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# John S. McCain Sr.

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**John Sidney "Slew" McCain Sr.** (August 9, 1884 – September 6, 1945) was a **U.S. Navy admiral**. He held several command assignments during the **Pacific campaign** of **World War II**. McCain was a pioneer of aircraft carrier operations.<sup>[1]</sup> Serving in the **Pacific Ocean theater of World War II**, in 1942 he commanded all land-based air operations in support of the **Guadalcanal campaign**, and in 1944-45 he aggressively led the **Fast Carrier Task Force**. His operations off the **Philippines** and **Okinawa** and air strikes against **Formosa** and the **Japanese home islands** caused tremendous destruction of Japanese naval and air forces in the closing period of the war.<sup>[2]</sup> He died four days after the **formal Japanese surrender ceremony**.

Several of McCain's descendants have also graduated from the **United States Naval Academy**. He and his son, Admiral **John S. McCain Jr.** were the first father-son pair ever to achieve **four-star admiral** rank in the U.S. Navy. The latter's son is sitting **U.S. Senator** from **Arizona** and **2008 Republican presidential nominee** Navy Captain **John S. McCain III**, whose son, John S. McCain IV currently serves.

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## John S. McCain Sr.



|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Birth name</b>       | John Sidney McCain   |
| <b>Nickname(s)</b>      | "Slew"   |
| <b>Born</b>             | August 9, 1884 <div><span></span> <a href="#">Carroll County, Mississippi</a></div>  |
| <b>Died</b>             | September 6, 1945 (aged 61) <div><span></span> <a href="#">Coronado, California</a></div>  |
| <b>Place of burial</b>  | <span></span> <a href="#">Arlington National Cemetery</a>  |
| <b>Allegiance</b>       | <span><span></span></span> <a href="#">United States</a>   |
| <b>Service/branch</b>   | <span><span></span></span> <a href="#">United States Navy</a>  |
| <b>Years of service</b> | 1906–1945  |
| <b>Rank</b>             | <span>★★★★</span> <a href="#">Admiral</a>  |
| <b>Commands held</b>    | <a href="#">USS <i>Ranger</i></a><br><a href="#">Air Forces for Western Sea Frontier and the South Pacific Force</a><br><a href="#">Bureau of Aeronautics</a><br><a href="#">Second Fast Carrier Force</a><br><a href="#">Task Group 38.1</a><br><a href="#">Task Force 38</a>                                       |
| <b>Battles/wars</b>     | <a href="#">World War I</a><br><a href="#">World War II</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><a href="#">Pacific War</a></li><li><a href="#">Guadalcanal Campaign</a></li><li><a href="#">Mariana Campaign</a></li><li><a href="#">Philippines Campaign</a></li><li><a href="#">Battle of Okinawa</a></li></ul> |

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|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Awards</b>    | <a href="#">Navy Cross</a><br><a href="#">Navy Distinguished Service Medal</a> (3)   |
| <b>Spouse(s)</b> | <a href="#">Catherine Davey Vaulx</a>  |
| <b>Relations</b> | <a href="#">ADM (USN) John S. McCain Jr.</a> (son)<br><a href="#">CAPT (USN)/Sen. John S. McCain III</a> (grandson)<br><a href="#">BG (USA) William Alexander McCain</a> (brother) |

## Early life, education, and family [[edit](#)]

McCain was born in [Carroll County, Mississippi](#), the son of [planter](#)<sup>[3]</sup> John Sidney McCain (1851–1934) and wife Elizabeth-Ann Young (1855–1922), who married in 1877. His grandparents were William Alexander McCain (1812–1864) and Mary Louisa McAllister, who were married in 1840.

