So, "What Does Being a Veteran" mean to me?

When I was in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War, selfless service was an ethics my leaders continually emphasized. When it was my turn to lead, I, too, emphasized selfless service. I served for six and 1/2 years as a commissioned officer, and was proud to do so. Being a veteran has left me with a sense of having invested in my country where I was born and raised.

It means extreme sacrifice by myself and my family. It means that families sacrifice as much if not more along this journey and many times are shunned in the communities for which we live and work. It means families never get the recognition for their support and many times don't receive the same assistance that the veteran receives. It means that I still to this day get major goose bumps on opening day at sports games when the military fly-over by takes place and the national anthem is sung. It means I take it seriously when I fly the American flag outside of my home on the 4th of July and Memorial Day. It means even though my body is riddled with multiple problems, aches, and pains, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. Why, because I deeply love this country of ours and I am damn proud of it.

Our past, present, and future military members and all the sacrifices that have been made by them and their families share in this great country. The freedoms for which all of us who are privileged enough to have and for which so many have made the ultimate sacrifice will live on in their honor.

It means Honor, Sacrifice, Pride, Character.

As I further reflect on what being a Veteran means to me, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and pride. I am grateful for the men and women that came before me, those that came after, and those that are still serving today. This gratitude extends not only to fellow Veterans, but also to the friends and family who sacrificed, endured,

and patiently waited while their loved ones served. I am also proud of the fact that I am one of so many that answered our country's call and put on the uniform of the greatest military on earth.

I was taught pride in my country and our nation's flag. Being a Veteran is an investment into personal character. It helped to develop who I am and what I wanted to strive for in the military and civilian life. Being a Veteran taught me the value of service. There is no better title than that of "Veteran." It means the world to me and has helped me to share my soldier ethics in the civilian workforce and society at-large.

Being a Veteran is the true embodiment of sacrifice. It is a sacrifice of time with one's family, missed birthdays with family, spending holidays in remote and dangerous locations, suffering the mental and physical pains that come with that sacrifice, but still being willing to do it all over again.

It is an honor to serve. Veterans serve in honor of our country, those who served with us and before us, those who didn't come home, and those haunted by the memories of fierce battle. The word "Veteran" is the past tense of having served in the United States of America. The title comes only after a proactive commitment to enduring courage. Before one becomes a Veteran, one must first have to step up to the plate, knowing one may fight and die in the service of this great country.

That's what it means to be a Veteran!

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