Today is *National Vietnam War Veterans Day*—the day our nation observes

every year on March 29 to thank and honor our nation’s Vietnam War veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the Vietnam War occurred from November 1, 1955, to April 30, 1975. America initially served as military advisors to South Vietnam in its defense against communist-backed North Vietnam but began its military involvement in the Vietnam War in February 1961.

More than nine million Americans served in the United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam War. Of this total, 2.7 million served in Southeast Asia, where more than 300,000 American service members were injured, and 58,318 killed in action—including 399 from New Mexico. More than 1,500 Americans are still listed as missing in action—including 12 from New Mexico. There are about six million Vietnam War-era veterans alive in America. About 600,000 are those that served in-theater.

Regardless of which side you fall on in the view of the Vietnam War, what’s important to remember is this: Those who served answered the call of duty when our country came calling for military service. Southeast Asia was on the verge of being overrun by Communist forces, and America’s leadership deemed it imperative to stop this spread. The dense, humid jungles of Vietnam and Southeast Asia were a kill-or-be-killed environment, one in which each of our service members were dependent on one another for survival. They served with bravery and a sense of duty for each other.

Unfortunately, we cannot erase the unwelcoming reception many of our returning service members received upon returning home from their service in the Vietnam War. Time is still healing these wounds…time has also allowed us to view our Vietnam veterans as honorable men and women who, regardless of the political firestorm back here at home, had a job to do thousands of miles from home. They were soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guard members—patriots, who swore upon enlisting or being drafted to serve to the best of their abilities. They followed orders and looked out for one another. On National Vietnam War Veterans Day, our country should always honor these brave men and women for this, and for their service for our country.

To New Mexico’s Vietnam War veterans…*Welcome Home.*

Sonya L. Smith

*Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Department of Veterans Services
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