

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

Each of us holds unique sensitivities that molded us. For me, the month of May makes me reflect on family friends, and those memories of generations that have come and gone. Memorial Day caps a month of reflection for me, because I remember especially those family members from my family and my wife's family who have served in the military. My personal sensitivities also reflect back to a May in 1972, when I returned from my first Southeast Asia trip. As our military transport touched down at Travis AFB, my team looked forward our bus ride to San Francisco airport, and boarding a commercial airplane to our home base in Illinois. Inside the "customs hall" briefing area, the briefer told those of us bound for the SFO airport we would be required to change into civilian clothes in order to board a commercial flight. We had heard about the protests outside the Travis gate, but we had no idea that wearing a military uniform was a bad thing. Neither did we understand our ill treatment and sometime threats of violence by the anti-war protestors. Over the next couple of years on trips in and out of Vietnam, I saw this scenario replayed many times. For many of us who are Vietnam veterans there are individual sensitivities that cannot be forgotten. This year, marks the 50th year since significant U.S. military operations began in Vietnam. May 9, 2015, will mark the date for a National Commemorative marking the service of the military members who served this country during the Vietnam war. Vietnam marks the last military conflict in which our government used a draft to provide fighting manpower. Unlike today's "all-volunteer" military force, many Vietnam service members were drafted into the Army and Marines and these draftees took the brunt of many anti-war protests when they returned home. Over the years, some people have attempted to fix this circumstance. For many of us, however, there still remains many very personal sensitivities. My sensitivities re-surfaced recently when I read the accounts of the military funerals for two Air Force Vietnam era flyers who were recently interned in Arlington National Cemetery. Major James E. Sizemore and Major Howard Andre Jr. had been listed as "missing-in-action" since July 8, 1969. On a mission in Laos in support of special operations forces the flyers' A-26A was downed deep in an area where American forces

were not supposed to be operating. Over the years, the two airmen remained listed as MIA. After 43 years, their remains were finally recovered, identified, and repatriated. The two returning heroes were to be honored with a burial with full military honors in Arlington. One problem..... the current government would not provide for a aircraft flyover. The administration cited funding issues as the reason. In order to set the record straight some retired military flyers got permission and funded a memorial flyover after securing the proper over-flight clearances. The funeral and flyover honoring these long-missing airmen went off flawlessly. Military people took care of military people.

You bet-- we are sensitive! Military service is a bond that protestors outside the gate at Travis in 1972 or bureaucrats behind a desks in Washington today just don't understand. At times, "welcome home" just doesn't cut it! It just happens to be one of my sensitivities.

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