

## **James Bond Stockdale**

Vice Admiral James Stockdale is a true hero. Few people have undergone the torture and hopeless circumstances that he has endured. He has endured, though, and come out a strong, tenacious leader. He served in the United States Navy for 37 years. On his third mission flying over Viet Nam, his fighter was shot down. He remained a prisoner in the infamous Hanoi Hilton POW facility for over seven and a half years. During that time he was tortured 15 times, thrown in solitary confinement (in total darkness) for 4 years and in leg irons for 2 years. Recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Secretary of the Navy established the Vice Admiral James Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership on his retirement from the Navy in 1979. He is one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the United States Navy.

James Bond Stockdale was born in Abingdon, Illinois in 1923. He was prominent in scholarship, music, and athletics as high school student and at Knox and Monmouth Colleges. During World War II he received an appointment to the United States Naval Academy. He graduated in 1946 and attended naval flight training school in Pensacola, Florida. He was accepted into the Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, Maryland where one of his classmates there was future Astronaut and US Senator John Glenn. During the mid 1960's, Stockdale flew fighter jets as a squadron commander over North Viet Nam.

On August 4, 1964, he was one of the U.S. pilots flying overhead during the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. On a mission over North Vietnam on September 9, 1965, Stockdale's jet was hit by anti-aircraft fire. He ejected safely from his jet, and parachuted into a small village where he was severely beaten and taken into custody. He was taken to the infamous Hoa Lo Prison, Hanoi, where he remained for the next seven and a half years. Stockdale was the senior naval service prisoner of war in the prison. Locked in leg irons in a bath stall, he was routinely tortured and beaten at least 15 times. During his captivity, Stockdale was considered to be a troublemaker by the Vietnamese.

As a senior ranking officer, Stockdale developed a policy of behavior for the POWs. The policy provided guidance on such things as propaganda broadcasts, bowing to guards, and unity, thwarting the "obedience" the Vietnamese tried to extract from the American captives. Though his captors held him, their relentless attempts to break his spirit never succeeded. Throughout his captivity, Stockdale's steadfast refusal to cooperate with the enemy kept alive the spirit of resistance in his fellow POWs. When told by his captors that he was to be paraded in public, Stockdale slit his scalp with a razor to purposely disfigure himself so that his captors could not use him as propaganda. When Stockdale heard that other prisoners were dying under the torture, he slit his wrists and told them that he preferred death to submission.

His citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor reads: "Stockdale...deliberately inflicted a near-mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. He was subsequently discovered and revived by the North Vietnamese who, convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the Prisoners of War." In

1973 James Stockdale was released from his captivity and the world learned of the brutality which he and many others faced. His overcoming story of tenacity won him admiration from military and civilians alike. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor and became Commander of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Wing of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

In 1977, he accepted the presidency of the Naval War College. He retired in 1979 as one of the most decorated servicemen in the history of the United States, receiving 26 combat decorations including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Distinguished Service Medals, four Silver Star Medals, and two Purple Hearts. He is the only three- or four-star officer in the history of the U.S. Navy to wear both aviator wings and the Congressional Medal of Honor. He retired from the Navy in 1979 due to his combat wounds. After retirement, he accepted the Presidency of The Citadel, in Charleston, South Carolina. He resigned in 1980 to join the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University in California.

In 1992 he ran for the Vice Presidency of the United States as an Independent with Ross Perot. Unfortunately, his single Vice Presidential debate revealed the toll the torture had taken on his body and many Americans were unaware of it until after the debate. In 1993 he was inducted into the Navy's Carrier Aviation Hall of Fame. He holds 11 honorary doctoral degrees. James Bond Stockdale's life is one of courage under extreme conditions that would break the average individual. He was able; however, to focus his will and determination to survive at all costs without betraying his principles and beliefs. His spirit is an inspiration to everyone who struggles with adversity in life.

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