

John McCain

United States Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) has a very colorful past. His is a story of courage in the face of disaster, torture and continuing physical pain. It is a story worth telling. Born August 29, 1936 in the Panama Canal Zone, he was a third generation Naval officer. Both his father and his grandfather were well-known four-star Admirals in the United States Navy. They had both served their country in wartime and John wanted to follow in their footsteps.

At the age of 17 he chose to apply for entrance to the US Naval Academy. After graduating from the Naval Academy, John trained to fly jets. He served for twenty-two years as an aviator. While serving on the US Forrestal Aircraft Carrier during his tour of duty in Vietnam, a disaster struck. John was in his plane on the flight deck when an errant missile from another aircraft fired and struck his fuel tanks. John's plane burst into flames. He managed to escape crawling over the nose. He could have gotten away, but turned to help a fellow flyer. Before John could reach the burning man, more bombs exploded on the flight deck blowing him back 10 feet. It took a full day to contain the flames in the Navy's worst non-combat related disaster. Many men were killed and injured.

When it was over, John could have gone home, but he volunteered to remain and was assigned to the US Orinasky. It was as fateful decision that would change his life forever. Perhaps his greatest test came just three months after the Forrestal disaster in 1967. He was going on his 23rd bombing run over Hanoi when he was shot down over Vietnam. The force of the ejection broke both of his arms and his leg. An angry mob beat and kicked him, breaking his shoulder and bayoneted him repeatedly. He became one of the most well-known prisoners housed in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." He was denied medical treatment for days and many of his fellow prisoners thought he was near death. They cared for him and he slowly recovered.

Torture and starvation became commonplace to his routine. He was suspended so often in solitary confinement (2 years) that to this day, he cannot lift his arms fully over his head. When his father, Admiral Jack McCain was appointed commander of all US forces in the Pacific, the Vietnamese offered to early release him as a propaganda ploy. But John refused citing the code of Prisoner of War (which states that they be released in their order of capture). He refused early release so many times, that his captors increased his torture. and beatings. He endured this suffering for over five and a half years (1967-1973).

The world watched as he walked off the airplane in 1973 carrying the returned Prisoners of War from the Vietnam War. His heroism inspired many. He worked hard in rehabilitation to be cleared to fly for the Navy again. Unfortunately as with many returning POW's, his marriage ended several years later. In 1980, he met and fell in love with Cindy Hensley in Phoenix and the two were married. He was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Purple Heart and Distinguished Flying Cross. He

retired as a Captain in 1981. His last service for the Navy was liaison to the US Senate. Here John acquired the desire to serve his country in a new way.

In 1982 he ran for US Representative from Arizona. John worked tirelessly to get elected. He campaigned door to door and outworked his five opponents to win the Republican Primary and later the US House seat in Congress. McCain came home every weekend and worked so well as a public servant that he was re-elected two years later. When the legendary Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater announced his retirement in 1986, John sought and won his Senate seat. In 1997, he was named one of the "25 Most Influential People in America" by Time magazine.

He ran unsuccessfully for the presidency in 2000, but didn't win the nomination. He returned to serve in the US Senate. Eight years later, John launched his second bid for the presidency. In early 2008 he was counted out as the Republican nominee by many in the press, but he overcame his critics and successfully won the nomination. After running a tireless campaign he was defeated by Barack Obama in the general election. He bowed out the night of the election loss with grace and returned to the US Senate, where he still serves. John McCain tells what he has learned about life and his upbringing in a famous Naval family in his autobiography "*Faith of My Fathers*," which spent 24 weeks on the New York Times "Best Sellers" list.

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