding. Small talk abounded to avoid uncomfortable silences. The bomb-sniffing dogs did their part to ease any preflight anxiety. Handlers made exceptions to the usual hands-off approach necessary for their working companions. Several veterans gave a good scruffing behind the ears for which the dogs seemed appreciative. And, while most of the guardians were nearer adulthood than childhood, their inner-kid made a playful appearance.

Here, with a little downtime, students were given their baby blue guardian t-shirts with a quote from Will Rogers on the back suggesting: "We can't all be heroes. Some of us have to stand on the curb and clap as they go by." The students were on a service mission with no time to stand on the curb; they would be there firsthand and alongside to enjoy the applause anytime the veterans would "go by."

0620 CST: Depart Kansas City (MCI)

It was finally time to board. Down the corridor guardians wheeled former soldiers, sailors, and corpsmen. The wheelchairs were collected for when we landed and guardians helped the veterans get situated. Some guardians sat next to their charge, some sat close by. Upon takeoff passengers were made aware of the men with whom they shared their flight, although their identical blue hats with red bills and matching grey shirts had already announced

their presence. After the on-flight instructions, a crew member called for a salutary hand from our fellow passengers. We were cleared for take-off.

0945 EST: Land at BWI and get ready to load bus

Local fire engines provided a welcoming water-cannon blast, arcing our aircraft upon touchdown. The pilot called for another round of applause while we taxied, reminding all aboard that Honor Flight Kansas would be the last to disembark.

Ours was the first flight in on a Tuesday morning. With the workweek more windshield than rearview mirror, one might expect passengers to rush off to luggage claim or look to be hurriedly transported to an important meeting, or both. That given, when the students rolled their veterans up the gangway then through the corridor we were greeted by a large group of well-wishers; almost all of our fellow travelers remained to further pay their respects. The most impressive of our welcoming committee were the sailors in full uniform from the nearby U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis who lined our way. Each young man took time to shake hands with each of the veterans thanking them for their service; the feeling was mutual. During this exchange I heard a veteran grumble to his guardian, "I don't like this. I don't like all this fuss." Looking out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that he was fighting back tears. A good many people took time to thank the student guardians as well, wishing all a great trip. If the tour was to be anything like our initial reception, the trip would be better than any of us could imagine.

1015 EST: Load charter bus and head for WWII Memorial (eat lunch on the bus)

Two to a seat – veteran and guardian – we headed toward the National Mall. Everyone relished their sandwiches and, more so, D.C. as recognizable markers appeared out our windows. Excitement mounted.

1115 EST: Arrive at WWII Memorial

Instructions were clear – student-guardians were to be with their veterans at all times.

The grounds of the memorial could be viewed in any fashion chosen at any pace necessary. The only requirement was that we all needed to reassemble along the wall toward the Atlantic side for our flag ceremony and group picture at 1200. As 25 veterans guarded closely by 25 students made their way around the memorial it became easy to lose track of our group, as we were not alone – Badger Honor Flight out of Madison, Wisconsin and the Eastern Iowa Honor Flight out of Cedar Rapids were also in attendance.

People of all stations and stripes took time to thank the veterans. Many asked to have their picture taken alongside. One father introduced his son to “a real-life hero.” The scene was sincere, touching all involved. Expansive and pillared, spanning from Atlantic to Pacific, the immensity of the memorial and the moment hit some harder than others. 4048 gold stars – one for every thousand soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice – did not go unnoticed. The survivors were not solitary representatives, they stood as old men for those who never got the opportunity to grow old.

The time had come for our flag placing and group photo. Everyone was accounted for save one veteran and his guardian. They were from our group and as a sponsor it was my job to find them. I was not too worried as they were missing together. I figured they had merely lost track of time. Little did I know that it was the tracks of time that had initiated their absence. Around the memorial and again – they were nowhere to be found. Thanks to modern conveniences, I was able to text for their whereabouts. They were on their way back from the Lincoln Memorial.

The Lincoln Memorial?!? I raced their direction. Did they not know that was the next stop on our tour? Did they not know the time? remember the picture? I caught up to them in time to witness the veteran pushing his guardian at a comfortable pace but one insufficient for the circumstances. I talked them into trading places and we began to double-time. We made it to the rest of the group so that the ceremony could begin.

One veteran from the Lyndon group was selected to advance a tri-fold flag that had once draped the coffin of one of their brethren. Now encased, it was to be placed on a chair procured for the occasion. Standing, every veteran saluted as it passed. The display was moving. Not only were they paying respect to the fallen but also to those more recently deceased, who, they would, more sooner than later, join. I often tell my students that “as you read history, you make history,” imploring them to pay attention – to connect biography with history. On this day, there was no need for reminders. On this day, we experienced history.

After the flag was placed, the veterans sat for a group picture. As this was going on I asked the young lady why they had chosen to go the Lincoln Memorial, given the itinerary and timetable. She said that her veteran was visibly upset with the memories invoked by the WWII Memorial. He mentioned that Lincoln had always been his favorite president. Appropriately, she had made an executive decision.

1230 EST: Depart WWII Memorial

All monuments on the Mall are within walking distance but distance is relative, literally and figuratively. Back to the bus, fast-forwarding to Korea then Vietnam all under Lincoln’s watchful eye.

1300 EST: Korean Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and Vietnam Memorial

Candid photos of guardians with veterans, veterans with guardians. Snap. Looking back toward the Washington Monument encased in scaffolding. Click. At the base of the Lincoln Memorial. Click. Reading the names of the fallen, engraved in black marble. Click. A veteran pushing a student guardian in a wheelchair. Snap. Roaming the grounds. Snap. Unexpectedly finding the Vietnam Nurses Memorial. Click. Witnessing the haunting white silhouettes still in the Korean theater. Snap. Walking. Snap. Talking. Click. Smiling. Snap. Thinking. Click. Here and there. Snap. Moments in time.

1415 EST: Driving tour of D.C. & other memorials

Back on the bus, we took a driving tour of other significant sites. Passing by the Pentagon, we observed the different-colored stone used to repair the physical crash caused by the 9/11 terrorist attack. We saw the spires of the Air Force Memorial before we reached it. As we had several men who had served in the Army Air Corps, the predecessor of the USAF, we stopped and those who wished got off and briefly investigated. The Marine Corps Memorial, often called the Iwo Jima Memorial, was our last point of interest. As we drove around the memorial, we witnessed the statues of six marines once more and forever raise our flag.

1630 EST: Supper at Old Country Buffet

Who doesn't love a buffet? Our group of hardy Midwesterners was ready for chow. The guardians helped their veterans to their seats, took drink orders, retrieved silverware and, in some instances, surveyed the food possibilities, provided a makeshift menu, and went back to load the plates. With our timetable eased, we were able to relax, converse, and enjoy our meals. The most moving part of the day was yet to come.

As we finished up, my co-sponsor and her counterpart from Lyndon rose to begin the mail call. The veterans had no idea about this portion of our journey. Loved ones had been

contacted with the request for handwritten letters. Schoolchildren had worked on cards – coloring within the lines, cutting, pasting, and writing in cursive letters – to the heroes their teachers had introduced them to in their lessons. All cards and letters were bundled together and now the men’s names were called as if they were in the field.

