

## *CounterPunch Diary*

### **"Hero" John McCain as Phony and Collaborator: What *Really* Happened When He Was a POW?**

By ALEXANDER COCKBURN

**J**ohn McCain's been getting kid-glove treatment from the press for years, ever since he wriggled free of the Keating scandal and his profitable association – another collaboration, you might say -- with the nation's top bank swindler in the 1980s. But nothing equals the astounding tact with which his clique on the press bus avoids the topic of McCain's collaborating with his Vietnamese captors after he'd been shot down.

How McCain behaved when he was a prisoner is key. McCain is probably the most unstable man ever to have got this close to the White House. He's one election away from it. Republican senator Thad Cochran has openly said he trembles at the thought of an unstable McCain in the Oval Office with his finger on the nuclear trigger.

What if a private memory of years of collaboration in his prison camp gnaws at McCain, and bursts out in his paroxysms of uncontrollable fury, his rantings about "gooks" and his terrifying commitment to a hundred years of war in Iraq. What if "the hero" knows he's a phony?

Doug Valentine has written the definitive history of the [Phoenix Program](#) in Vietnam. He knows about the POW experience. His dad, an Army man, was captured by the Japanese and sent to a POW camp in the Philippines for forced labor. Many of his mates died. Doug wrote a marvelous book about it, [The Hotel Tacloban](#).

Now Valentine has picked up the unexploded bomb lying on McCain's campaign trail this year. As he points out, he's not the first. Rumors and charges have long swirled around McCain's conduct as a prisoner. Fellow prisoners have given the lie to McCain's claims. But Valentine has assembled the dossier. It's devastating. We're running it in our current CounterPunch newsletter and [we strongly urge you to subscribe](#).

Some excerpts from Valentine's indictment.

"War is one thing, collaborating with the enemy is another; it is a legitimate campaign issue that strikes at the heart of McCain's character. . .or lack thereof. In occupied countries like Iraq, or France in World War II, collaboration to that extent spells an automatic death sentence.. .The question is: What kind of collaborator was John McCain, the admitted war criminal who will hate the Vietnamese for the rest of his life?

"Put it another way: how psychologically twisted is McCain? And what actually happened to him in his POW camp that twisted him? Was it abuse, as he claims, or was it the fact

that he collaborated and has to cover up? Covering-up can take a lot of energy. The truth is lurking there in his subconscious, waiting to explode. ”

“McCain had a unique POW experience. Initially, he was taken to the infamous Hanoi Hilton prison camp, where he was interrogated. By McCain’s own account, after three or four days he cracked. He promised his Vietnamese captors, “I’ll give you military information if you will take me to the hospital ...

“His Vietnamese captors soon realized their POW, John Sidney McCain III, came from a well-bred line in the American military elite. . .The Vietnamese realized, this poor stooge has propaganda value. The admiral’s boy was used to special treatment, and his captors knew that. They were working him.”

“. . .two weeks into his stay at the Vietnamese hospital, the Hanoi press began quoting him. It was not ‘name rank and serial number, or kill me’. as specified by the military code of conduct. McCain divulged specific military information: he gave the name of the aircraft carrier on which he was based, the number of U.S. pilots that had been lost, the number of aircraft in his flight formation, as well as information about the location of rescue ships.”

“...McCain was held for five and half years. The first two weeks’ behavior might have been pragmatism, but McCain soon became North Vietnam’s go-to collaborator.....McCain cooperated with the North Vietnamese for a period of three years. His situation isn’t as innocuous as that of the French barber who cuts the hair of the German occupier. McCain was repaying his captors for their kindness and mercy.

“This is the lesson of McCain’s experience as a POW: a true politician, a hollow man, his only allegiance is to power. The Vietnamese, like McCain’s campaign contributors today, protected and promoted him, and, in return, he danced to their tune. . .”