By U.S Senator Mark Kelly, Navy Combat Veteran

A few years ago, I had a group of students from Arizona visiting me in my Senate office and one of them asked me which of my military medals meant the most to me. It's a funny question to get from a kid. I joked that one of my daughters once gave me a medal for being a good dad, and that one meant a lot to me. And then I went on to tell them that military service isn't usually about the medals, it's about accomplishing a mission, together. In the military, you have a job to do. You train for it, and you count on the people around you to do their jobs too.

That clicked for me on my first combat mission. I was flying an A-6E Intruder with my bombardier navigator Paul Fujimura. One of my primary jobs as the pilot was to fly the plane and get us safely over the target. The bombardier navigator's job was to navigate us to the target, identify it and track it with the weapons system.

We started taking anti-aircraft fire and I saw a surface-to-air missile coming right at us. I told Paul about the missile, and his response was simple: "Roger, I'm tracking the target." I told him again and again, and got the same response each time. That's when I realized that to accomplish the mission, Paul had to do his job and I had to do mine. I rolled the airplane upside down, added full power, and pulled the stick into my lap. The missile went over us and exploded. I got the airplane upright, checked that the engines and hydraulics were still working, and turned back toward the target. We dropped our bombs and accomplished the mission. The guys who maintained our jet did their job too, so it performed as we needed it to. And so did the Landing Signal Officers who helped us land safely when we got back.

I flew 39 combat missions, but I never flew any of them alone. And supporting all of us were families back home making sacrifices of their own. When I think about Veterans Day, I think about those people I served with, the men and women serving today, and the generations of patriotic Americans who have signed up to risk their lives for our country. In return, our country makes a promise that after their service, they will receive the care and support they earned.

As a combat veteran, I take that promise personally. I helped pass the PACT Act to expand VA health coverage for servicemembers who were exposed to toxins during their service. I worked with my Republican colleagues to pass the ACES Act to study

cancer rates among military aviators and aircrew. And I've successfully passed a bill to help build a veterans center in Gila County, Arizona.

When I was 22 years old, I swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. That oath stayed with me through 39 combat missions and four trips to space. This Veterans Day and every day, I'm proud to stand alongside the millions of Americans who have answered the call to serve. Like I told those students, when you talk with a veteran, know that they didn't do it for the medals or the recognition. They did it for their country and their fellow service members.

And now serving as a US Senator, swearing the same oath to the constitution again, I remember the same lesson from that first combat mission. We all have a job to do, our piece to accomplish the larger mission for our neighbor and our country.