

MILES LIPTON McKINSTRAY

Third grader, an old soul, wins VFW State Youth Essay Contest

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CLE ELUM – Cle Elum-Roslyn Elementary third grader Miles Lipton McKinstry earned first place in VFW's Washington State Youth Essay Contest for the third-grade age group – but what's more extraordinary than that? Answer: The way he handled his interview with the *NKC Tribune* – and we'll get to that in a minute.

Early in April members from the VFW, the school board and his teacher surprised Miles and his family with the award and his medal.

When asked how he felt about the achievement, Miles replied, "I couldn't have done this without the people who believed in me."

In terms of interviews with youngsters over the years, many of them distinguished themselves as extraordinary. Miles is certainly one of those. Why? Not once did he pause before he answered. Direct questions garnered direct, succinct answers. Not once did he say 'um' or 'ah.' At times I felt like I was talking to a confident, young savant with a very old soul who knew more about military history than I ever did – at any age.

What you read below is unedited for press. That's how well he spoke. I didn't have to repair his responses to make complete sentences. I needed to tell you that because there's a chance you wouldn't believe this is a third-grader talking, one who didn't pause more than a couple seconds between the time he heard the question and the time he provided an answer.

Here below is how the interview went. I got started with Miles by apologizing for having to do a second interview with him for various reasons, one of them being I had to hear him again – so I could truly grasp the fact that the adult-ish answers I got were coming from such a young kid.

Are you sure you have the time to do this second interview with me? "Yup."

Okay, my apologies to you and let's get going. You ready? "Yup. Apology accepted and let's get going."

Why did you enter this contest? "Because I really like soldiers and I thought this would be a good use of my time."

What did you write about? "I wrote about how soldiers should be honored because they make a supreme sacrifice."

You said you did a lot of research for this? "I researched the Tuskegee airmen. They were an all Afro-American group of pilots in WWII. I saw the movie, too."

What was it about them that interested you? "They defended their country really well, but they were still treated poorly."

And how did that make you feel? "Sad."

What was their war record? "Sixty-six of them were killed in action. Sad fact: Every single Tuskegee airman has passed away."

That is a sad fact. The same is true for, I forget, ... um ... what's the name of the aviator who led a squadron of bombers from an aircraft carrier to bomb Tokyo in WWII right after the attack on Pearl Harbor? His pilots have all passed away, too. Help me out here with his name? "Colonel James Doolittle."

How long did it take you to write your winning essay? "Two days. I wrote it by hand and my mom typed it up."

What piqued your interest in WWII military history? "Well, I think it was the weaponry they had. I got into ground warfare, then into war ships, and then into aircraft."

I understand you really took to military aircraft, correct? "Correct. They look cooler than modern aircraft."

What books have you read focused on military history? "The attack on Pearl Harbor, the encyclopedia of military aircraft, the history of aviation, and another book on aircraft carriers."

Those books weren't written for third graders, correct? "Correct."



LOCAL VFW ESSAY CONTESTANT Miles Lipton McKinstry holds up the medal he won for winning the state title. He was chosen to lead the crowd in the *Pledge of Allegiance* at the VFW's Memorial Day ceremony held at the Cle Elum city cemetery in May this year. His parents are Stefan and Jennifer Lipton McKinstry.

N.K.C. TRIBUNE/Jim Fossett photo - 2021

And you had no trouble reading and understanding those books? "No trouble at all."

Did you have to go to the dictionary and look up words? "No."

Tell me something about your favorite WWII airplanes. "Okay. The B24 Liberator was a bomber, and it was the most produced bomber. It had many bombs, and it had a ball turret replaced by radar. If it was hit by enemy aircraft or enemy flak, the pilot switched to autopilot so the men were able to bail out."

"Men were afraid to ride the B-17E because its tail number ended in 666."

"The P-51 carried six machine guns. It flew very fast because it had a sleek design. However, it was not the fastest U.S. airplane in WWII, because its wings were straight."

"The BF 109 was German. The Sonderkommando Elbe group flew them."

What was the fastest aircraft? "The ME163, a German aircraft."