It was extraordinary to witness the veterans open and read their letters. Their loved ones had traveled with them in spirit, but now they were here talking in written word. There was not a dry eye in sight. Several asked how we were able to pull this off without their knowledge. The cards from the youngsters brought beaming smiles. The sentiments relayed culminated the day, stretching appreciation across the country.

1830 EST: Hotel check-in

Bunking assignments were issued and keys were distributed. Veteran and guardian alike were eager to acclimate and relax after a long, emotionally taxing day. Maneuvering wheelchairs and baggage into and out of the elevators provided laughs and levity. Once everyone was situated, team doctors made “house-calls” to check on medicinal needs, mobility concerns, and possible fatigue. Our phenomenal medical staff of two came back to the lobby with an overall thumbs-up. Most veterans retired to their rooms for the remainder of the evening. Their younger counterparts still had some energy left.

The lobby became the meeting place; young people lounging, talking and texting about their days. Others visited the gift-shop. One of our most diminutive guardians was holding up a t-shirt that she could easily swim in. “That’s way too big,” I stated the obvious. She replied, patiently, “It’s not for me. It’s for my veteran.” Smiling, I was struck; struck by her syntax and her sentiment – “my veteran.” An affection afforded with respect, a development not singular, had been established in less than 24 hours.

“Mr. Hornung, look what my veteran gave me,” another ventured. Carefully unfolding what appeared to be delicate crepe, an eighteen-year-old student guardian unveiled a black-and-white photo of a twenty-year-old soldier in uniform – her veteran – looking at us across time. It was apparent to me that the juxtaposition was not lost on her. The protective nature with which she handled the photograph mirrored the way both the guardians and veterans cared for each other.

Proper care-giving requires proper rest. Early to rise proved early to bed.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22nd

0700 EST: Breakfast at the hotel

Breakfast was scheduled for seven a.m. Given the eventfulness of the previous day, one might expect a need for mustering. No reveille was necessary. The old soldiers mustered strength and took their coffee black. The young guardians met their veterans and fueled up for the day.

0800 EST: Board bus to Arlington National Cemetery

Waiting curbside for our bus, a renewed energy buzzed through the group. Most of us had completed 30 hours in current company. Others had a longer history. An indelible image was that of guardian grandson with his veteran grandfather sitting in side-by-side wheelchairs shooting the bull; one of them was popping wheelies, both were laughing. With no parental supervision – for either – the stories shared could be candid. Just then, the charter arrived. Veterans first. Wheelchairs in carriage. Student-guardians next. All parties accounted for? Check. We were off.

My co-sponsor and I held a great vantage near the back of the bus from which to view interaction. Pairs were engaged in conversation – eye contact, pointing out the window, nods,

chuckles. No longer the “stranger on the train” phenomenon, there were also moments of comfortable silence; trust.

There had been no grand plan or well-designed schematic to match student with veteran save the young man who had the privilege of escorting his grandfather. Yet, watching this morning, it seemed preordained. The veteran who retired after 30+ years teaching high school science was paired with a state scholar looking toward a science-related major and subsequent longevity. The most soft-spoken veteran was combined with a student of like disposition; bonding over their mutual reserve. The least reserved and more ornery of our nine was matched with a young lady who gave as good as she got – a fine match indeed. A real talker was balanced with a contemplative listener. One of the most fun-loving of our guardians had relayed to me that her cheeks hurt from laughing as her veteran was so funny. And, so on. It wasn’t until later that one young guardian confided, “My veteran said that girls with my initials are good because his wife had the same initials and he knew that we were meant to be partners.” Coincidence seemed no match for providence.

0900 EST: Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns

Arlington National Cemetery is an active burial ground with approximately twenty-five funerals a day. One’s entire person is halted with the sight of a flag-draped coffin being pulled by a horse-drawn caisson. Taps echo through the white marble headstones hauntingly chasing the obligatory 21-gun salute. The nation’s collective history is interred here.

It doesn’t take a graveyard to remind one of his mortality. The weight increases arithmetically with the years. More soldiers from the Vietnam War are laid to rest on a daily basis than those of the Second World War, such are the ever-dwindling numbers of our Greatest Generation. These eventualities walked beside us over the contours and through the crowds.

When our troop arrived at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, we were ushered to a spot reserved us across from the regular viewing area. Twenty-one. Click..... Twenty-one. Clack..... Like clock-work. Twenty-one steps, a twenty-one second pause, twenty one steps. Choreography and precision. Reverence is required; irreverence impermissible. Singularly, it was if people were trying to measure their photographic click with the timing of the heel-clack. Taking this all in, I couldn't help but notice many a camera aimed in our direction. It was here, at the laying of the wreath, where the veterans stood tallest and saluted most acutely, their age receding, facing memories without an inch of retreat.

1030 EST: Depart for BWI

The mood was somber after leaving Arlington. Its magnitude commanded solemnity. Reflection over our last stop was coupled with the knowledge that it was our last stop. Finality was in the air; home increasingly on our minds. And, yet, one of the more curious exchanges took place amidst the introspection.

Audie Murphy was the most decorated American soldier of WWII. Student guardians took turns being photographed with their heroes in front of his grave. Smart phones and iPads captured the moment. Our oldest veteran and his guardian found 76 years between them with a digital divide as expansive. While seated behind them, I noticed that they were viewing photos taken on the young lady's iPhone. The elder statesman said that he couldn't recall all of the exploits of Major Murphy. No need to remember all of the details – she quickly accessed his biography via on-line encyclopedia. In this moment, they were both learning something new from one another.

1130 EST: Arrive at BWI – eat lunch at the airport

Careful protocol was required when the veterans exited the bus. An adult sponsor was stationed at the top of the steps – the “pusher;” another at the bottom – the “catcher.” The pusher was to do just that if a veteran lost his balance. Rather than twisting and falling with difficulty, better to be pushed and caught. At ground-level, if all went well, the catcher simply provided a steady hand for touchdown. My role was catcher. One of our most jocular and larger veterans always threatened to jump from the top stair; I, to step aside. Such was the good-natured comradery of our band.

Off, seated, and wheeled into the lobby, the veterans waited as their guardians retrieved return tickets. Once more the airport security honored the aging heroes by handling them with care. Through security, we made our way to the food court where our lunches were waiting. Here the discussion turned more personal – family, hometowns, number of siblings, childhood, careers; history witnessed, history lived.

If ever an occasion called for dessert – a cherry on the sundae – it was here. As luck would have it, BWI had an “old-fashioned soda shop” where a person could enjoy a malted. Ever-chivalrous, a veteran bought his guardian a frozen treat. They walked and talked, enjoying dessert and each other’s company.

After lunch, we all headed to our respective gate. Veterans visited and watched as their guardians sat on the floor dealing hands of cards. Energy ebbed. An airline employee called our flight number for boarding.

1435 EST: Depart BWI for Kansas City

Our flight was delayed...

Normally impatience accompanies inconvenience. In this instance, as we sat on the tarmac, I sensed no restlessness. In retrospect, it was if the pairings were blessed with more

time. During this bonus allotment I witnessed something extraordinary. A young lady was pressed very close to her veteran in what appeared to be an attempt to better hear him. However near, I noticed that she was facing away; tears streaming down her face. I later found that he was sharing unvarnished details of his experiences in the war and how these experiences had affected the entirety of his life to follow... our delay provided an opportunity a long time coming.