He attended the [University of Mississippi](#) for two years, where he joined the [Phi Delta Theta Fraternity](#), and then decided to attend the [United States Military Academy at West Point](#), where his brother William Alexander McCain was enrolled.<sup>[4]</sup> To practice for its entrance exams, he decided to take the ones for the United States Naval Academy; when he passed those and earned an appointment, he decided to attend there instead.<sup>[4]</sup> In doing so, he would leave behind his Mississippi plantation and adopt the Navy's itinerant life.<sup>[5]</sup>

At the Naval Academy, his performance was lackluster.<sup>[1]</sup> He failed his annual physical on account of defective hearing, but the condition was waived due to the great need for officers.<sup>[4]</sup> When he graduated in 1906, he ranked 79th out of 116 in his class, and the yearbook labeled him "The skeleton in the family closet of 1906."<sup>[1]</sup>

He married Catherine Davey Vaulx (January 9, 1876 – May 29, 1959), who was eight years his senior, on August 9, 1909, at [Colorado Springs, Colorado](#).

## Early career and World War I [[edit](#)]



McCain as a young ensign listens to <sup>ⓘ</sup> President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) as he stands on a gun turret to address the officers and men of the USS *Connecticut* (BB-18), upon its return as a part of the [Great White Fleet](#) in February 1909 in [Hampton Roads, Virginia](#)

Soon after earning his commission, McCain sailed aboard the [Great White Fleet](#)'s world cruise from 1907 to 1909, joining the battleship [USS \*Connecticut\*](#) for the last stretch home.<sup>[6]</sup> His next assignment was to the [Asiatic Squadron](#), after which the Navy ordered him to the naval base at [San Diego, California](#).

During 1914 and 1915 he was [executive officer](#) and [engineering officer](#) aboard the armored cruiser [USS \*Colorado\*](#), patrolling off the Pacific coast of then-troubled [Mexico](#).<sup>[6]</sup> In September 1915, he joined the armored cruiser [USS \*San Diego\*](#), flagship for the [Pacific Fleet](#).<sup>[6]</sup>

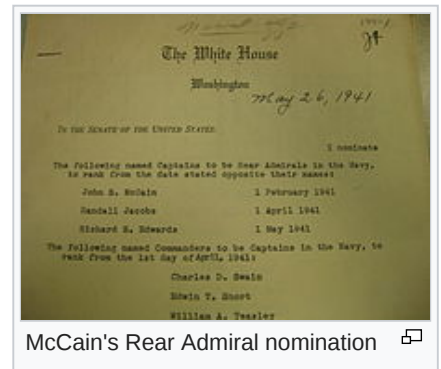
After the U.S. entered [World War I](#), McCain and *San Diego* served on convoy duty in the [Atlantic](#),<sup>[6]</sup> escorting shipping through the first dangerous leg of their passages to Europe. Based out of [Tompkinsville, New York](#), and

[Halifax](#), the *San Diego* operated in the weather-torn, [submarine](#)-infested [North Atlantic](#). McCain left the *San Diego* in May 1918, two months before she was sunk, when he was assigned to the [Bureau of Navigation \(United States Navy\)](#).<sup>[6]</sup>

## Interwar period [ edit ]

In the 1920s and early 1930s, McCain served aboard the *USS Maryland*, the *USS New Mexico*, and the *USS Nitro*. His first command was the *USS Sirius*. In 1935, McCain enrolled in flight training. Graduating at 52 in 1936, he became one of the oldest men to become a [naval aviator](#)<sup>[7]</sup> and from 1937 to 1939 he commanded the aircraft carrier *USS Ranger*. In January 1941, after promotion to [rear admiral](#), he commanded the Aircraft Scouting Force of the Atlantic Fleet.<sup>[8]</sup>

Short in stature and of rather thin frame, McCain was gruff and very profane; he liked to drink and gamble.<sup>[5]</sup> He also showed courage and was regarded as a natural, inspirational leader.<sup>[5]</sup> In the words of one biographical profile, McCain "preferred contentious conflict to cozy compromise."<sup>[5]</sup>



## World War II [ edit ]

After Japan [attacked Pearl Harbor](#) in December 1941, the Navy appointed McCain as Commander, Aircraft, South Pacific in May 1942. As COMAIRSOPAC, he commanded all land-based [Allied](#) air operations supporting the [Guadalcanal campaign](#) in the [Solomon Islands](#) and south Pacific area. Aircraft under McCain's command, including the [Cactus Air Force](#) at [Henderson Field](#) on Guadalcanal, were key in supporting the defense of Guadalcanal from Japanese efforts to retake the island during this time.<sup>[8]</sup>

