

## **Wreaths Honoring our Military: an Amazing Experience in American Heritage Girls**

American Heritage Girls offers a wide variety of experiences full of faith, service and fun. During my six years as a part of American Heritage Girls troop MD1212, I've been given the opportunity to try new things I would never have attempted otherwise. From camping and archery to CPR and first aid as well as weaving and macrame, the new skills my friends and I have learned are countless. We have also participated in many service projects including packing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, sewing bibs, repairing a prayer garden and fundraising and volunteering with Wreaths Across America. This organization works to try to place a Christmas wreath on every veteran's grave across the country during December. Our troop had worked to help fundraise and lay wreaths for at least five years, however I never attended the wreath laying ceremony until this past December. I helped fundraise throughout November by asking my family and friends to sponsor wreaths. Our troop as a whole collected 358 sponsorships for wreaths to be placed at the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery.



Saturday, December 17, 2022 arrived, and by 10:30 a.m. the first girls from my troop began to prepare for the ceremony at the cemetery. There were girls from other American Heritage Girls troops and boys from Trail Life as well as other organizations. Before the laying of wreaths, there was a ceremony to honor our military. The American Heritage Girls and Trail Life boys who were participating in the flag ceremony arrived early for practice. Flag etiquette is a very important part of American Heritage Girls. We want to show proper respect to our nation's flag because it is a symbol of our country's freedoms and values. There are many types of flag ceremonies, and the one we participated in at the cemetery was different from our troop's regular flag ceremonies. Along with the American flag, there were also flags representing Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. Many of my friends were in the flag ceremony, as well as my younger brother who is in Trail Life. I was not a flag bearer or color guard because I had been given the job of master of ceremonies. I was slightly nervous because it was my first time attending the event. They gave me a script to read to announce the different parts of the ceremony. As long as I was loud enough and did not read too fast, I hoped that not much else could go wrong.

During the ceremony, we were required to wear our full class A uniforms. In American Heritage Girls, the uniforms often represent many years in AHG and can have badges and patches that girls earn at meetings and events. Younger levels have a vest and older levels have a sash. Whenever an AHG member spots the red, white, and blue colors of the vest or sash, she immediately recognizes a fellow American Heritage girl.



The cold air was filled with anticipation as the crowds of people waited. The seconds were counted down until noon and then finally, the ceremony began. It was a wonderful ceremony. A prayer was read, a poem recited, the Pledge of Allegiance was proclaimed all while the flag bearers proudly held their flags high in the breezy air. The flag bearers did an amazing job holding the flags up the entire ceremony which lasted around 20 minutes. Service members were present representing each branch of the military. One by one, they came forward to place a remembrance wreath in honor

of all who served and are serving in the military. Each of them was escorted by either two American Heritage Girls, Trail Life boys or representatives from other service organizations. After the ceremony concluded, the crowds dispersed and took wreaths to place on the graves in the cemetery. I was surprised by how quickly the wreaths were laid. In just a few minutes, the entire cemetery was transformed with the green of the wreaths and their bright red bows. I was so grateful that I had been able to help honor veterans that day alongside my AHG friends.

At each meeting the girls say the AHG oath: *"I promise to love God, cherish my family, honor my country and serve in my community."* We also say the AHG creed: *"As an American Heritage girl, I promise to be compassionate, helpful, honest, loyal, perseverant, pure, resourceful, respectful, responsible, and reverent."* We do not say the oath and creed simply to have something to recite, we say them because we want to live them out every day. Serving with Wreaths Across America was a great way to honor and respect my country and those who help to keep us free. I hope other American Heritage Girls will have the same opportunity whether they serve with Wreaths Across America, or find a different way to honor their country. Laying wreaths at the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's home cemetery is one of the many AHG memories I will never forget.



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