

# “Education on Life”

Ken of Rotterdam was in the Navy during the Vietnam War, stationed on the USS Forrestal, an aircraft carrier. Lt. John McCain, now a U.S. Senator, was stationed on the same vessel.

“McCain always had a grin from ear to ear, like he was going out to play for the day,” Ken remembered.

Ken said he always wanted to be in the Navy because he wanted to travel. He served from 1964 to 1967 and was a boatswain’s mate.

In 1967, the Forrestal off the coast of Vietnam had an electrical anomaly and a Zuni rocket discharged. A fire broke out and 134 sailors were killed. The fire took place 50 years ago as of July 2017. Ken remembered seeing the deck of the ship lined with the bodies of those killed in the fire. “I couldn’t believe how many.”

“On anniversaries, I think about what happened,” Ken added. He said his time in the Vietnam War was like a bad dream but said it was safer than being in the jungle.

When he came home, he said he experienced some shell shock, where his body would tense up at the sound of a balloon popping or dropped silverware.

Ken, a former WMHT employee, said he would sum up his thoughts on Vietnam as it being an Education on Life. “My 20-year-old self thought we were there for a reason. Now, I think it was foolish.”

—Ken, Rotterdam