

Firefighter Name: Tom Zielinski
Position: Engineer
Fire Department: Culver City FD
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- 1) What branch and unit were you in? *Navy Marine Machinist aboard USS Hector (AR-7)1970-1974 Active Duty, one year in Reserves.*
- 2) What was your highest rank? *E5.*
- 3) Are you still enlisted as a reservist or National Guard? *No.*
- 4) Why did you join the service? *Mom and Dad had been in the service, so it was something I was thinking about. The draft was going on at the time and, after I dropped below enough college units at Santa Monica City College, I figured I would sign up for what I wanted instead of getting drafted and assigned somewhere I didn't want to be. I got to pick the type of ship I wanted to be on and, since I had been taking Machine Technology and Industrial Arts in college, I wanted a ship with larger machines. The Hector had three machine shops and a foundry aboard.*
- 5) What did you like the most about being in? *Enjoyed working with my hands, liked the rate (position in military) that I had. We got to travel a lot in order to do repairs on ships. We got to go on liberty in lots of ports. The cooks on board were also tops. We kept winning cooking competitions, so it was a good time.*
- 6) What did you like the least? *Racial problems and drugs. At the time I was in, I didn't like the racial agitation because I liked discipline in the ranks. Drugs could impair judgment and you could end up with somebody letting a boiler blow up, sinking the ship. That was probably the biggest reason why I got out. I was going to train to be a hard-hat diver, but decided to get out when they started cutting the fleet size. Billets disappeared, which meant you could get stuck in a bad rate (job).*
- 7) What moment most defined your military experience? *Nothing in particular.*
- 8) What made you choose firefighting as a career? *When I got out of the Navy, I looked around at what I could do and the two choices were law enforcement or firefighting. I didn't really want to be a cop, so I chose firefighting. The military experience helped me get hired.*
- 9) What do you like the most about firefighting? *Stability, the fact that once you're in, you're in for good. Civil Service gives you pretty good job security. The fact you can go out and do something exciting. The camaraderie. The days off. That's why I've stayed for 30 years.*
- 10) What do you like least about firefighting? *In my case, not having taken promotional tests sooner, so that younger guys with less experience are over me. This only applies to a smaller department like ours, it probably wouldn't be true in a larger department like LA County or LA City. Policies that discriminate against people who have tattoos are limiting the recruits and excluding many from the military.*