In October 1942, the Navy ordered McCain to [Washington, D.C.](#), to head the [Bureau of Aeronautics](#). In August 1943, he became Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Air with the rank of vice admiral.<sup>[8]</sup>

McCain returned to combat in the Pacific in August 1944 with his appointment as commander of a carrier group in [Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58](#) (TF 58), part of [Raymond Spruance's Fifth Fleet](#). In this role, McCain participated in the [Marianas campaign](#), including the [Battle of the Philippine Sea](#), and the beginning of the [Philippines campaign](#).<sup>[8]</sup> At the [Battle of Leyte Gulf](#), Admiral [William Halsey](#) left in pursuit of a decoy force, leaving Rear Admiral [Clifton "Ziggy" Sprague's](#) Task Unit 77.4.3 (usually referred to by its radio callsign, "Taffy 3") to continue supporting forces ashore, defended by only a light screen of [destroyers](#) and [destroyer escorts](#).

Taffy 3 came under attack from a much heavier Japanese force under Vice Admiral [Takeo Kurita](#), provoking the [Battle off Samar](#). Sprague promptly pleaded for assistance from Halsey, who was responsible for protecting the northern approach to the landing site. Halsey had contemplated detaching a battle



Vice Admiral McCain (L) and Admiral William Halsey, Commander of the Third Fleet, hold conference on board battleship *New Jersey* en route to the Philippines in December 1944. ✉



Admiral McCain (R) with Admiral William Halsey on the battleship *Missouri* on September 2, 1945, shortly after ✉

group, Task Force 34 (TF 34), but chose to bring all available battle groups north to pursue the Japanese carrier force.

Hearing Sprague's pleas (including messages in plain language, not even bothering to encrypt them as the situation grew desperate), Admiral Nimitz sent Halsey a terse message,

the ceremony in which Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

TURKEY TROTS TO WATER GG FROM CINCPAC ACTION COM THIRD FLEET INFO COMINCH CTF SEVENTY-SEVEN X WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK FORCE THIRTY FOUR RR [THE WORLD WONDERS](#). Halsey was infuriated (not recognizing the final phrase as padding, chosen for the anniversary of the [Charge of the Light Brigade](#), until a communications officer explained) and sent McCain's Task Group 58.1 (TG 58.1) to assist.<sup>[9]</sup>

McCain had been monitoring the original pleas for help and, recognizing the seriousness of the situation, turned around without awaiting orders.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> His ships raced downwind toward the battle, briefly turning into the wind to recover returning planes. At 10:30, a force of [Curtiss SB2C Helldivers](#), [Grumman TBF Avengers](#), and [Grumman F6F Hellcats](#) was launched from [USS Hornet](#), [USS Hancock](#), and [USS Wasp](#) at the extreme range of 330 miles (610 km). Though the attack did little damage, it strengthened Kurita's decision to retire.<sup>[10]</sup>

On October 30, 1944, McCain assumed command of [Task Force 38](#) (TF 38). He retained command of the fast carrier task force that he led through the [Battle of Okinawa](#) and raids on the Japanese mainland.<sup>[8]</sup>

While conducting operations off the Philippines, McCain, as Chief of Staff of Third Fleet, participated in Halsey's decision to keep the combined naval task force on station rather than avoid a major storm, [Typhoon Cobra](#) (later known also as "Halsey's Typhoon"), which was approaching the area. The storm sank three destroyers and inflicted heavy damage on many other ships. Some 800 men were lost, in addition to 146 aircraft. A Navy court of inquiry found that Halsey committed an error of judgment in sailing into the typhoon, but did not recommend sanction.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Death [\[ edit \]](#)

By war's end in August 1945, the stress of combat operations had worn McCain down to only 100 pounds. He requested home leave to recuperate, but Halsey insisted that he be present at the [Japanese surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay](#) on September 2, 1945. Departing immediately after the ceremony, McCain died just four days later of a [heart attack](#) at his home in [Coronado, California](#), on September 6, 1945. His death was front-page news.<sup>[1]</sup> McCain was buried at [Arlington National Cemetery](#).

