


## **Honoring an American Veteran**

When people think of veterans, they tend to picture a soldier carrying a weapon and fighting the enemy. For every foot soldier, however, there are thousands of men and women that support those soldiers in many different capacities. As I am sure our guests can tell us, a veteran wears many hats. Service men and women learn a plethora of skills while serving in the military. One of our guests today is a retired Petty Officer First Class E6 United States Navy. This December, he will be celebrating his 97th birthday. It is not everyday we have the privilege to meet someone that has served in the Second World War. This afternoon, I am encouraging all of you to speak with him and learn from him.



In the beginning of WWII, most young men were receiving draft orders as they had no choice whether or not to join the military. Because of his age, Donald had already enlisted in the Navy before his draft orders arrived. He had already begun his training as a Naval shipman. His assignments included instructing soldiers how to swim for survival and how to abandon ships - practice exercises that would soon become real life. Donald's expertise, at such a young age was learning how things worked and fixing them. Superior officers took note of this and his skills were put to better use fixing aircraft and preparing them for war. He was even sent to schools to teach other aircraft mechanics how to troubleshoot these powerful machines. His expertise was



used in different naval bases throughout the US. He was sent to Hawaii during the war to prepare the aircraft for the Pacific Theatre. At one point during the war, he was even sent back to Brooklyn, New York to fix aircraft at Floyd Bennett Field. It was at that time he met his wife who he would be married to for more than 75 years. As the war came to a close, he was sent back to Hawaii to repair aircraft that was used in the South Pacific. While ordered back to Hawaii, he had to leave his pregnant wife and would not return home until after his first daughter was nearly six months old. Truly, a sacrifice. I think she may even be with us today.

As the war ended, Donald's military commitment was coming to an end. At that





point he continued to serve the Navy for the next 20 years fixing aircraft in Brooklyn at the Naval Fleet Reserve. When he retired he took those skills to the NYC Transit Authority and repaired the NYC subways for 20 years. He then spent the next 20 years as a caretaker for 15 houses in Fire Island. If you ever visit Kismet Fire Island, ask any local who Mr. Fix is and they will tell you Donald. We can learn a lot from our veterans, but one thing they will tell us is how much they learned while serving our country. Skills that remain with them in Donald's case for almost 100 years.

They say military service is not for everyone, but it is so important that we remember the personal sacrifice and individual story behind every veteran. As

we sit here today to honor our guests, my hope is that you get a chance to hear some of their stories and think about them this coming Veterans Day, or when you see a veteran at the grocery store, if you attend a parade, or go get to see an airshow. You have all served this country well and for that we are all eternally grateful.

Being that there are only so many 96 year old WWII Veterans walking around, Sayville Middle School would like to take this time to recognize and give an extra warm welcome to one of our honored guests Donald T. Decker, who is not only an American Naval Veteran but also my grandfather. A man I and all of his family are so incredibly proud of. Grandpa, we would like you to have this handmade flag so you can remember today



fondly and know that we will always  
remember your service to our country.