



# U.S. Presidential Nominees 2008

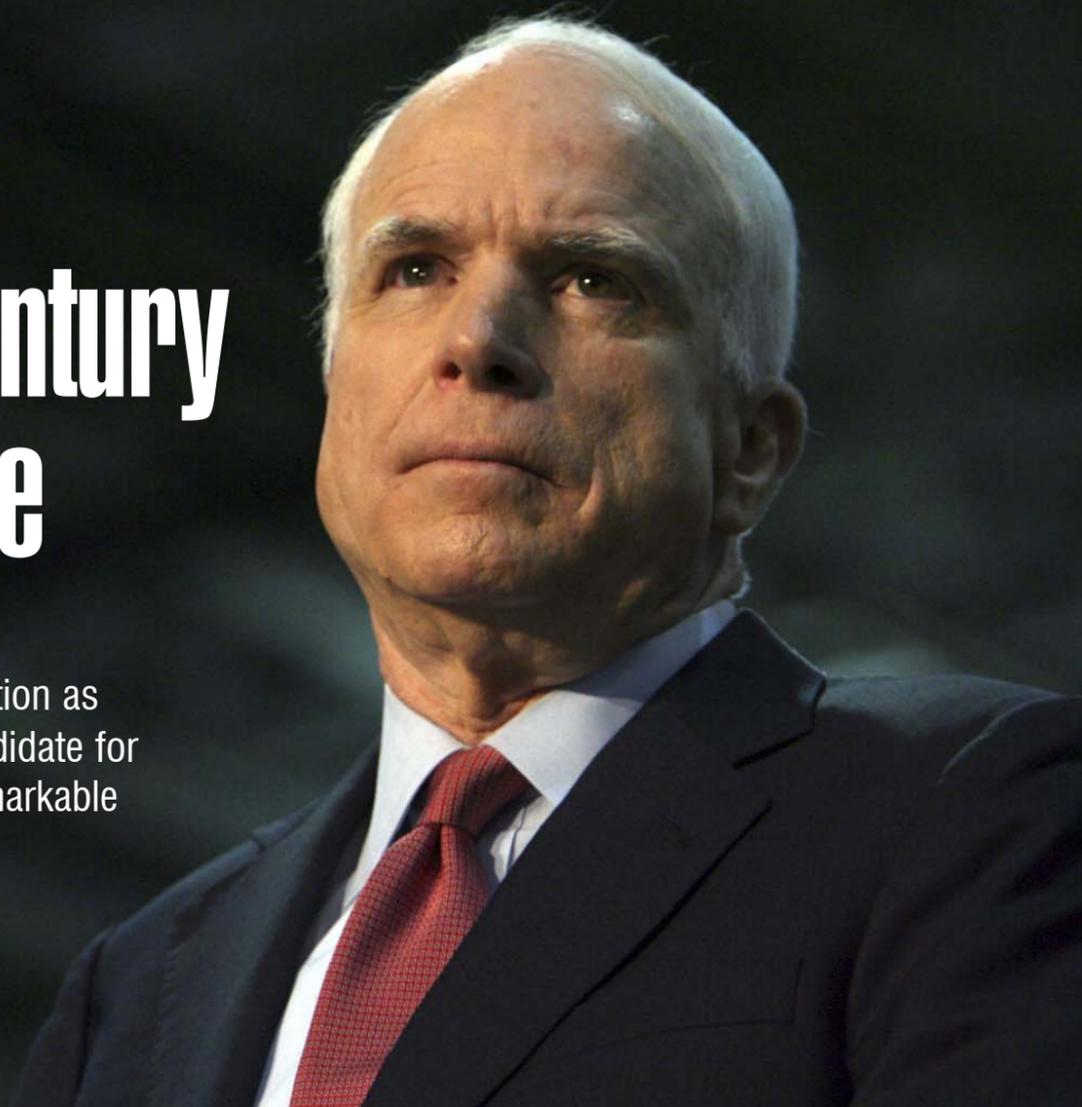
Barack Obama  
and  
John McCain



## A Half Century of Service

By DOMENICK DIPASQUALE

**John McCain's** nomination as the 2008 Republican candidate for U.S. president caps a remarkable 50-year career.



**A**s a naval aviator, prisoner of war in Vietnam, Congressman and Senator, John McCain's life story has been distinguished by such consistent core traits as a willingness to speak his mind, an adherence to deeply held values and principles, a devotion to duty, and a fiercely guarded streak of independence. Those characteristics, which earned him the anger of his North Vietnamese captors, and sometimes even the occasional rancor of his Republican colleagues, have also won McCain the support and admiration of millions of American voters.

As the man whom the *Almanac of American Politics* calls "the closest thing our politics has to a national hero"—the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, and Purple Heart are among his medals—McCain burnished his already high profile with an independent-minded campaign for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination which captured the imagination of many Americans. He emerged from that losing effort as one of the most respected voices in the U.S. Senate, especially on national security issues, and one of the most prominent figures in the Republican Party.