In 1949 McCain was posthumously promoted to full admiral by a resolution of Congress.<sup>[12]</sup> This followed a recommendation of [Secretary of the Navy Francis P.](#)

[Matthews](#), who said that McCain's combat commendations would have earned him the promotion had he not died so soon after the war.<sup>[12]</sup> During his career McCain was awarded the [Distinguished Service Medal](#) and two [Gold Stars](#) in lieu of subsequent awards.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Family heritage [\[ edit \]](#)



John S. "Slew" McCain Sr. and [John S. "Jack" McCain Jr.](#), on board a U.S. Navy ship in [Tokyo Bay](#), c. September 2, 1945. The senior McCain died four days later.



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His grandfather, William Alexander McCain (b. [North Carolina](#), 1812 – d. 1864), is often cited on the internet as having "died while serving as a private in Company I, 5th Mississippi Cavalry Regiment, [Confederate States Army](#)". However, that William McCain was recruited in Attala, Mississippi and is listed in the 1860 census in Attala County. The correct McCain ancestor lived in Carrollton, Carroll County, Mississippi in 1860. According to a 1930 application to the Sons of the American Revolution he was Dr. William Alexander McCain b. May 2, 1817 d. Jun 20, 1863 and did not die a POW in 1864. At least three William McCains can be found in the 1860 US census in Mississippi and in the Fold3 databases in Confederate service. One was recruited from Choctaw County (Co K, 1st Regiment Miss Reserves), one from Attala County (Co I, 5th Regiment MS Cav), and a third from an unknown County who served in Co K 28th Regiment Miss Cav. It is possible that early genealogy records were not so easily accessed as today. During his life, he owned a 2,000-acre (8.1 km<sup>2</sup>) [plantation](#) in [Carroll County, Mississippi](#), known alternately as "Teoc" (the Choctaw name for the creek it was located upon) and "Waverly", as well as 52 [slaves](#) (some of whose descendants share the surname and call themselves the "[black McCains](#)").<sup>[14]</sup> He was married in 1840 to Mary Louisa McAllister (b. [Alabama](#), 1812 – d. 1882).

McCain's father, the first John Sidney McCain, known as J. S. McCain (which may explain the apparent discrepancy in Senator John S. McCain being the III, rather than the IV), served as Sheriff and, later, President of the Board of Supervisors of Carroll County.

McCain's older brother, another William Alexander McCain, also attended the [University of Mississippi](#) before transferring to the [United States Military Academy](#). William A. McCain would eventually retire with the rank of [Brigadier General](#), and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for actions in World War I, as well as the Oak Leaf Cluster during World War II. An uncle, [Henry Pinckney McCain](#) (b. [Mississippi](#), 1861 – d. 1941), also attended West Point and later retired from the Army as a [Major-General](#). Camp McCain, a [World War II](#) training base and current Mississippi National Guard training site, located in [Grenada County, Mississippi](#), is named for him.

Admiral McCain's son [John S. McCain Jr.](#) was a submarine commander in World War II and later served as CINCPAC, Commander in Chief Pacific Command, during the Vietnam War.

His grandson [John S. McCain III](#) was a U.S. Navy pilot during the Vietnam war, and was shot down and spent over five years as a [P.O.W.](#) in the infamous "[Hanoi Hilton](#)" and other North Vietnamese camps. After his release, he was elected to the U. S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate from Arizona. He ran for President in 2000 (losing the Republican nomination to [George W. Bush](#)) and in 2008, when he won the [Republican Party's](#) nomination but lost the general election to [Barack Obama](#). His book *[Faith of My Fathers](#)* recounts his heritage and his experiences as a [midshipman](#) at [Annapolis](#), a naval aviator and prisoner of war. Senator McCain's brother [Joe McCain](#) attended the US Navy Academy but served in the US Navy as an enlisted man.

