

Personal Statement for the Nomination of
Lieutenant (Retired) Jessie K. Kitchens, USN

I've known Lieutenant Jessie Kitchens my whole life; he is my uncle and someone who really showed me true pride in being an Aviation Boatswain's Mate. It is not only our relation to each other as uncle and niece that he earn my respect, but he is also the most dedicated AB I know.

It is easy to be able to nominate Jess as Living Legend of an association he has come to treasure. His love for the AB community started back in 1960 when he joined the Navy and figured out that he would rather not be doing much else (his words, not mine). He climbed the enlisted ranks, stationed on the USS FORRESTAL (CV-59), Jess fought the infamous raging fire alongside his shipmates on July 29, 1967. Then, even as a second class, his shipmates remember him as being a true mentor and someone who they could look up to. Ronald Ruthenberg, an airman stationed with Jess on the USS FORRESTAL, remembers Jess:

"I first met Jess in March of 1967 aboard the USS FORRESTAL, prior to our leaving for the West-Pac cruise. I was an E-3 greenie, the Jet Blast Deflector (JBD) operator on Catapult 3 and Jess was an ABE2, the Assistant Catapult Captain on Catapult 3.

Since A Division did all the JBD maintenance I had a lot of free time. Jess took me under his wing and I became his 'gopher.' Beside going for tools and holding the flashlight, he also taught me what and why we were performing these tasks. Because of Jess I was able to learn catapults.

On July 29, 1967, we had a tragic fire that killed 134 of our shipmates. The fire started in our area and Jess, among others, heroically fought the fire. Despite massive explosions and fire, Jess continued to risk his life battling the fire. He continued to fight the fire for many long hours until it was brought under control and put out.

After returning to Portsmouth, Virginia for repairs Jess continued teaching me about catapults and arresting gear. In addition I would go home with him and he would help me study for the third class exam. Jess always made clear the difference between working hours and liberty.

I made ABE3 in the first increment and Jess made first class. He later left the ship for a new duty station. I never forgot his lessons and later made ABE2 and was the Assistant Catapult Captain on catapult 3. I owe much of my

success to a true living legend and my mentor, Jessie Kitchens."

Jess took his motivation for teaching others about being an ABE to NATTC Lakehurst, New Jersey after leaving the USS FORRESTAL. He realized that he not only wanted to change the community by leading as a technical mentor but he also wanted to become a much bigger part of the picture; Jess climbed into the officer ranks and took on the role as a Chief Warrant Officer, working as the USS CORAL SEA (CV-43) and the USS ENTERPRISE (CVN-65) Catapult and Arresting Gear Maintenance Officer. Typical of his mentality (even still today) to want more and more of any opportunity, he later put on Lieutenant and went back to the USS CORAL SEA after his shore time. He then went back to NATTC Lakehurst to, once again, pass on the knowledge of his awesome twenty years of service.

Although Jess had retired from the Navy he never truly let the excitement he had for being an AB escape from his heart. Speaking as an ABE who learns from him still, his never ending dedication to the Aviation Boatswain's Mate Association and his shipmates lingers with the newest and oldest of those in our community. Yearly, he is eager to attend the Association functions: the Spring Jamboree and the Symposium. He and his wife, Dawn Julene, traveled to attend the USS FORRESTAL reunion and are always looking for any opportunity to meet up with old shipmates. Alongside Jess through most of his active duty Naval career and now as he stays involved as a retiree, Dawn Julene is proud:

"Although he excels at all that he endeavors, Jess has never sought personal recognition. In fact, when he started his recycling business in 1996, he said he didn't want the business to carry his name, so 'Homestead Metals' was chosen because it started in the garage of our home. He knew several electrical contractors with an accumulation of scrap wire that he offered to buy; he guaranteed next day cash. He hand stripped the wire and then drove it to Dallas in three 55-gallon drums, set in the back of his half-ton pickup. Now, he regularly sends loads weighing in excess of 30,000 pounds each, some transported in semi-trailers.

Jess' favorite scripture is *I John 3:17*: 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?' He feels very blessed with two successful business ventures and very often anonymously donates computers as well as monetary gifts to individuals in the community that are deserving or needy."

Keeping true to his giving manner, Jess, without hesitation, gives his time and money to others who need it most. In his civilian community he offers his time to volunteer services for liter pick-up, senior citizens assistance, VFW posts, and his church. He also sponsors local sports teams and events and chairs his county's Veterans Affairs Board. Beyond this, he stays actively involved in his AB community as well: he is a life member of the USS FORRESTAL Association and a life member of the Aviation Boatswain's Mate Association along side Dawn Julene. For two years straight Jess gave \$4,500, in total, to the ABMA Scholarship Fund and, still, more to the various raffles in order to support the association.