1615 CST: Arrive in Kansas City. Return trip home

Honor Flight Kansas was celebrated much the same on the return leg as it had been on its Eastern tour. Freedom Riders took the place of the USNA; the applause was as vigorous. The only hitch was that one of our wheelchairs had been mishandled and a claim needed to be made with customer service. In the meantime, goodbyes were made between the Lyndon group and our Wamego contingency. Everyone loaded onto their respective bus. After filing the proper forms, I joined our bunch and we headed west.

“This bus rides like an old buckboard.” Never having had the pleasure, I took the veteran’s word for it. We arrived at one of the Interstate 70 McDonald’s. Having called ahead, my co-sponsor and I went to retrieve what amounted to our third meal on a bus and our last one together. One of the students got off with us to lend another pair of hands. While in line, the young lady asked me if I knew what her veteran did in the war. I said that the only information I knew was what had been recorded on his application. She said that he had told her everything. I was quick to tell her that his story should remain between them; if he wanted me to know he’d share. To which she said that the only people he had told were family and he had confided, “Now that we’re family, I can tell you.” Family ties established through shared experience. We got back on our yellow buckboard and journeyed on.

Topeka, Kansas, the state capitol and final destination for two of our WWII veterans, was the site of our first reunion. Friends and relatives had amassed at our designated rendezvous waiting eagerly to gauge expressions that would endorse our mission. Hugs and kisses abounded followed quickly by introductions. Once the student guardians had retrieved their veteran's affairs, they were made known to grateful family members. In this moment the magnitude of their responsibility seemed to fully resonate with the guardians, reflected as it was in the faces of their veteran's loved ones. Hugs and goodbyes then became the order; after which, two of the four climbed back on the bus. I couldn't help but think about how much time had been bridged in such short duration; memories revisited and memories made to be revisited. Pulling out of the parking lot I watched the veterans already reminiscing about their experience and felt the anticipation of the remaining riders awaiting similar homecoming. Onward to Exit 328, then northward home.

1830 CST: Arrive back in Wamego. Trip over – MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Driving over the Highway 99 bridge, spanning the Kansas River, we were greeted with our national banner waving proudly at well-placed intervals. From behind I heard one veteran say, "We're getting a better welcome than when we came home the first time." Knowing what awaited I couldn't help but smile. Thinking of what Lincoln Street must have looked like some seventy years ago, we were met with the main street of today; our star-spangled gauntlet coming into view. Some forty standard-bearers from schoolchildren to older adults, all in patriotic pose, ribboned the avenue with Old Glory. Bus windows down, taking advantage of the late-May evening, we could hear the community band playing strains from the Armed Forces Medley; loved ones and fellow citizens hailing our return.

As rehearsed over the previous day-and-a-half, the student guardians would exit the bus first to assist with bottom and balancing steps. Applause met the students in anticipation for the returning heroes. Cheers swelled through the crowd as one-by-one the veterans descended. Tears and smiles met fathers, husbands, brothers, and grandpas – all “great.” Guardians ushered their veterans safely into the arms of their families and friends as was their charge.

Clean-cut, close-shaved, light and tucked-in, the WWII and Korean War-era Veterans were saluted by their long-haired, bearded, ear-ringed, tattooed, black-leathered brethren from the Vietnam generation. Both groups of men, having answered the call of duty, embraced in a knowledge that most, thankfully, don’t share; theirs a mutual respect founded on common service with like-sacrifice on-going – classical republicanism on temporal display.

Service, the thematic backbone of our trip, proved the gift to the “Greatest Generation” by America’s next generation. So much of life is symbolic, learned by example, yet experientially cemented. By viewing the memorials through the eyes for whom which they were constructed, the student guardians were able to witness honorable sacrifice while rendering humble service in return. Heroes of a bygone era were welcomed home and the youth were received back into their community. Each, perhaps, in fresh, more appreciative light.

Chapter 4 - Experiential Service Learning

“It’s definitely something I’ll remember forever. It’ll stick with me, and I really think it meant a lot to our veterans, too. The sacrifices they made changed the way we were able to live. This really is a great generation and we really do have a lot to learn from them. Being able to see the memorials with the people they were made for changed the meaning of everything.”

- Madison Bowser, Student-Guardian, Spring 2014 Honor Flight (Bauman, 2014).

Service learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Office of Civic Engagement & Service Learning, 2015). Simply put, students serve and learn (Klopp & Liptrot, 2002). Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School is a service project where the learning opportunities come primarily through intergenerational connectivity. It may be that a student has never flown on an airplane, left their home state, or visited our nation’s capital, but the guardian will be experiencing these firsts with their veteran; honoring them by assisting them. Some of these firsts may even be shared between veteran and guardian. Here, serving and learning have particular intergenerational context.

Intergenerational approaches “typically call for the using the strengths of one generation to meet the needs of another” (Kaplan, 2002). While most veterans on our trips are ambulatory, some require wheelchairs, and most accept assistance when offered - when moving through airport screening for instance. The mission, then, calls for the literal use of strength on the part of the student-guardians to meet the needs of our veterans. Interaction is goal-oriented and purposeful. The purpose is to see that the veterans witness their memorials, allow them the opportunity to be recognized and thanked, and return home safely to the arms of their loved ones

and their welcoming community. There is a distinct civic responsibility in guarding well our aged veterans, with meaningful consequences for all involved. The trip is experienced individually and collectively.

Academic journaling is a well-known and time-honored tool for students to get their thoughts on paper. Written reflection is an avenue for deeds to be made visible in word and meaningful consequences measured. The formal reflection component is viewed as an essential component of many service-learning models, with the nature of reflection more important than that which is regularly quantifiable (Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah). As a follow-up to the trip, this particular exercise may be a contrivance, an artifice imposed as an exit ticket begging the question – for whose benefit? That is not to say that the student would not benefit from reflecting on their experience to be revisited at a later date, but in this instance it should be through individual, private volition.

While there can be no doubt the power of the written word, it is also a means for the learning to be quantified. If not written, then the trip cannot be studied and thus learning is not measureable. If not translated into written word, what was learned? Symbolism and emotion do not always translate; some things may be lost in translation. Language acquisition develops over time and citizenship matures with practice. In other words, from a civic education standpoint, lessons may not emerge until later or there be no context clues presently to help illuminate the significance of the event upon existing read.

Far too often what is relegated to education is reductionist – multiple-choice items on a time-bound test. In this instance what is quantifiable may be reduced to words on paper. Education should not be solely reductionist; rather revelational. That which is revealed may be cicada-like, taking years to emerge but, when given the proper conditions, producing a deafening

reverberation. Rhythmically it may be years before the lesson is revisited. Educators must be willing to afford a period of dormancy. There is a certain sense of educational Pygmalionism on the part of the teacher as well as an almost voyeuristic need to witness connections between past and present, old and young, veteran and guardian. The desire to read the journal may, in fact, detract from the journey. What is shared should be voluntary and, if shared in confidence, safeguarded. As such, the formal reflection component takes place prior to the flight.

