A Deserved Day of Remembrance and Recognition: Honoring Vietnam Veterans

By Brooke Oleen Tieperman

I am privileged to have been raised in America's heartland—just miles from Fort Riley, Kan.—and to have a Vietnam veteran as a father.

The sound and feelings of freedom were always close to home. They still are for my little family and me now living in Denver. We have the Air Force and Army within arms' reach, which provide reassurance and positive impacts for us, surrounding communities and the state.

Others may relate sharing similar perspectives or draw from their own life experiences in measuring their sense of freedom and the privileges we share in the U.S.

Today we've learned to recognize and honor our soldiers and their families. They sacrificed and go to battle for the rest of us to protect and promote our freedoms and sense of security—at home and abroad.

Companies both large and small work to hire veterans because it makes sense, is good for business and integrates back in to society where they belong and can continue to contribute. Leadership, accountability, teamwork and grit are just a few skills veterans bring to the workforce as they have experienced these qualities and honed them first-hand. Veterans' groups and other organizations have made it their mission to help veterans with post-war physical and emotional wounds and rehabilitation.

Yet, in the early 1970s during the Vietnam War, this wasn't the case because of political differences and a draft. When soldiers were drafted or chose to enlist (like my dad), they did what they had to do and endured with their families to promote freedom—something I've come to better understand and appreciate.

Nearly 3 million Americans served in Vietnam and more than 58,000 service men and women made the ultimate sacrifice. For the most part, those who returned were not publicly welcomed home at airports, thanked on the streets even understood by fellow citizens and the rest of the nation. I believe one would have to serve to know such reality. Some may have been more fortunate, like my dad, to come home to a job on a family farm, use the GI bill to earn a master’s degree then go on to law school before opening a private practice.

But the stress, rigor, memories and effects of war are as individual as these individuals themselves—and the same for those who have served after them. It is our duty to assist, respect and honor all service members, veterans and their families, including Vietnam veterans who have more than proved themselves deserving of a special day of remembrance and recognition.

As part of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration, 41 states and Puerto Rico have enacted legislation or passed resolutions recognizing those warriors who stood strong when they were needed and answered the call when they were called.

The 13-year recognition which began in 2012 is commemorated through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense designating March 29 as Vietnam Veterans Day—based upon the date the last combat troop left Vietnam and last prisoners of war held in North Vietnam arrived on American soil.
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Special recognition continues to occur across America, as nearly 90 percent of Vietnam veterans who survived are still living. Commemorative lapel pins for those who served are being presented to Vietnam veterans during public events held in their communities, with accompanying remarks reflecting the nation’s thanks for their service and sacrifice.

NCSL’s Task Force on Military and Veterans Affairs spurs military and veterans’ affairs research and programming to its vigilant efforts to support and promote veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice for our country.

Today I am once again recognizing my dad, Kent Oleen, pictured in An Loc South Vietnam, in 1969, and all Vietnam who honorably served as defenders and promoters of freedom during the Vietnam War and era. I would encourage others to make a visit, a phone call, or send a message thanking our Vietnam veterans and their families. It will be a gesture worth giving and one remembered.

For more on Vietnam Veterans Day recognitions, please see the links and information here:

- U.S. Vietnam War Commemoration
- NCSL’s Vietnam Veterans Day Legislation and Statutes
- This blog from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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