Perhaps more than any other quality, the concept of personal honor has been consistently central to McCain's public persona.

"In prison, where my cherished independence was mocked and assaulted, I found my self-respect in a shared fidelity to my country," McCain wrote in his autobiography *Faith of My Fathers*. "All honor comes with obligations. I and the men with whom I served had accepted ours, and we were grateful for the privilege."

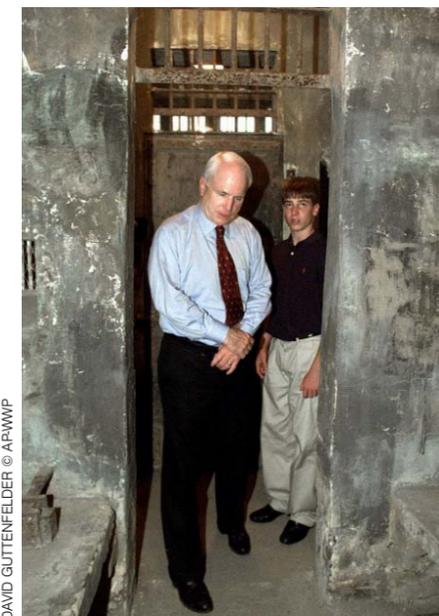
### The early years

The son and grandson of U.S. Navy admirals, John Sidney McCain was born August 29, 1936, in the U.S.-administered Panama Canal Zone territory. The military legacy of his family, which traces its roots to the Highlands of Scotland, actually extends as far back as America's 18th century War of Independence, when one of McCain's ancestors served on General George Washington's staff.



Far left: McCain at a town hall meeting in Aurora, Colorado.

Left: McCain arrives home in 1973 from Vietnam, where he was a prisoner of war for more than five years. He was met by his first wife, Carol, and son Doug, on crutches after breaking his leg in a soccer game.



Left: McCain, with son Jack, in a cell at the Hoa Lo Prison in North Vietnam, during a 2000 trip.

MARY ALTAFER © AP/WWP

DAVID GUTTENFELDER © AP/WWP

JOHN MCCAIN





John McCain and wife, Cindy, at the end of a town hall meeting in Peterborough, New Hampshire.

In typical military fashion, the young McCain led a nomadic existence as his father's assignments forced the family to move frequently from one naval base to the next. This constant uprooting may have played a role in shaping McCain's temperament as an outsider and an independent. As he put it, "At each new school I arrived eager to make, by means of my insolent attitude, new friends to compensate for the loss of others....At each new school I became a more unrepentant pain in the neck."

In 1954, McCain graduated from Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, and kept his "unavoidable appointment" with the U.S. Naval Academy. At the academy, he embarked upon a self-described "four-year course of insubordination and rebellion." Earning a reputation as an affable fellow always ready for a party, racking up numerous demerits for his behavior, and often struggling academically, McCain persevered and graduated in 1958, ranking fifth from the bottom of his class.

#### Naval aviator and prisoner of war

Commissioned as a naval officer, McCain attended flight school in Pensacola, Florida, where he earned his pilot's wings. In the early 1960s, he embarked on several aircraft carrier deployments to the Mediterranean. As American involvement in the Vietnam War deepened in the mid-1960s, however, McCain

began to aspire to positions of command and determined that a credible combat record was the best way to achieve it.

Serving on the USS Forrester in the Tonkin Gulf off the North Vietnamese coast in 1967, McCain barely escaped with his life when a horrific fire swept the flight deck and engulfed his A-4 attack jet as he waited to launch. Soon thereafter, McCain voluntarily transferred off the crippled ship to another squadron aboard the carrier USS Oriskany.

John McCain greets war veterans during a campaign stop at the Maine Military Museum in South Portland.



STEPHAN SAVOIA © AP/WIDEWORLD

McCain's life changed forever on October 26, 1967. While on a bombing raid against an electrical power plant in Hanoi, a surface-to-air missile tore the right wing off his A-4. Ejecting from his doomed aircraft, McCain parachuted into a lake in the center of the city, suffering two broken arms and a broken knee. Captured immediately, he began five and a half years of imprisonment, marked by often brutal mistreatment and torture, in a series of North Vietnamese prisoner of war (POW) camps.

Like other American POWs, McCain was the frequent target of savage beatings and interrogations conducted by his captors to elicit military information or anti-U.S. propaganda statements. After refusing an offer of early release, McCain was beaten so severely for several days that he eventually signed a forced confession, an event that caused him anguished despair and shame. Yet, he rebounded from this personal nadir to earn a well-deserved reputation as a tough resister, the ultimate compliment his fellow POWs bestowed upon the toughest among them.

McCain attributed his endurance of captivity, including two years of solitary confinement, to faith—"faith in God, faith in country, faith in your fellow prisoners."