John S. McCain III claims a royal connection on his campaign website: "McCain's family roots in Europe are [Scots-Irish](#). His great-aunt was a descendant of [Robert the Bruce](#), an early Scottish king. McCain's roots in America date to the American Revolution. John Young, an early McCain ancestor, served on Gen. [George Washington's](#) staff."<sup>[15]</sup> John Young's ancestry has been traced to John Lamont, [Baron McGorrie](#) (the "red baron of Inverchaolain and Knockdow"; 1540–1583).<sup>[16][17]</sup> According to DNA testing, Senator McCain is related through his mother to John Washington, a great-great-grandfather of President [George Washington](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

Admiral McCain's great-grandson John Sidney "Jack" McCain IV attended and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2009.<sup>[19]</sup> and is a naval aviator. Jack McCain IV was awarded his diploma



## Notes [ edit ]

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- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> <sup>[d](#)</sup> Timberg, *An American Odyssey*, pp. 17–34. [↗](#)
- <sup>^</sup> Alexander, *Man of the People*, pp. 13–14.
- <sup>^</sup> McCain and Salter, *Faith of My Fathers*, p. 21.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> McCain and Salter, *Faith of My Fathers*, pp. 22–23.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> <sup>[d](#)</sup> <sup>[e](#)</sup> Leahy, Michael (2008-08-31). "A Turbulent Youth Under a Strong Father's Shadow" [↗](#). *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 2008-11-08.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> <sup>[d](#)</sup> <sup>[e](#)</sup> Reynolds, *Famous American Admirals*, p. 206.
- <sup>^</sup> His contemporary Admiral [William Halsey](#) also graduated at age 52 as a flight aviator.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> <sup>[d](#)</sup> <sup>[e](#)</sup> Boatner, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 351.
- <sup>^</sup> McCain and Salter, *Faith of My Fathers*, 40–41.
- <sup>^</sup> "[Wasp](#)" [↗](#). *DANFS*. U.S. Naval Historical Center. 2005-05-11. Retrieved 2008-09-04.
- <sup>^</sup> Drury, *Halsey's Typhoon*.
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> "[M'Cain Promotion Passed](#)" [↗](#). Associated Press for *The New York Times*. 1949-08-28.
- <sup>^</sup> USS *John S. McCain* (DDG 56), [\[1\]](#) [↗](#).
- <sup>^</sup> Chideya, Farai (2008-10-21). "[Black McCains Share Family's Struggles, Triumphs](#)" [↗](#). NPR. Retrieved 2008-10-26.
- <sup>^</sup> McCain and Salter, *Faith of My Fathers*, p. 19.
- <sup>^</sup> "[Ancestors of one Young family in America](#)" [↗](#). Archived from [the original](#) [↗](#) on 2006-02-10. Retrieved 2007-07-05.
- <sup>^</sup> [Ancestry of John McCain \(b. 1936\)](#) [↗](#)
- <sup>^</sup> PBS [Finding Your Roots](#) broadcast February 9, 2016; he also has [Native American](#) ancestry.
- <sup>^</sup> Superville, Darlene (2009-05-22). "[Obama vows not to send people to war without cause](#)" [↗](#). *Yahoo! News*. Associated Press. Archived from [the original](#) [↗](#) on May 25, 2009. Retrieved 2009-05-23.
- <sup>^</sup> "[Sen. McCain's youngest son joins Marine Corps](#)" [↗](#). *Marine Corps Times*. Associated Press. July 31, 2006. Archived from [the original](#) [↗](#) on August 1, 2006. Retrieved 2006-08-01.
- <sup>^</sup> "[McCain win might stop sons from deploying](#)" [↗](#). *Navy Times*. March 10, 2008. Retrieved 2008-03-17.
- <sup>^</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer (2007-12-27). "[Bridging 4 Decades, a Large, Close-Knit Brood](#)" [↗](#). The New York Times. Retrieved 2007-12-27.
- <sup>^</sup> Kirkpatrick, David D. (2008-10-12). "[Writing Memoir, McCain Found a Narrative for Life](#)" [↗](#). *The New York Times*. Retrieved 2008-10-13.

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## External links [[edit](#)]

- [John Sidney McCain at arlingtoncemetery.net site](#)

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