



## Faith of My Fathers

By John McCain  
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### Introduction

John McCain is one of the most admired leaders in the United States government, but his deeply-felt memoir is not a political one and ends before his election to Congress. With candor and ennobling power, McCain tells a story that, in the words of *Newsweek*, "makes the other presidential candidates look like pygmies."

John McCain learned about life and honor from his grandfather and father, both four-star admirals in the U.S. Navy. This is a memoir about their lives, their heroism, and the ways that sons are enriched and shaped by fathers. McCain's grandfather was one of the navy's greatest commanders, and led the strongest aircraft carrier force of the Third Fleet in key battles during World War II. McCain's father followed a similar path, equally distinguished by heroic service in the navy, as a submarine commander during World War II. He, too, rose to the rank of four-star general, making the McCains the first family

in American history to achieve that distinction.

John McCain faced the most difficult challenge of his life in Vietnam. A naval aviator, he was shot down over Hanoi in 1967 and was seriously injured. When Vietnamese military officers realized he was the son of a top commander, they offered McCain early release in an effort to embarrass the United States. Acting from a sense of honor taught to him by his father and the U.S. Naval Academy, McCain refused the offer. He was tortured, held in solitary confinement, and imprisoned for five and a half years.

**Faith of My Fathers** is about what McCain learned from his grandfather and father, and how their example enabled him to survive those hard years. It is a story of three imperfect men who faced adversity and emerged with their honor intact. Ultimately, *Faith of My Fathers* shows us, with great feeling and appreciation, what fathers give to their sons, and what endures.

### Questions for Discussion

1. John McCain and John Sidney McCain lived much of their childhoods without their fathers. However, even with this absence, their fathers became a major force and influence in their every day lives. How did this come to be?
2. According to McCain, an officer's honor is greatly defined by his obligation to the enlisted men he commands. How did this relationship between the officers and enlisted men influence the type of military career McCain, his father, and his grandfather had?
3. McCain writes that he "winces" at the racist overtones of his grandfather's comments on the Japanese during WWII, but believes that they only stem from a need to hate your enemy. Are you able to understand or distinguish a difference between racism and war-time hatred? How have these differences in sentiment and connotation affected society during WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and now the war in Iraq?
4. McCain describes in detail some of the hazing and rigorous structure imposed on the "plebes" at the Academy. How do you feel these practices prepared McCain for combat and later for his experiences as a POW?
5. McCain writes, "Communicating not only affirmed our humanity. It kept us alive." The prisoners had secret ways of contacting each other and found their only real strength came from each other. What does this say about human resilience? Do you think McCain would have been able to survive the camp had he been alone?
6. Throughout his story McCain mentions faith and its role in helping him not only survive his time as a POW but also in becoming a man his father and grandfather could be proud of. What different things did he need to have faith in to become the man he is today? When he writes, "... all I had left of my dignity was the faith of my fathers," to whom does "fathers" refer? How was he able to draw on his faith to survive his continual torture?
7. Towards the end of his story, McCain states that the United States was afflicted with an "identity crisis" after the Vietnam War. However, he goes on to say that "America's period of self-doubt" has ended. Do you agree with this statement? How would you define America's identity now? What do you think the largest factors in creating this identity are?

### About the Author

After a career in the U.S. Navy and two terms as a U.S. representative (1982-1986), John McCain was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1986 and re-elected in 1992 and 1998. He has seven children and four grandchildren. He and his wife, Cindy, reside in Phoenix.

Mark Salter has worked on Senator McCain's staff for ten years. Hired as a legislative assistant in 1989, he has served as the senator's administrative assistant since 1993. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia, with his wife, Diane, and their two daughters.