As a component of the student-guardian selection process, applicants are asked to respond to an essay prompt requiring them to contemplate a greater civic context. In this instance, the reflective piece is introductory. The prompt ties to an historical event and its significance for an individual citizen and the collective citizenry (note Appendices I - III). Not only are the students obligated to craft a response, their essays serve as personal introductions. Essays are provided to the veterans from the individual students with whom they are paired as a piece of their pre-flight informational packet. The intent of the essay is two-fold. First, it allows the student to reflect upon service and citizenship. For the student, the flight is foremost a service trip. Second, it supplies the veteran insight into the thoughts of a young person on the verge of greater civic responsibility; often the insight of one whose horizon is witnessed through far fewer vantages given life experience. One could reasonably conclude that said horizon would be more expansive and the student perspective more profound post-flight.

If meaning is in need of measuring, return holds possibility. Why did members of the inaugural flight reappear to hold flags for our following homecoming? Why did one of our original student-guardians post the following on the Honor Flight Facebook page?

“For all the student guardians that returned from the Honor Flight, some friendly advice: keep in touch with your veteran. Call them, write them, or take them out to lunch every once in awhile. You now mean the world to them and there is much you can learn from them.”

Follow-up is promising to decipher effect and meaning; it provides evidence of impact. From an educational standpoint, the return of former guardians is revealing. And, while not guaranteed, personal connection is possible. Some connections are more detailed and in-depth, some calls more frequent, and some cards more forthright.

The natural progression holds that the student-guardian, once having visited our nation’s cemetery with her veteran, will stand alone at a nearer gravesite. “I never got the chance to take him fishing.” Such was the response on the part of one young man having been informed that his veteran had passed away. In his voice were lessons often lost on those in the springtime of their lives – time is precious; we are all day-to-day. It was not difficult in that moment to recognize the difficulty of translating lessons so individually learned. Just as time is not guaranteed, neither personal connection. Yet, for those who find friendship, the connection is real and it is personal.

The seeds of civic education sown here are those that can grow a bridging strain of social capital. While the service learning is experiential, it does not constitute action learning as no affected change was part of the stated outcome (Kimoto, 2011). At least not a visibly-outward, clearly-intended, societal change. Nor was the flight undertaken as a means to generate intergenerational social capital. For some engaged in the development of service-learning programs, the generation of said relationships should be an intended outcome. Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School has a singular, manifest mission, yet acknowledgement must be

made of the benefits and latent consequences of bringing together the young and young at heart – the formation of bridging social capital.

Chapter 5 - Bridging Social Capital

“It is something everyone ought to go to... it was perfect. (Going with other veterans) made it cool and (going with the students) gave me a better perspective of what the younger generation is. Those girls and boys were awesome. They were polite and very nice. They are something to be proud of.”

- Calvin Muckenthaler, Korean War Veteran, Spring 2014 Honor Flight (Bauman, 2014).

“It was the experience of a lifetime. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to show my appreciation for our nation’s heroes. It was so much more than anything I could have ever imagined. It is a memory I will cherish for the rest of my life.”

- Megan Elder, Student-Guardian, Spring 2013 Honor Flight (Portell, 2013).

Social capital, as a theoretical construct, was introduced and reinvented no less than six times over the last century (Putnam, *Thinking about Social Change in America*, 2000). For purpose here, Robert Putnam’s definition is accepted: “social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” Moreover, involvement in community events can create a sense of shared identity and broadened self-understanding. Further, social capital can be understood in terms of “(a) norms and values (b) social networks, or (c) consequences.” Networking focuses on the ability to mobilize various groups of people for the “proper functioning of social and political life.” Consequences refer to the outputs of social capital – what can be functionally gained (Putnam, *Thinking about Social Change in America*, 2000).

Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School connects individuals and places them within an established social network – the greater community of volunteers, supporters, and

financial contributors vital to making the mission a success— as well as within a newly created network – the specific participants of each individual honor flight. The creation of social networks helps to facilitate social and political life within a community. Although measurement of social capital is difficult because it may already be embedded in functional communities. In other words, if the host community – Wamego, Kansas – is civic-minded and cultivates civic engagement, then the social capital is pre-existing and self-reproducing; “when social capital is used more social capital is generated” (Koliba, 2003). The honor flight acts as a vehicle for renewal.

Measuring the program by its meaningful consequences holds merit. Outputs could be measured functionally, if anecdotally. For instance, the discussion of a guardian’s future goal to work with “Doctors Without Borders” led to introduction of a like-international medical program that the student had never heard of but her veteran knew well and could put her in touch with one of its directors. One veteran, retired from a career in art and architectural design, offered lessons in 3-D architectural renderings for his student-guardian studying for the same profession. In return, the student-guardian’s family had her veteran over for a holiday dinner and later an outing for ice cream. Another example saw one student-guardian helping with household chores too difficult for his veteran in his current state of health. All of these are fine examples of functional social capital. However if what can be quantifiably gained is the primary metric, then the qualitative norms and values of trust and reciprocity may be deemed less meaningful.

The truer purchase of civic development is in the emergence of a shared identity. This emergence, within the confines of the honor flight program, should be focused on that which elicits commonality. “Social capital can be understood in terms of norms and values...involving the cooperation, trust, understanding, and empathy that enables citizens to treat each other as

fellow citizens” (Newton, 2001). While more subjective and less tangible, the promise of the honor flight should be understood in terms of norms and values and how veterans and their guardians are able to treat each other as fellow citizens.

Due to the intergenerational nature of the mission, a very specific form of social capital is generated, providing for recognition of fellow citizens from across the social strata. Unlike its “bonding” counterpart, “bridging social capital” is “inclusive” allowing for the broadening of one’s civic identity (Putnam, *Thinking about Social Change in America*, 2000). The bridging social capital produced by the student-guarded honor flight brings together those separated by years, spanning generations. Bridging networks “are likely to be positive” whereas bonding networks “are at greater risk of producing negative externalities” (Introduction, 2002) bolstering our “narrower selves” (Putnam, *Thinking about Social Change in America*, 2000). Some of the associated social goods of bridging capital include “education, children’s welfare, happiness, and democracy,” to name but a few positive externalities (Quesenberry, 2002). Furthermore, the cultivation of bridging social capital in a community has even been shown to hold health benefits (Kim, Subramanian, & Kawachi, 2005).

Given the initial time parameters of the mission – two days – the social capital developed would be deemed to be “weakly tied.” However, this may be good news with regard for the renewal of civic virtue as, “weak ties may be better for knitting a society together and for building broad norms of generalized reciprocity” (Introduction, 2002). The social capital generated by Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School bridges participants across age divides creating generalized reciprocity lending to trust, cooperation, and mutual support. The measure should be understood in terms of shared norms and values rather than solely the utility of the networks constructed.

Chapter 6 - Reciprocity and Trust

“I think I could have taught my guardian anything, because she was always there. The veterans really notice it when the kids are kind and aware, it’s very helpful. We enjoyed the trip because it truly seemed like the kids did, which made it easier to communicate and carry on unforced conversation.”

- Ralph White, Korean War Veteran, Spring 2013 Honor Flight (Portell, 2013).

“Once I opened myself to another perspective, I learned an unlimited amount of new things from my veteran.”

- Luke Hannan, Student-Guardian, Spring 2013 Honor Flight (Furney, 2013).

Like so many unraveling strings on an increasingly threadbare sweater, our elder populations become progressively more estranged from the fabric of their once tight-knit communities. When a cinderblock filling station is bulldozed in the name of progress or a once proud farmstead surrenders to development, memories are altered and a life’s work is left with little or no visible totem. Every obituary leaves the High School Class of 19__ less one surviving graduate. It is as if our aged citizens become travelers from antique lands with fewer and fewer companions for the journey. The advantage of their time travel is that it carries with it an historical compass and a map to the past. The honor flight provides potential for a centripetal energy pulling our aging veterans back to the center along with their instruments for deciphering the path ahead by studying the road from whence they came. The uninitiated may not know what to pack.

