

We are thankful for veterans in November, too

By **JOHN LIVINGSTON**

November 11 is Veterans Day. Begun in 1920 as Armistice Day, to mark the end of World War I, it is set aside to recognize that the United States depends on its military veterans both for its existence and its continued security. -Ed.

Two Pike Place Market veterans – from two different eras and with different experiences – have one thing in common: both are glad to have served their country when they were called.

Emigdio Ramos is proud to have served his country in the Army. He was wounded while training for the Vietnam conflict. But Ramos, a

member of the Pike Market Senior Center, remained in the Army as a personnel specialist.

Ramos is just as proud of his service as he is of his son, Emigdio Ramos III (his dad calls him "Triple" or "Tres"). His son realized Ramos's dream of becoming a helicopter pilot and recently left the Air Force after serving in combat in the Persian Gulf.

"Helicopter" is the word that got Ramos off the farm in Texas and into the Army.

"I came from a family of 14 – eight girls and six boys in Otine, Texas – near Gonzalez. The Army recruiters were always after us," he said. "One day, in 1959, I was driving a John Deere tractor and this recruiter jumped in front

of me. He had a frosty bottle of root beer in his hand."

Then came the recruiting pitch.

"He said, 'You're driving a sophisticated machine. Why don't you become a helicopter pilot?'" Ramos recalled. "I was excited, my father was excited, but my mother was the opposite. I was every bit of 19. I had never been off the farm"

The next thing he knew, he was in basic training in Fort Carson, Col. But the dream of being a helicopter pilot would have to wait, even though Ramos was named an outstanding recruit at basic training.

"They said my grades in were not good enough to qualify me for helicopter school – but they wanted me to become an advisor," he said. "They also wanted me to spend weekends training on a .50 caliber machine gun. I couldn't get the logic between being an *advisor* and the machine gun training. What did a Chicano on a farm know about being an *advisor*? But I was a soldier and I followed orders."

Before Ramos could be shipped overseas to find out, a training accident intervened, and kept him from finding out. It also left him with permanent injuries.

"We were training at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds (for artillery and other weapons) and our sergeant led us into a restricted area. We

were not supposed to be there, but we were soldiers and we didn't ask questions," Ramos said. "Something came flying through the air. The next thing I knew, I had a severe concussion, a broken rotator cuff and a ruptured spleen. I wound up in Walter Reed Army Hospital for six months."

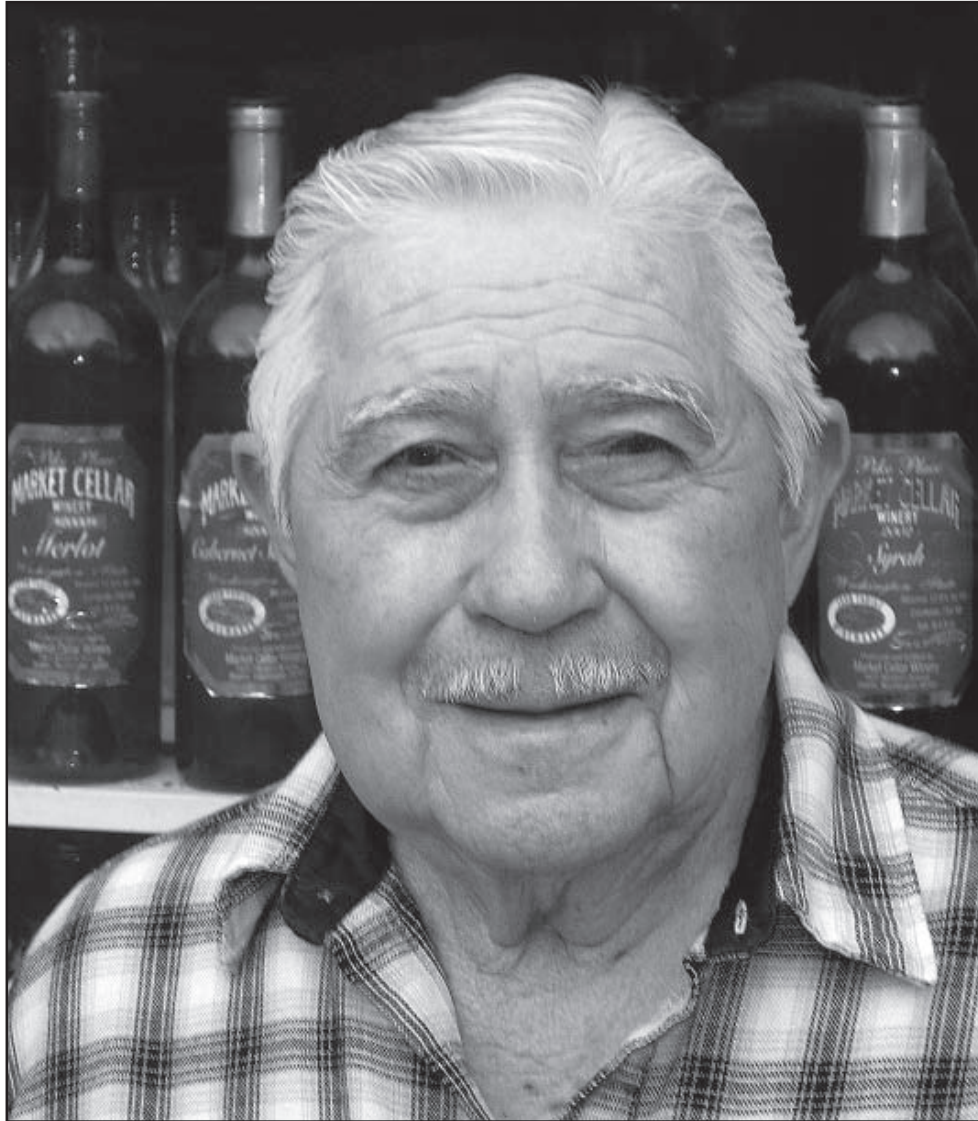
When he recovered from his injuries, Ramos found himself serving the rest of his time in the Army in a clerical role.

"I didn't go over there (to Viet Nam). It was such a dumb thing," Ramos said. "But what I did do was fascinating. I was a personnel specialist for Nike and Hercules Missile batteries – to defend Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. The Cuban Missile Crisis happened at that time."

Ramos's brothers went to Vietnam, and lived through hell.

"My brother Jose was exposed to so much Agent Orange that his face became disfigured. He works at night because he doesn't want to be seen during the day," Ramos said. "Another brother, Isidoro, was a Prisoner of War for seven months. And another of my brothers was in transportation over there. Part of Juan's job was to put bodies in body bags. Every now and then there were two left legs in the bags. He hasn't done well since getting out."

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