



On Veterans Day 2016

I served in Vietnam in 1968-69 with the 101st airborne division.

Today is a bittersweet day for me. Today I do not think about combat, the missions, nor the disabilities that I and so many of my fellow veterans live with every day.

On this Veterans Day I am thinking about America. Why we served our country and what we veterans hoped to accomplish by doing so.

Many of us had to leave our families not knowing if we would ever see them again. We did this so Americans would have their families intact. Yet today, 50 years after my war I see Americans abandoning and not taking care of their families.

We veterans went to fight a war in countries where the common people had no right to have their own opinions, they were jailed or killed for expressing them. We went to war to defend every American's right to believe what they wished and voice their thoughts freely. Yet today 50 years after my war I see contempt, discrimination, anger and violence directed against those who believe differently from others.

I will never forget the hungry, suffering, ill treated and endangered children I saw in Vietnam. I served so that our children would be cherished, protected and cared for. Yet 50 years after my war I see on the streets of our cities children who are endangered, sick, not cared for, not clothed, hungry and homeless.

We veterans fought in wars where differences in race, ethnicity, gender and language made people enemies to be harmed, beaten, imprisoned and often killed. We veterans fought for the rights of all people to be respected,

valued and cherished regardless of these differences. Yet 50 years after my war I am pained to see an America more hateful, suspicious, fearful, violent and cruel towards people of differences that when I left to go to Vietnam.

We veterans fought in countries where the people had no right to choose who led them. They were ruled by dictators. There was no peaceful transference of power. Yet 50 years after my war 100 million Americans chose to sit at home and not vote in the last election.

I am very proud of the sacrifices that I and my fellow veterans made and are still making. I want to be proud of what my country has done with these sacrifices.

I am told that on this Veterans Day I can get free pancakes and coffee.

I am grateful for that but there is something that I would much rather have from America than a free breakfast.

America, please love, value and honor your families. Respect the opinions of others and defend their right to voice them. Take care of, protect, feed and cherish all children. Remember that the differences we have in color, language, ethnicity, life style and gender is what makes America strong not weak.

The next time you get a chance to vote even if you have no interest in who is running for office, please respect the veterans and their families who paid and are still paying the price for your right to vote. Do your due diligence and support the democracy that we defended. If your being able to vote was worthy of our lives then it is worthy of your time.

If you do these things then this old veteran will will be happy to buy you pancakes, coffee and I will thank you on this Veterans Day.

Sergeant Richard Pimentel
101st Airborne Division
Vietnam