

Dear Dad, I won't forget

by Drew Zahn

My father is a U.S. Navy veteran.

Like many of the men who served in the Vietnam era, he returned from overseas with far too little recognition for the sacrifices he made in service to his country and to his children. Many of our Vietnam vets, in fact, speak very little of those days.

My father, however, had another reason not to tell even his family about the details of his service. For his work was classified. He referred to it only by the code name given to his unit, a rather funny moniker, calling himself a "Lightning Fast Chicken Plucker."

Only when I was 10 years old was his work finally declassified and I learned "Lightning Fast Chicken Plucker" meant an enemy code interceptor and breaker.

But by then, memories of the Vietnam era were fading. Too few people even knew my Dad had been in the military, that by relaying intercepted intelligence to the U.S. Navy, he had likely saved the lives of their fathers, brothers, and sons. Too few people knew; fewer thanked him; fewer yet saluted him, and Veteran's Day in my hometown became a day to honor the old heroes of World War II, while my Vietnam Dad silently watched the parades go by.

But this isn't a column specifically about Vietnam. It's about not forgetting. Not forgetting Veteran's Day. Not forgetting the men and women who may not have died in service to you and me, but who do bear the scars – some seen, some unseen – who gave years of their lives not for themselves, but for others.

So, Dad ... and to my uncles and grandfather, to my neighbors

whose names and sacrifices I may not even know ... thank you for your service. My life is made better today in countless ways that only God above could know ... because of you. And even if others forget, I remember. And I'm grateful.

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