Did you see the movie about the Battle of Midway? "Yes! The ocean looked so real, you thought they were actually filming it. The sound effects were amazing. Everything in the movie looked entirely real."

I understand you like WWII model airplanes. Which ones have you assembled? "Yes. The P-39 Airacobra, two P-51 Mustangs, a B-17 Flying Fortress, and a Japanese bomber."

Who started WWII? "The Germans did, by invading Poland."

What was America's response to that? "Americans didn't want another war, so they tried not to enter it. But then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor."

Speaking of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese called Midway 'target AF.' How did American code breakers figure out AF was Midway? "They sent out a fake message that said there was a shortage of fresh water on Midway. Then the Japanese sent out a message that 'target AF' was out of fresh water."

You homeschooled in a program run by teacher Cheryl Ficelle, who encourages her students to pursue their topics of interest. That gave you an opportunity to do projects about military

history, correct? "Yes. She's awesome."

What are your hobbies? "Sometimes I make aircraft carriers out of common household items. I also made a 3-by-5 foot diorama of the Battle of Saipan."

Why the Battle of Saipan? "Because it basically had all the forces: Army, Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy. It was also one of the most strategic battles of the war, because the Americans were doing an island-hopping campaign, where they would setup bases to rearm. Saipan was important because it had a long enough tarmac for our B-29 bombers."

Last question. What's the importance of Memorial Day to you? "Finally, all the soldiers who fought and died in the world can be honored as heroes, young men and women, but mostly men."

Teacher Cheryl Ficelle weighs in

Asked about her policy of sometimes allowing students to pursue subjects that pique their curiosity, Ficelle replied, "We allow student choice whenever possible. At the project fair, I had students do the history of Legos, the history of ballet, is there life on other planets, and chickens. Miles did the *Battle of Midway* in a report and a diorama he made."

"Miles has taken a topic he loves and absorbed it into his knowledge base. Most students have a passion for something they love. Miles has a topic that many love, but he decided to go in-depth and become the expert."

"He has an unquenchable thirst. He's like a sponge who wants to absorb information on WWII."

"Many high-achieving students have this curiosity and it is up to teachers, parents and community to water it."

A note from Miles's mom, Jennifer

"He has always had super strong passions and those that know him outside of family have been amazed at his retention of information and his communication skills. If you want to have a sophisticated conversation about the Titanic, trains (and model trains), and/or World War II, he's your 9-year-old. I do believe he's an old soul."

"If any of your readers remember Roslyn's Milie Radonovich, she would always call Miles 'Mr. Articulate' because he would bend her ear when he was just a wee-one."

MILES' WINNING ESSAY

Here below is the essay that won Cle Elum-Roslyn Elementary third grader Miles Lipton McKinstry first place in the VFW's state essay contest in his age group. His parents corroborate they didn't help him, though when his mom was done typing, she asked Miles for a closing sentence, so he adlibbed one on the spot in the same way he answered the *NKC Tribune*'s questions. Check it out below. You won't believe the words that came out of this third grader's mouth – again, without an 'um' or an 'ah' or a struggle to put a sentence together. We've boldfaced that sentence for you.

Why American veterans should be honored

"American Veterans should be honored because they made the supreme sacrifice protecting America, its people, and all of its glory."

"The members of the Armed Forces risk their lives to protect our freedom."

"Veterans are men and women from different races and different places around the United States. These brave men and women are a team that would cooperate for a common mission."

"For example, the Tuskegee Airmen were an all African-American squadron that at first were not treated equally during World War II."

"They had a mission to escort B-17 bombers to the target and back over enemy territory in Germany. Tuskegee Airmen never let a single bomber crew die and bravely completed their missions."

"Throughout their service, sixty-six Tuskegee Airmen were killed in action and they shot down 55 German FW-190s, BF-109s, and four of the feared ME-262s enemy aircrafts."

"They fought together, men from all backgrounds and races, to complete a common purpose and became stronger together for our country."

"Today all veterans, including men and women, served and are equally important for how they gave their time and lives for all Americans."

"All veterans are great but my favorite is my old pal Grandpa Ron. He's a great man, one that we should all be like."

Veterans of the past and the present should be honored for their heroism, their service, and the impact they have on American morale."