Engaging in a community effort like the honor flight can elicit a “sense of shared identity and reciprocity” (Putnam, Thinking about Social Change in America, 2000). Reciprocity is embedded in the veteran – guardian relationship. The role of the student-guardians is certainly

that of personal assistant. They ask nothing in return, it is a service project. However, as a relationship is built, there emerges an implicit role for the veteran – that of historical guide. The reciprocal nature of the social capital herein, then, is comprised of “relationships in which people are ‘doing with’ others, rather than ‘doing for’ others” (Lichterman, 2006).

Although the relationship may initially take on a “stranger on the plane” interaction where quietness is uncomfortable and small talk fills the silences, eventually personal exchanges make their way into conversation and experiences are shared. The veteran has more chapters in his biography from which to draw and not all stories are that of soldier. There very well may be lessons he wishes to impart from his childhood, advice he would give to his younger self, or an adage or verse he revisits when times get tough that he finds merit in sharing. A study of youth impact on adults and organizations found that adults “motivated to work collaboratively with young people” tend to “find satisfaction in passing on their knowledge and experience to the next generation” (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2014). Motivation comes via shared mission; relayed experiences through personal discretion.

It is not required that the veteran share anything with his guardian. He may be lost in reflection, on a distant beach-head half a world away over half a century ago. Emotions need not be explained. Even so, tears and the inability to verbalize thoughts and memories speak volumes to the magnitude of remembrance. Stories of service and sacrifice can be shared readily or carefully observed.

Civic renewal is required in each ensuing generation. Virtue needs to be taught and learned. Regarding the development of civic society, Youniss, et. al. (2001), believe that the older generation has a duty “to support youth’s quest for identity. Youth seek transcendent meaning. This entails locating themselves in history by adopting ideological traditions that older

generations have sustained and that still merit respect” (Youniss, McClellan, & Yates, 2001). Veterans take the trip at no cost to them, they paid their price long ago. They sustained the republican experiment and still merit respect. If a veteran can help his guardian locate herself within a shared American history complete with commonly-held republican traditions, he once more accepts his civic duty; this time as elder statesman. Statements are made by what is said and what is left unsaid.

Meaningful communication requires a degree of trust. Where reciprocity is embedded, trust must be refined. There is an initial degree of trust given based on design. The student knows that the veteran is being honored and trusts that the honor is merited. She is given a small biography of the veteran’s military service from which to do pre-flight research. The veteran knows that the guardian has undertaken this endeavor with a servant’s heart, willing to assist the veteran to ensure that they have the best trip possible. He is given his student-guardian’s essay and understands that there was a selection process, including the initial requirement of National Honor Society admission and active membership. Trust does not truly solidify until the trip begins.

Active participation engenders trust. When excitement is shared and bags are hoisted, confidence follows. Promise is held for young and old, as “participation in civic affairs invokes ageless values, creates meaning in life, and allows elderly participants to transcend themselves and their limitations” (Boggs, 1992). Avenues open for ageless values to be expressed and discussed. Student-guardians continue to create meaning for their lives by more fully measuring what it takes to be an American. It is here where the honor flight holds considerable possibility for renewal due to its specific timing. Guardians are actively engaged in experiential service-learning, within a communal framework in their formative years, providing “processes by which

civic commitment develops within individuals who are constructing their personal and social identities” (Youniss, McClellan, & Yates, 2001). Service, and subsequent reflection, grants the young person trust that they are constituent in a greater context. For the veterans, the honor flight not only helps them to build trust in our next generation but also allows them to more greatly trust themselves as they are able to overcome any limitations and complete yet one more mission – traveling to our nation’s capital to be honored for the transcendent truths on which they staked their lives. Active participation allows for greater personal and interpersonal trust.

Trust in the form of faith comes in reciprocal fashion. Members of the “Greatest Generation” want to have faith in the future for which they fought; trusting they are leaving the nation in good hands. Those of the next generation want to hold hope for a bright future; having faith that seemingly insurmountable odds can be overcome. One of the outcomes of giving student-guardians such responsibility is that the veterans can “witness the competence of youth” (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2014). Seeing their guardians engaged in activities that benefit and honor the veterans creates trust for the future. Knowing that obstacles were overcome and sacrifices made so that liberty could be maintained provides trust from the past. Students acting as guardians and veterans acting as historic guides – reciprocity and trust.

Chapter 7 - Spanning Generations

“My favorite moment is probably when Robert gave me a picture of him in uniform. The picture started a ton of neat conversations.”

- Katie Baker, Student-Guardian, Spring 2013 Honor Flight (Furney, 2013).

“[our young guardians] took care of this group of old vets... Each of us had his own guardian. They could not have been more helpful and their maturity was impressive. If you had a problem they fixed it... I think I can speak for most of us old vets, way back when we were 17, would we have volunteered to take a bunch of old ladies and do what these kids did?”

- Vince Fechter, WWII Veteran, Spring 2013 Honor Flight (Fletcher, 2013).

Ernest Hemingway attributed the well-known admonishment to those who came of age during the Great War – “You are all a lost generation” – to Gertrude Stein, in his epigraph from *The Sun Also Rises* (Hemingway, 2006). As the flannel-suited set sought to put them down, The Who answered with a defiant, “I hope I die before I get old (Who). Media pundit Ann Coulter, in her 2010 call to repeal the 26th Amendment, referred to America’s next generation as the “infantilized, pampered, bicycle-helmeted children of the Worst Generation” (Coulter, 2015). Aggravation with, and grouching about, the impulsive nature of youth is often seen as a “right” of passage. Chafing under the unsolicited advice and unwanted rules of one’s elders is a ritual to be endured. How then to find a certain equivalence between those deemed unworthy of fully-placed trust and those too often defined in afterthought? Both marginalized real-time, in some capacity, by the ascriptive trait of age.

Who is the next “Greatest Generation”? From what context will they emerge? The Revolutionary generation, whose passing was lamented by Lincoln, was nothing less than foundational. The generation engaged in the Civil War was fighting a definitional battle for the

soul of the nation. Existential was the conflict waged by those coming of age during the Great Depression and fighting the Second World War. Foundational, definitional, existential, all great the cause. Andy Rooney, referencing Tom Brokaw's defining book, considered "The Greatest Generation" was a good title. But I question your proposition that mine was a greater generation than either my dad's or your own" (Rooney, 2006). To decorate a singular generation concedes waxing and waning rather than a continuing democratic renewal. However, the "Greatest Generation," even if popularized mythos, strikes at the heart of the American ethos – coming together for a common cause to help ensure "liberty and justice for all." A shared ethos; a collective American identity.

A question bears asking – is the flight "uniquely" generational? In other words, is there something specifically promising about connecting the "Greatest" and "Silent" Generations with the "Millennial Generation"? Robert Putnam, in his look into American community Bowling Alone, asks an important question, "Do people of different ages behave differently because they are momentarily at different points in a common life cycle or because they enduringly belong to different generations?" (Putnam, From Generation to Generation, 2000). If it is more the former, then one is reminded of George Washington Carver's careful instruction:

"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these" (United States National Park Service).