Jess' love for his Navy and AB family epitomizes what a Living Legend is all about. His almost 50 years of obvious commitment and attentive mentorship toward the AB community cannot be summarized in a nomination, only seen in his eyes when he tells "sea stories," talks to his fellow retirees, or measures up to those who follow behind his legendary trail. This nomination is for a man who I love as an uncle and who I respect as a LEGEND; a man who has made Aviation Boatswain's Mates a cherished part of my life, past and present AB's, and his own.

ABMA Living Legend 2009 Nomination For:
Lieutenant (Retired) Jessie Kitchens

Submitted By:
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Nomination Eligibility:

- Served on active duty as an Aviation Boatswain's Mate from December 12, 1960 to June 30, 1981.
- Performed service(s) which impacted the AB community and Naval service (statements included in nomination).
- Was honorably retired on June 30, 1981.

Biography of Service:

- 1960-1961- RTC San Diego, CA
 - SR-ABEAR
- 1961-1965- USS HANCOCK (CV/CVA-19)
 - ABEAN-ABE3
- 1965-1967- NAEC Philadelphia, PA
 - ABE3-ABE2
- 1967-1968- USS FORRESTAL (CV-59)
 - ABE2-ABE1
- 1968-1969- NATTC Lakehurst, NJ
 - ABE1
- 1970-1971- USS CORAL SEA (CV-43)
 - ABE1-CW01
 - Assistant Catapult and Arresting Gear Maintenance Officer
- 1972-1974- USS ENTERPRISE (CVN-65)
 - CW01-CW02
 - Catapult and Arresting Gear Maintenance Officer
- 1974-1976- NAS Moffett Field, CA
 - CW02-CW03
 - Crash/Fire Division Officer
 - Assistant Security Officer
- 1976-1978- USS CORAL SEA (CV-43)
 - CW03-LTJG
 - Catapult and Arresting Gear Maintenance Officer
- 1978-1980- VP-31
 - LTJG-LT
 - Line Division Officer (Maintenance Dept.)
 - Human Resources Officer
 - Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor
- 1980-1981- NATTC Lakehurst, NJ
 - LT-Retirement
 - AB School Department Officer/ Director

Chronology of Rank:

- December 1960- June 1971- Enlisted (E-1 to E-7)
- July 1971- June 1973- Warrant Officer (CWO1 to CWO3)
- July 1973- June 1981- Officer (LTJG to LT)

Awards Received:

MILITARY:

- Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
- National Defense Service Medal
- Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal w/device
- Vietnam Service Medal (15 Awards)
- Navy Commendation Medal
- Navy Unit Commendation
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Good Conduct Award (2)

CIVILIAN:

- Won first place in the entire state of TEXAS for liter pickup campaign and community recycling efforts as a member of "Keep Texas Beautiful."

Organizations Currently Involved In:

- Past Chairman of the Montague County Veterans Affairs Board
- Sponsors a little league baseball team in Nocona, TX
- Sponsors the Nocona, TX Chisholm Trail Rodeo
- Gives assistance to the Nocona Senior Citizens Center
- Member of VFW posts in both Bowie and Gainesville, TX
- Active member of Bonita Baptist Church
- Member of the Patriot Guard Riders
- Life member of the USS FORRESTAL Association
- Life member of the Aviation Boatswain's Mate Association
- Member of Keep Texas Beautiful

Outstanding Accomplishments During Naval Career:

- Actively involved in the flight deck fire onboard USS FORRESTAL on July 29, 1967
- As the Catapult and Arresting Gear Maintenance Officer onboard two aircraft carriers he:
 - Was responsible for the preventive maintenance, material readiness and safety of four catapults, five arresting gear engines, the visual landing aids equipment and hundreds of sailors
 - Received top grades on CNAP inspections
 - Reduced costs per catapult by maintaining availability
 - Responsible for initiating a change which resulted in the increase of the maximum number of F-14 arrestments per purchase cable from 150 to 350, thus reducing man hours and cost
 - Responsible for fleet wide corrective action on lubricant and wire rope cleaning fluid
 - Responsible for fleet wide change in the method of pouring arresting gear sockets after discovering why an unusually high incidence of pulled wire ends was occurring potentially saving a catastrophic accident within the Navy