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News Release #110-14

November 12, 2014

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Still serving after all these years

In mid-June of 1953, Jim Kight enlisted in the Marine Corps at age sixteen. Granted, his recruiter thought he was seventeen, but it was not uncommon during this time for young men to give themselves an extra year on paper to be allowed to join the military.

After basic training in Camp Lejeune, Kight came to Naval Air Station Pensacola in 1954 where he remembers standing sentry duty at the main gate. Thirteen years of enlisted service followed at multiple duty stations to include Parris Island, S.C., Camp Pendleton, Calif. and Okinawa Japan. In 1966 the young Marine received his commission and headed to Vietnam as an infantry officer. When asked to share one of his most important recollections of his time on active duty, he paused before recounting a solemn memory.

"In May of 1967, I had 40 guys in my platoon. We were headed up a hill and I lost five men that day, including my corpsman. He was treating me for gun-shot wounds to my leg and arm and had to push ahead to get to a Pfc. (private first class) who was in far more serious condition," he recounts. "That sticks with me, I was responsible for those men."

He soon transitioned into the Naval Aviation Observer (NAO) School where he trained and subsequently flew numerous missions in the OV-10 Bronco.

During his tours, he earned more than 20 Strike/Flight Air Medals and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. Arguably, his most notable recognition was an Individual Action Air Medal received for assisting in the rescue of a downed pilot shot down in Quang Tri Province, west of Dong Ha. Kight was also credited with the last combat flight in his squadron during the Vietnam Conflict in 1973.

"Just before the cease fire, we knew that they were going to shoot all their artillery at us, and we were going to shoot all ours at them. I wanted to be in the air when that happened, not on the ground," Kight remembers.

After retiring as an NAO instructor with 26 years active duty in 1979, the former Marine began work as a civil servant for the Navy. Currently, as the NETC N4 supply policy program manager, he is responsible for supply policy and oversight as well as maintaining administrative support for NETC headquarters supply system. If his 33 years of civil service are added to his active duty time, he is only one year shy of his goal of 60 years total combined service. When asked about retirement, Kight says that he has always been shooting for the 60 year mark. After that, he says he'll play it by ear.

"I'll retire when I can't do the job anymore, or I'm not having any fun," he says while chuckling. "There's camaraderie among veterans working in civil service. I think we gravitate toward these jobs because of the shared experience."

Retirement for Kight (whenever that comes) will offer more time to spend with his wife Dale, six children, and 13 grandchildren.

"I'd also love to visit the Scandinavian countries, specifically Sweden and Denmark," he said.

Isiah Long, the assisting contracting officer's representative, has worked with Kight for years. He says that it's impossible to sum up Kight's profound career in the confines of an article.

"Jim has undoubtedly had incredible influence on the countless men and women with whom he has served," said Long. "We are lucky to have a man of his caliber still serving after, what's soon to be, 60 remarkable years."

For additional information on the Naval Education and Training Command, visit the NETC website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

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Story by Lt.j.g. Mike Hathaway, Naval Education and Training Command
Public Affairs