Spanning the years dispels misconceptions where compassion can be cultivated and sympathy emerges. Participation in programs like Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School is civic-minded by design and is "age-integrated and intergenerational thus affording opportunities to dispel negative age stereotypes (Boggs, 1992). The uniting of generations also

provides a means for both reminiscence and projection in a curiously reflective fashion. Young and aged, striving, weak and strong, the veteran and guardian will have been all of these. It is all the more remarkable, then, to witness a veteran paired with a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old guardian given that was the very age many of the veterans enlisted in the gravest contest of the 20th Century.

If the answer to Putnam's question resides in enduring difference then it becomes instructive to look at each generation in its own right. Formative years are molded by formative events. Key happenings collectively shared engrave an indelible generational imprint, leaving a mark on those who share commonly defined birth. So, based upon their respective series of events, are the veterans and their student guardians enduringly, generationally different? Well, obviously "yes", and reasonably "no". "History repeats itself" is a much-appropriated adage. While perhaps not exact in its events, history follows patterns; if in no other way at least in the ways it is interpreted. On inspection, there is eventful similarity between these seemingly distinct generations. The question may become not how old are people currently but, rather, when where they young?

It is worth noting here the age of the student-guardians. By definition, "the Millennial Generation was born in the years 1982 to 2003" (Winograd & Hais, 2008). The average birth year for our student-guardians from our first two flights is 1997. They are on the tail end of their categorical generational construct. Given their level of comfort with social media, some would seek to add them to the newly (bit)coined "iGeneration." A day will come when the guardians will be of a freshly-affixed generation. The student-guardians at this juncture, however, will be couched as Millennials.

Lack of shared sacrifice should not be viewed as a complete lack of symmetry between the G.I. Generation and their Millennial counterparts. Generations can be defined in various ways. One way in which generations crystallize is via key, defining events. Whereas the chasm between the generations in question – spanning a population boom and disaffected Xers – appears insurmountable, there is a certain historical similarity acting as rope-bridge.

In their documentation of generational compliment and contrast, Winograd and Hais (2008) assert that “millennials are a lot like their grandparents.” Millennials are the most racially diverse cohort in American history and the G.I. Generation was “diverse by the standards of its era.” Both saw an initial reduction in world affairs, the first witnessed a rejection of internationalism and a return to isolationism post-WWI while Millennials witnessed a focus on domestic affairs after the end of the Cold War. The G.I. Generation experienced the subsequent rise of fascism throughout the 1930s with Millennials feeling the growing threat of terrorism and Islamic extremism post-9/11 (Winograd & Hais, 2008). One generation witnessed an attack on Pearl Harbor and answered with declaration into the Second World War. The other saw the Twin Towers fall, the Pentagon breached, and the crater of a Pennsylvania crash site, initiating entry into Afghanistan followed by Iraq in the Global War on Terror. The G.I. Generation defeated Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan. The Millennial Generation will be forced to deal with the ramifications of U.S. reactions following the events of September 11th with the endgame yet to be played. Whether the endgame will be of the same magnitude remains to be seen.

The generational theory introduced by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) recognized recurring generational cycles. Millennials share definitive similarities with the G.I. Generation. Accordingly, both belong to a “Civic Generation” coming of age during a “Crisis Era.” The

Crisis Era “opens with growing collective unity in the face of a perceived social peril and culminates in a secular crisis in which danger is overcome and one set of new ideals triumphs” (Strauss & Howe, 1991). This theory is instructive in its pursuit of intergenerational patterns. While perhaps not readily observable, with discernable thought given to historical circumstances, generational connections can be found. Seeking symmetry invites interconnectivity. Recognizable similarities lead to an understanding that every generation could be the next “Greatest.”

When focusing on inhabited positions along a common life cycle it is not difficult for the man in the winter of his life to see that he was once just a “stupid kid” (Veteran, 2014). Likewise, for the student-guardian, a lifetime of choices becomes accessible for one day she, too, may be aged and reflective. Even if concluding enduringly distinct generational particulars, similarities can be found via historical pattern and interpretation. The honor flight brings together individuals from clearly-defined eras at differing points in the trajectory of their lives. Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School, then, is uniquely generational. Perceived age-related incompatibilities can be changed if participants are united in an interaction that is “goal-oriented and purposeful” and has a “meaningful outcome” (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2014). The mission is clear; the student-guardian role well-defined. Intergenerational civic engagement of this type “encourages citizens to broaden their self-understandings, developing the ‘I’ into the ‘we’” (Putnam, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, 1995). The outcome can be no less than life-changing; the ability to see oneself in others, invaluable.

Chapter 8 - Democratized Heroes

“Being able to experience the memorials with a WWII veteran is something I will never forget. While we walked through the WWII memorial, Mr. Larmer could point out where he was at different times. It was an amazing experience seeing the memorial through his eyes.”

- Kasey Holle, Student-Guardian, Spring 2014 Honor Flight (Wika, 2014).

As of this writing, Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School is finalizing plans for its third flight. This mission will take on special significance as this is our first flight where Vietnam veterans will be honored. Veterans from WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War will be honored respectively. The year 2015 holds a particular weight for it marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Historical dates are curious constructs as they attempt to bookend events whose lessons and memories are not so easily contained. Given the dubious nature of the conflict, the Vietnam War has un-agreed upon start dates. The 60th anniversary is commemorated with the official Department of Defense listing of deaths in Vietnam beginning in November of 1955 or recognition of the 50th anniversary begins with the shift from advisory and support roles to full military intervention in the region (Vietnam War 50th, n.d.). Inconsistencies merit questioning.

Civic virtue should not be confused with a civic religion that is indoctrinated habitually, deemed infallible, and enduringly undisputed. Glorification of mortal sacrifice and a martial culture is not the intent of pairing students with those who have seen combat all too close. One might assume that student-veteran interaction may lead to a sense of hyper-patriotism giving way to an unquestioning assent to governmental initiative. Rather, one could as readily conclude that students would be more inclined to ask difficult questions of current engagements under the guise of – is the sacrifice worth it? Stories shared have more impact than stories read. If, my

veteran suffered gangrene so debilitating that it partially crippled him for life – then, how do we ensure our wounded warriors receive the necessary care to lead their most healthy lives? If, my veteran chose never to marry because he knew his psychological scars created too-heavy an emotional burden – then, how do we help those similarly suffering from PTSD reintegrate into some semblance of a normal life? If, war is hell – then, is our current cause just? Is it worth the inevitable human cost? If – then, it becomes less easy to eschew like-stories from our current generation of veterans.

WWII had a clear objective following a direct attack. It is easily brushed in broad black-and-white strokes, referred to as the “Good War.” Yet it should be noted that the same war that witnessed Dachau gave us Dresden. Korea was a Cold War operation with less clear directives and unfinished outcomes leading to shades of gray. Textbooks and curriculum give comparatively short shrift to the engagement referred to as the “Forgotten War.” The Vietnam War was as questionable as its post-modern complexion; entrance based upon theory, an international game of dominos with lethal outcomes. As these events are given the face of a veteran, they provide a context from which to question. These veterans are real people met with real choices that would have real and lasting consequences.

