

# RW Herman on his second book, surviving Vietnam and climbing the ladder in the Navy

By [Marissa Mahoney](#) on Thursday, November 10, 2022



RW Herman

The year is 1965 and there's something called a "small conflict" happening in Vietnam. RW Herman – a former U.S. Navy Commander-turned-author – was one of the first to be selected in the draft.

"It was a time of turmoil. Everybody knows it's as the Vietnam War. I was 19 years old and a sophomore at the University of Minnesota. Everything's going along just fine. Then one day, on

Dec. 7th, 1965, I got my draft

notice," Herman recalled. "That was my rude awakening. I wasn't really against the military, but I didn't think I'd be a great fit for the Army, so I took the draft notice I received and went to my recruiter. I joined the Navy that day. I never opened the letter."

This very memory inspired Herman to write his first book, "The Unopened Letter," which gives readers front-row seats to the very early days of the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1969. Like Herman, many others who received draft notices didn't open the letter, but they still answered the call that they were needed.

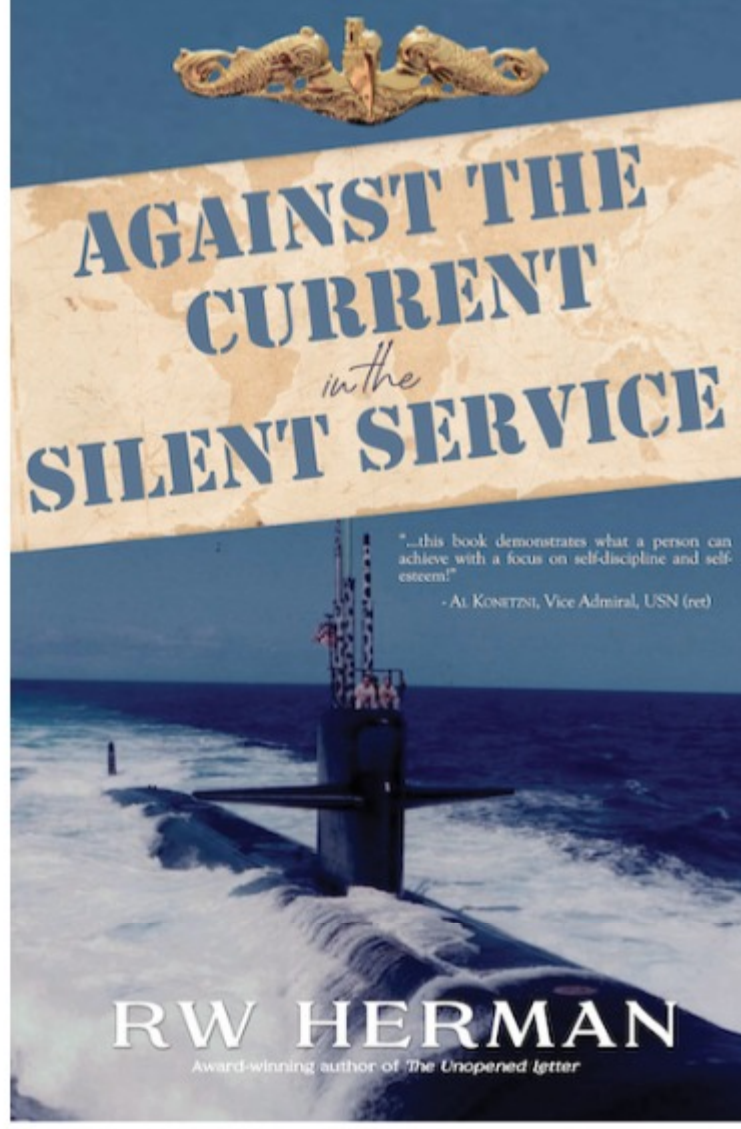
"Everybody wanted to support the country. Everybody wanted to support the efforts of keeping America safe and all that. But nobody wanted their kids to go because they're tired of war," Herman said.

For four years, Herman served in the Navy training Marines for combat in Vietnam. He prepared the men who'd go into battle on the USS Cambria sailing the Atlantic Ocean. Fifty years later, he found himself inspired to write "The Unopened Letter" after discovering a box filled with letters he wrote to his mother during this time period.

After his first stint in the Navy, he returned to the States to resume his education, but by 1970, he was thrust into the middle of the infamous Vietnam War student protests.

"I go to class at the University of Minnesota and all these protesters are trying to shut down university," Herman shared. "And I held up my ID card and said 'No, I did my time. I served my country. I want my education.' They never physically harmed me or stopped me, but I got spit on, I was called baby killer, all that stuff, because I served my country. It was just a sign of the times."

Herman and his then-wife decided to leave Minnesota for a clean break. He found himself in social work, but after talking to a cousin, realized his true dream in life – becoming a commissioned officer of the Navy. His mission to achieve this serves as the backbone of Herman's second book, "Against the Current in the Silent Service," which continues his story from the first book.



Book cover

"One of my friends said, 'You're being selfish if you don't share the rest of your story,' so I wrote the second book and I'm really glad I did because I think it's a good book," Herman said. "One of things I want people to realize when I give my book signings is that it sounds like it's going to be for military people, but actually you can compare it very easily to the civilian world, too. You have your successes and your failures, your ups and downs, your love lost and love gained. Life is life — it's how you deal with it."

Herman is quick to point out that it's far from easy becoming a commissioned officer. His own journey took seven years once he in the early '70s.

"The first part of my book is about what I have to do, what I am willing to sacrifice, to reach my dream and achieve my goals," Herman explained. "Like I said, it's not easy. And then when I do reach my goal, what happens if this dream all of a sudden turns into a nightmare?"

It's always up for interpretation, but it doesn't look like his life evolved disastrously by choosing the career he always dreamed of. In fact, Herman retired 30 years later as the senior-most senior submarine communications officer in the Navy.

He's once again challenging himself, but this time as an author. Herman profusely praises his editor, Emily Carmain of Noteworthy Editing Services, for turning the stories in his head into a real, tangible book series. He also credits Mark and Marie Fenn of Giro di Mondo for locally publishing "The Unopened Letter" and "Against the Current."

"I'm blessed I won the 2021 award from Florida Authors and Publishing Association for Best Memoir of the Year. That was really great. But still, more rewarding than that was the emails I got from the veterans saying they enjoyed the book," Herman said.

The retired commander still struggles with considering himself an author, but like so many before him, he's been bitten by the writing bug. While he acknowledges how hard it would be to write subsequent books, he can't help but ponder what those stories my hold.

"I took a right turn at the fork in the road in 1972 and went back to the Navy. What if I had taken a left turn? I had a very good offer in 1972 to do something else," Herman mused. "What if I had taken that? What would my life have been like? Maybe I'll write a book about this type of thing."

Herman coyly left the News-Leader hanging on that front, but you can speak to the author yourself at a signing event in the Book Loft on Nov. 12 from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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