

# SATURDAY OPINION

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY, MARCH 29

## An overdue thanks for Ga. vets

By Dan Holtz

As a member of the United States armed forces, I served in Vietnam from 1969-1970. While I was not assigned to a unit fighting in the jungles and rice paddies trying to preserve Vietnam's freedom and independence, I was in harm's way from enemy rockets and guerrilla attacks raining on my locations many times. I saw firsthand the efforts of American forces to subdue the enemy. Like many others, I am of the opinion it was the politicians, the news media back in the States and the misguided youth of the '60s and '70s who caused the war to be lost.

When I returned to the "world," I faced name-calling, shunning and other forms of degradation for my service and wearing of our country's uniform. I remember traveling from Travis AFB to the airport in San Francisco and having to duck below the window of the vehicle, so agitators along the streets would not know a servicemember was there. I had the pain, and understand the pain, my fellow servicemen and women endured during those times. Today, I weep silently for what we should not have had to endure because we served our nation, our flag and our freedom.

On March 30, 2015, the Governor of Georgia inaugurated a program to recognize



Dan Holtz is Assistant Commissioner for Administration, Health and Memorials for the Georgia Department of Veterans Service.

and to thank Georgia's veterans who served our nation during the Vietnam War era, to say thank you to all of us for our service by issuing Certificates of Honor to those who served, to welcome us home as we had not been welcomed when we came back so many years ago. Georgia partnered with the U.S. Defense Department's Office of Commemorations to recognize all the servicemen and women who served from 1954-1975, when the U.S. had troops in Vietnam as advisors and members of full units fighting a Communist insurgency.

Why are these certificates being issued to all who served during this period of time and not just those who served with boots on the ground, or as crew members of aircraft and naval vessels that directly supported the troops on the ground?

Because everyone who served during that period had some role in fighting or supporting those



Army veteran Bernie Klemanek, of Mineral, Va., stops to salute his fallen comrades on Memorial Day during an early morning visit to "The Wall" at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. DAVID AKE / ASSOCIATED PRESS 2015

who were in direct combat with the Vietnamese enemy! Some of us who were there argue, if you were not there with boots on the ground you should not be eligible to receive a certificate. How soon we may forget our country had military commitments around the world where the firing-up of hostilities at any one of

them could have caused our efforts in Vietnam to be seriously jeopardized in a manner much worse than they ultimately were. We were, and still are technically, at war with North Korea. We were protecting the nations of Europe against potential Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact aggression and we had other military ob-

ligations that if not upheld would have had catastrophic consequences.

Those of us who served in-country in Vietnam were not the only servicemen and women who were treated like scum, spat upon, called baby killers and subjected to other humiliations. From personal observation, I am aware all who wore the uniform of our nation were subjected to these degradations. Now, 50 years have passed and the citizens of the State of Georgia and our nation are trying to say "thank you" and "welcome home," which should have happened back then.

**Now it is 50 years later and calmer minds with clearer thinking are doing their best to correct a terrible wrong done to all of us.**

While I am disappointed by how many of my fellow countrymen treated me and my fellow members of the armed forces during those turbulent times, I try not to be bitter and unaccepting of those today who are trying to make amends. Americans have learned much during Desert Storm and the Iraq/Afghanistan wars about how to protest against policies of political leaders, while still supporting the servicemen and women who follow orders and defend us from who would destroy us and our way of life and freedom.

So I say to those who would refuse to accept a Certificate of Honor from the state of Georgia because they are being presented to Vietnam War-era veterans, please reconsider. Those who were there were treated badly when we came home, we were treated badly by the politicians in Washington who did not and would not support us like they should have back in the day. Now it is 50 years later and calmer minds with clearer thinking are doing their best to correct a terrible wrong done to all of us. I encourage you to accept the thanks of a grateful state and nation.

Thank you for your service to our nation. Thank you for doing your part to keep our country free and independent. May your God bless all of us and our nation.