

A Marine on USS *Forrestal*: The Fire's Aftermath

Jonnie Allen enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in June of 1964. He served on USS *Forrestal*, an aircraft carrier, in Vietnam as an administrative chief. On July 29, 1967, while conducting combat flight operations off the coast of Vietnam, a massive fire erupted on *Forrestal's* flight deck. The fire was ignited by jet fuel after a Zuni rocket accidentally fired and hit a plane. Upon impact, the main fuel tank, along with a 1,000-pound bomb, fell off the plane. When the fuel tank fell, it opened and the bomb exploded, causing a domino effect of explosions and fires from other ordnance. On the ship, 130 men lost their lives. Jonnie Allen was below deck, sitting at his desk when the fires began. There was even a period when he and others were trapped below deck. After the hatch was finally opened, Jonnie was tasked with what he describes as “damage control.” This included putting out fires, hunting for survivors, and the daunting task of recovering the dead.



Watch Jonnie Allen's oral history, in which he describes the “carnage” aboard *Forrestal*, what he saw and how he felt. The video is available on YouTube at:

<https://tinyurl.com/JonnieAllen> or you can click directly on this QR code from your smartphone or tablet (using either a QR reader app or your phone's camera).



Questions to consider:

1. What is the importance of oral histories? Why do we spend the time to speak with veterans about their experiences?
2. Is this a primary source or a secondary source? Why?
3. What was the main thing Jonnie remembers about the first person he found after the fire?
4. What kind of impact do you think this experience had on Jonnie and why?
5. How does he describe the scene at the ship's store?
6. What lessons do you think we can learn from hearing Jonnie's story about the aftermath of the fire?