Operation Enduring Freedom was born from the pains of 9/11. It was a response to a direct attack. The nation was galvanized with few dissenting voices. Like the name implies, as of this writing, the fight endures. Operation Iraqi Freedom is debated and will remain highly debatable regarding its necessity, scope, purpose, and outcomes. The student-guardians from our two flights were preschoolers at the time the Global War on Terrorism was initiated. These students are growing up in wartime, potentially unaffected, with the news of said engagements buried underneath economic fluctuation and pop culture minutia. Less than 1% of the U.S.

population has served in this engagement (Martinez & Bingham, 2015). America's wars today appear removed and are often conducted remotely. However, students whose families have been touched by the multiple deployments along with their after-effects understand the familial sacrifice. Questions as to what constitutes a "war of necessity" versus a "war of choice" naturally arise in this context. Most Americans do not have a personalized stake in the conflict providing said context. The honor flight, then, personalizes service and sacrifice and creates a framework from which to question.

Civic virtue rightly refined includes temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice (Patrick, 2006). Prudent citizens are prone to thoughtful consideration and deliberative discussion prior to providing their assent. Citizens acting with temperance will likewise hold their government to act within the bounds of the rule of law. Civic virtue requires "self-interest properly understood" (Tocqueville & Goldhammer, 2004). This type of civic virtue combines a "disinterested concern for others with calculations of private welfare" (Allen, 1998). The true purchase, then, is the ability to come together for the good of all while recognizing the inherent individual rights to life, liberty, and pursuits of happiness. If these self-evident truths are to be jeopardized the cause must be just, for the price is dear. By pairing students with veterans willing to share their experiences the price becomes clear. Virtue is not inheritable, it must be informed; virtue is better-informed when modeled.

The Honor Flight Network regularly uses the word "hero" in describing the veterans it seeks to honor. What is the civic function of heroes? As a culture, whom we lionize we authorize. Heroes reinforce a "national civic self-conceptualization and self-actualization" sanctioned for emulation (Levinson, 2012). However, heroes can too-often be elevated to superhuman status. If so, the hero may become one to whom ordinary citizens look to for

deliverance and can't reasonably assume ascendance to like-status. Similarly, singling out individual heroes may inadvertently discount collective efforts. By pairing guardians with veterans, the students learn that their heroes are, in fact, life-sized and were often merely an individual, albeit singularly integral; part of a much greater endeavor.

While veterans were forced into instances where heroism would be inhabited, they were also met with the mundane and the routine. They made decisions based upon circumstance. Historic determinism discounts decision-making and active agency. Decisions are fraught with very-human emotions – fear, anxiety, anger, and retribution. Actively dealing with his humanity, in often inhumane conditions, is what makes the veteran a true role-model. By getting to know their veteran, the guardian's "hero" becomes life-sized and democratized – hailing from their hometown, living within their community, willingly answering the call of duty at a similar age. Civic virtues and dispositions no longer remain reserved as a unique quality of the heroic few. "Instead, role models are almost inevitably ordinary... it is their very ordinariness that inspires us to act differently and emulate their achievements" (Levinson, 2012). Virtue – modeled, emulated, and employed – becomes part of what is expected of the ordinary, engaged citizen.

Veterans become flesh-and-blood role-models whose biographies provide a platform from which to prudently question America's international presence and prerogatives. Similarly, by demystifying the veteran and recognizing the ordinary in all of us, the pairing allows for a broad-based civic heroism to emerge – a civic heroism where civic duty is accepted and civic virtue honed. The hero is less lionized; more humanized. He has a certain civic vigor while holding a sense of humility, self-doubt, and healthy skepticism. The hero is the citizen who recognizes that events are not pre-determined and individual choices have cumulative

consequences. Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School offers the cultivation of civic virtue through the democratization of heroes.

Chapter 9 - Homecoming

“As a Korean War veteran, I didn’t come home to cheering crowds, but last week I felt like my country appreciated my service. It was a touching experience.”

- Calvin Muckenthaler, Korean War Veteran, Spring 2014 Honor Flight
(Muckenthaler, 2014).

“I feel incredibly fortunate to have been a student guardian on this year’s Honor Flight. My veteran, Mr. Claeys, has been given the chance by his community to visit his nation’s capital and the memorials that are built there in his honor... The amount of support from family, friends, and strangers alike throughout our trip gave our veterans a reason to stand tall once more and to realize that they are truly appreciated.

- Melissa Ginavan, Student-Guardian, Spring 2014 Honor Flight (Ginavan, 2014).

Homecoming is an integral part of the two-day experience, perhaps most integral. A greater appreciation of community becomes one of the hallmarks of the trip – both launching pad and touchdown. Community connotes geographic locality as well as citizens who share a defined identity or hold common concerns (Baum & Ziersch, 2003). Secondary to the primary mission of honoring our area veterans is pairing them with local students. The “area” from which the local honor flight hub can draw for veterans can be as large as needed to ensure all are honored. Several veterans come from a 50 mile radius of Wamego. However, some veterans cross both county- and state-lines. Regarding social capital, “sense of community” is more important than physically delineated space, as long as it is the right kind of social capital (Bauman, 2014).

“Sense of community” can be concerning if it comes via the exclusivity of bonding capital rather than through the shared norms and values of its bridging counterpart. Handheld

personal devices embolden too-quickly constructed opinions, shared 140 characters at a time, with every surface owning reflective possibility. Bonding capital in the information age challenges the notion of local community. Everyone can assumedly find his village because “there is room for selectivity” where “instead of having to listen and confront people with different views, people can simply interact with those who think the same way” (Wuthnow, 2002). The elder set is not immune to the downside of bonding social capital. Whereas those more comfortable with social media can widen their scope of exclusivity, insulation can take place just as easily at the coffee-shop or local café. Insulation can give way to isolation if “friends” are limited to cyberspace or friends become fewer and fewer due to natural attrition; centrifugal forces moving away from a communal center. A “sense of isolation” can afflict both young and old. Intergenerational programs that can expand ones “sense of community” are vital for both the individual and the collective (Kaplan, 2002). The student edition of the honor flight brings together those who would be marginalized and those who could become isolated.

Sense of community can be developed and witnessed at the local level with known neighbors, family, and friends welcoming the flight home. Here, sense of community is nested. Similarly, yet conversely, sense of community can emerge amidst strangers standing in wavelike fashion to applaud the veterans and their guardians thankfully welcoming their honored flight to our nation’s capital. There, sense of community is shared by an expanded citizenry. In both instances, the individual “I” becomes part of “we the people.” “We” emerges especially between veteran and guardian, locally between community members and flight participants, and collectively within the republic. Sense of community is personal, communal, and American.

Chapter 10 - Coda

WHAT IS PAST IS PROLOGUE.

- Engraved on the National Archives Building in Washington D.C. (AOTUS National Archives, 2013).

Kansas Honor Flight – Wamego High School is an intergenerational, experiential, service-learning project that bridges difference. It allows participants to “understand themselves in a larger context” and provides them with “opportunities to present themselves to others in new ways” (Koliba, 2003). Homecoming gives veteran and guardian alike a new appreciation of home and homeland while allowing both to be newly appreciated. The honor flight invites civic virtue to be considered and passed down; civic duty remembered and honored. Democratization of heroes allows every citizen to answer the call to heroism. Development of a shared civic identity recognizes the ability of each generation to be the next “Greatest” stitching their story into the “proud fabric of freedom.”

