



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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**Contact:
Mokie Porter
301-996-0901**

A Letter to All on the Frontlines in the Battle Against COVID-19

In the midst of this pandemic, one the likes of which we have never before seen, we, as veterans, are transported back to memories of our service during the Vietnam War, the last time America witnessed this shocking loss of life. Although the environment and circumstances of our war are not precisely the same as yours, we see a direct correlation to the experiences, conditions, and fallout that we endured from our time in the “trenches.” We know from our wartime experiences the feelings of social isolation; little contact with family; the endless, incoming casualties; the stressful anxiety of making triage decisions; and the frustration of lacking critical medical equipment and personal safety items.

We remember the sadness of our hearts in not having the time to do all we wanted to do for the patients in our care. We see on your faces and hear in your voices the profound weight and sense of grief that you carry. We know that, along with these feelings, you have the added fear and threat of dealing with this unpredictable virus and the burden of potentially exposing family and friends.

We were not prepared for our war, just as you are facing situations unlike any you have experienced before. The daily chaos, anxiety, and stress of the shifts you work can be overwhelming at times with patients wherever you turn, all of whom need your care and attention. You are running a marathon with no finish line in sight, even though you are running as fast as you can.

Your coworkers will be with you forever as you are sharing something that no one else will ever truly understand. This may well be the most intense experience of your life. This *will* change your life. Don't forget to take care of each other, because you have each other. However, when all is said and done, on the other side of this national crisis, you need to pause, reflect, and get in touch with yourself. We spent too many years after we came home from the war dealing with the denial of our feelings and memories.

One of the legacies of the Vietnam War is that society now accepts Post-traumatic Stress as a natural reaction to abnormal events. We discovered the importance of seeking professional help to explore the emotional residue created by our war. We had to take a deep dive into our feelings and search our souls in order to heal ourselves. We know this path—it is a life-long journey. Your loved ones are suffering and sacrificing in this fight. Don't forget to include them in this process. Family and friends are your first line of support and are critical to healing.

We write this letter because we believe we share a commonality of serving our nation in a time of uncertainty and need. You are the very essence of what make America great. Your courage, determination, strength, and selfless sacrifice give us hope. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all. We salute you. You are not alone. We stand with you.

Chuck Byers, BSN
Chair, VVA Veterans Health
Committee
U.S. Army Combat Medic RVN 67-68
Arizona

Kate O'Hare-Palmer, RN, RD
U.S. Army Nurse Corps
Vietnam (1968-1969)
National Chair of the VVA Women
Veterans Committee
California

Marsha Tansey Four, RN
U.S. Army Nurse Corps
Vietnam 1969-1970
Special Advisor to the VVA National
President
Immediate Past National Vice
President, VVA
Pennsylvania

Dr. Linda Spoonster Schwartz, RN,
MSN, DrPH FAAN
U.S. Air Force Nurse Corps (1968-
1986)
Special Advisor to the VVA National
President
Connecticut

Dr. Thomas C. Hall, PhD
U.S. Army
Vietnam 68-71
National Chair
VVA PTSD Committee
Missouri

Rick Weidman,
Executive Director for Policy and
Government Affairs
Vietnam Veterans of America
U.S. Army Combat Medic RVN 1969
Maryland

Postscript:

It is important to know that this letter was a spontaneous effort by a group of Vietnam veterans deeply touched by your videos, the news reports, and daily body counts. They cannot be in the trenches this time, so they looked for a way to help. The sentiments expressed in this letter reflect the thoughts and feelings of our many of our members. As a New Yorker, there is so much more that could be said. Most importantly, I want to thank you all. As stated in the letter, we stand with you now and in the future. We are all in this together. Be safe out there!

--John Rowan, National President, Vietnam Veterans of America, U.S. Air Force