

Dear American Warrior:

Thank you for your service to our country and for your willingness to put your life on the line.

I saw combat in the Vietnam War. Since I am also a returned combat soldier, I know you have seen things, experienced things and done things that most people in the America to which you will return will never be able to understand.

Returning home will puzzle you. Nothing will ever be the same. This is part of the burden and the blessing we warriors bear.

We speak a language that only other warriors can truly understand. Memories and dreams will visit us for the rest of our lives. Our wounds may heal, but our scars will remain forever.

The protected America to which you return will never be able to comprehend what you have done for them. With the exception of the people who were directly touched by the attack on September 11th, American civilians do not understand war. You and I do not want them to know what we have had to learn.

We have seen the effects of war's savagery in the faces of small children. We do not want to have to see American children wear those same, sad faces.

When you return to our America, I urge you be patient with our protected countrymen. If they jest at your scars and belittle your sacrifice, it is because they have never felt a wound. They have no concept as to how much they are in your debt.

As a warrior, you are blessed. You now understand the fragility of life. You know that each mundane moment is filled with miracles. Not knowing if each day or moment would be our last, we learned in combat to appreciate each moment and to savor every simple pleasure.

You deeply understand the concept of selfless sacrifice, of total commitment to something more important than self. You know a vintage of love that comes from a willingness to lay down your life for your friends. You have watched them do as much for you. Most people never receive this wisdom.

You comprehend friendship in dimensions unfathomed by those who have not received the sacrament of battle. Our comrades, living and dead, more brothers than our own brothers, will live within us for all time. Not every one here will understand.

When you return to America from your foreign war, you will begin to understand that we are aliens in our own land. We are travelers come home from far-flung destinations, poor in substance, rich in deepest understanding.

You must never forget this wisdom. You must never deny nor denigrate it. You and I and the very few like us, have had the high honor to have served at the very sharpest point of the spear.

We know that war must never be invoked for light and transient reasons. We understand that the only acceptable goal of war is victory. We know too well, that the road to victory is paved with blood and tears.

Thank you for your service, courage and sacrifice - and welcome home.

Welcome to our warrior band.

We extend to you our hearts and hands from a thousand battlefields.

The Veteran who composed this Welcome Home letter for service men and women returning from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) served two tours of duty as an Infantryman in Vietnam.

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