“When we are born we arrive, as it were, in the middle of the conversation to which we feel compelled to contribute as long as we are able” (McKenzie, 1991).

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Appendix A - 2013 Student Essay Prompt

2013 Student Essay Prompt: In a well-written essay, please respond to the following prompt.

Essays should be typed, double-spaced, and have a 500 word limit.

On January 20, 1961, the day of his inauguration as the 35th president of the United States of America, WWII Naval veteran John Fitzgerald Kennedy famously urged the following:

“My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

What is your response when you ask yourself this question?



Selected Winning Student Essay Submission:

During his inauguration speech in 1961, President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to lessen their demands for government intervention and instead focus on their civic duty to America. In our great nation, each citizen has certain responsibilities to fulfill. A few, such as jury duty and taxes, are compulsory. The actions that speak louder are those that one must choose to do. For some citizens, this simply requires that they opt to participate in elections but many answer the call for greater service. A few, such as the

Kennedy family, look to the realm of politics and serve the nation in a position of high stress and criticism in an act of pure patriotism. For me, and the majority of Americans, that call is answered with selfless acts of community service. All around are people in need, projects to undertake for the betterment of our community and outstanding individuals who deserve recognition. Those that choose to sacrifice their time, money and talents in the service of others do so because they see the value of our country and wish to strive for improvement. However, many decide to sacrifice everything by serving in our nation's armed forces. My own family tree is filled with honorable veterans, including my grandfather who served during World War II. He, and countless other courageous Americans, rose up to defend our country at a time when America desperately needed them. Each of them served admirably in the greatest act of selflessness.

The brave men and women who answered the call to arms have performed a service for America that Americans can never fully thank them for. We can celebrate these heroes once a year on Veteran's Day, but that is not enough. We can erect a memorial in their honor as a way of displaying to the world our appreciation, but that is not enough. We can take time from our busy lives to listen and talk to them to show them they still matter to us, but that is not enough. We can take them to their memorial and the capital of the nation they patriotically served and defended to personally show them our deep-felt appreciation, but it is not enough. However... it is a start.

Over fifty years later and President Kennedy's famous words still resonate with Americans. For me personally, I will rise to Mr. Kennedy's challenge in the only way I can: by continuing to serve my community and our great nation at every possible opportunity in the

hopes of having an impact. However, my efforts will never compare to those who have sacrificed so much more.

Appendix B - 2014 Student Essay Prompt

2014 Student Essay Prompt: In a well-written essay, please respond to the following prompt. Essays should be typed, double-spaced, and have a 500 word limit.

September, 2014 will mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Fort McHenry. On the morning of September 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key famously saw the American flag waving above Fort McHenry inspiring him to write the words that would ultimately become known as “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” – the national anthem of the United States of America.

Using our national anthem, how do its lyrics resonate some 200 years later?

*O say can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there;
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*



Selected Winning Student Essay Submission:

When Francis Scott Key wrote what we now know as “The Star-Spangled Banner,” he was in the midst of a battle that questioned our nation’s strength. The uncertainty that loomed then was a feeling that is recognized even now when America is tested on her ability to uphold the standards we have placed upon her. When viewed as more than just words we sing at sporting events, “The Star-Spangled Banner” actually poses two main questions that, truthfully, came as a surprise to me. When sung, the tones do not give way to doubt, instead they breathe intense pride. However, when the lyrics are read, and punctuation plays a greater role, the true meaning of our anthem is revealed.

Do the proud stars and stripes that we hail, still fly after the struggles we face? This is the first question asked us by our anthem. It questions our faith in the strength of our country after being poked and prodded, criticized and beat down. The lyric makes us contemplate the power of the American flag. Our flag is a symbol that stands for hope and pride. After nearly 200 years, this question can still be asked of us today. Is the trust in our country still visible even in the darkest of times? We all know the answer to that. Even following an incident such as 9/11 that rocked our nation, we have not fallen. We are still standing tall, proving those who think otherwise wrong.

A veteran himself, I knew my father would have an interesting perspective on our National Anthem. I asked him the second question that our nation inquires of us: Does the Star-Spangled Banner still wave over the land of the free and the home of the brave? This question offers two possible takes on its meaning; the first being, the validity of our flag when our nation’s values are threatened, and the second – what is believed to be the truest

meaning behind Key's words – the strength of America's foundations of freedom and bravery. Is America still brave and free? As my dad told me of his American flag that he carried through Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait, he broke down in tears and gave me his answer, "*It had better.*" If our National Anthem did not resonate after 200 years, my dad would not have stood in front of me crying over the service he provided to his country.

Proudly displayed, my dad's flag, no longer red, white, and blue, but stained with past turmoil, was once held with the hope of returning home but now is held in trust that what it, and my dad, was dragged through was worth the fight. Ask any veteran for their answer to this same matter and they would probably reach for their own flag and share their stories the way my dad did. These stories that are shared among the generations are the reasons our Star-Spangled Banner still resonates today.

Appendix C - 2015 Student Essay Prompt

Introduction:

May 8th and September 2nd 2015, respectively, will mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Nearly 16 million Americans served during World War II. There were slightly more than one million living WWII veterans, as of Jan. 1, 2014. An estimated 413 WWII veterans die each day. Journalist Tom Brokaw, in his book *The Greatest Generation*, wrote the following about our nation's WWII veterans:

"They answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs. They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. They succeeded on every front ... As they now reach the twilight of their adventurous and productive lives, they remain, for the most part, exceptionally modest ... In a deep sense they didn't think that what they were doing was that special, because everyone else was doing it too."

They answered the call. Yet, their modesty will prevent most from ever knowing the sacrifices this "Greatest Generation" made on our behalf.

2015 Student Essay Prompt: In a well-written essay, please respond to the following prompt.

Essays should be typed, double-spaced, and have a 500 word limit.

John Adams, in a letter to his wife Abigail, expressed the following to future generations:

“Posterity! you will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make a good use of it.”

How best should Americans make “good use” of their freedom?



Selected Winning Student Essay Submission:

It would seem that at this point in history freedom has very little value to Americans. Freedom has always been available like the air we breathe. But freedom is not a gift that can be accepted and then neglected. Freedom demands to be protected, expanded, and enriched.

Freedom must be understood. Freedom is not a word, but is an action. A person may be granted freedom but until they put it into practice are they truly free? In order to make use of our freedom we must practice it. Americans must understand the boundaries, allowances, and rights granted in the United States. Developing an understanding of freedom allows for it to be put into practice. One of the best ways to practice freedom is by voting. People often forget that we fight to preserve our freedom in the form of democracy. But to have democracy to fight for, people must be involved in their government.

Freedom is altruism, a characteristic all veterans shared and continue to share. It is the fuel for freedom. Men and women are willing to put their country before their own comfort and if need be, die for it. Citizens should also see the interests of the country as above their own. When Americans place their country first, and their personal wants second, then freedom thrives. Freedom is best when it is worth sacrificing for.

Freedom asks for courage. Nelson Mandela once said, “there is no easy walk to freedom.” Freedom is not always widely accepted or popular. Throughout history, and even in modern times, most of the world does not know freedom. We need to be able to stand up for freedom even if we stand alone. The United States is a city upon a hill and if we do not stand for freedom, who will?

Freedom needs to be understood for what it is, an action. When freedom is acted upon with courage and not for our own personal advantage, freedom will be protected and expanded for the present and enriched for the future.