Speaking of his fellow POWs' resistance and bravery, McCain said, "They were a lantern for me, a lantern of courage and faith that illuminated the way home with honor, and I struggled against panic and despair to stay in its light."

#### Entry into politics

After the signing of the peace accord between the United States and North Vietnam in January 1973 that included the release of all POWs, McCain regained his freedom on March 15 of that year. Despite the severity of his wartime injuries—McCain can be seen in news footage limping off the plane that carried him to freedom—he worked intensely to rehabilitate himself physically to the point that he regained his flight status as a naval aviator.

From 1973 to 1974 he attended the National War College in Washington, D.C., writing a thesis that examined POW resistance in captivity, but it was a subsequent assignment that eventually charted a new direction in McCain's life. In 1977, McCain began to work as a Navy liaison officer to the U.S. Senate. In this role, the *New York Times* noted, he "relished the push and pull of legislative battles (and)...built personal friendships and professional collaborations across ideological divides, a hallmark of his later Senate career."

Retiring from the Navy in 1981 after foregoing the offer of promotion to admiral, McCain moved to Arizona, the home state of his second wife, Cindy, whom he had married in 1980. In 1982, he



Above: John McCain walks with Renee Gould and her daughter Morgan through the fruit and vegetables section of King's Supermarket in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

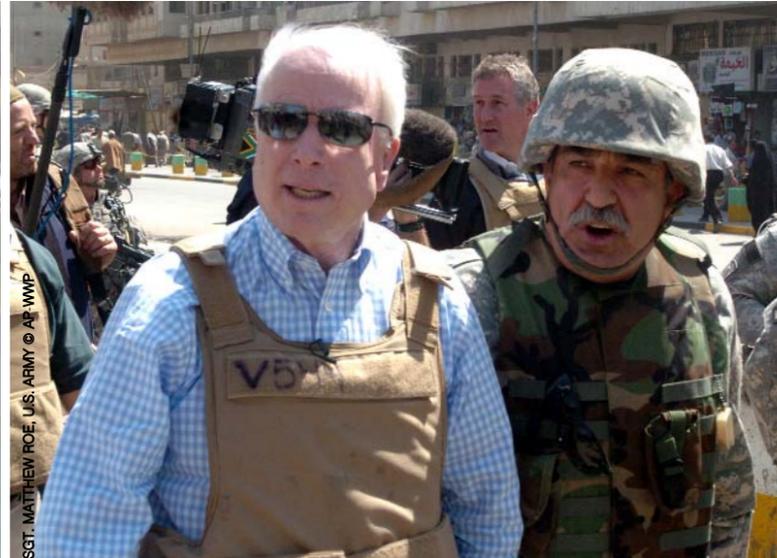
Left: McCain on a tour of a New Orleans area damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

made his first run for political office and was elected to a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from Arizona's First Congressional District with 66 percent of the vote. Re-elected to the House in 1984, McCain subsequently ran for and won in 1986 the Senate seat vacated by the retiring incumbent Barry Goldwater (himself the 1964 Republican presidential nominee).

In the early years of his Senate career, McCain focused on issues close to his personal experience, such as national defense, support for military veterans, and normalizing relations with Vietnam, working on this last issue with Democratic Senator John Kerry, a fellow Vietnam War hero. Years later, when Kerry was the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate and under political attack, accused of misrepresenting his military service, McCain rose to the defense of his fellow veteran's war record.

Reaching across the political aisle is not uncommon for McCain. He has attempted to forge consensus with his Democratic colleagues in the Senate on solutions for complex, controversial issues—sometimes successfully, as in the case of normalized relations with Vietnam, sometimes unsuccessfully, as in his and Senator Edward Kennedy's attempt to tackle the highly charged question of illegal immigration.

Now in his fourth term as Senator, McCain has amassed a congressional voting record in line with most mainstream Republican political beliefs—a strong national defense, low taxes, opposition to activist judges, and a pro-life position on the abortion issue. Yet, he has also played the role of maverick as an



advocate of campaign finance reform and as a strong opponent of wasteful government spending and the practice of “earmarking,” or specifying funding for legislators’ pet projects.

### Running for president

McCain’s first foray into presidential politics came in 2000, when he ran for the Republican presidential nomination. Many voters found his candor, self-deprecating humor, and straightforward style attractive qualities that gained him not just national attention but also support transcending traditional party lines; his campaign bus was called The Straight Talk Express. McCain went on to score an impressive upset victory against putative front-runner George W. Bush in the always important, first-in-the-nation primary of New Hampshire. However, his campaign had mixed results thereafter as he failed to attract sufficient numbers of core Republican voters in other states. After losses in such major states as California and New York, McCain suspended his campaign and eventually threw his support to Bush, who returned the White House to Republican hands that November with his election as president.

Over the next several years McCain’s profile in national politics remained high. The U.S. Congress finally enacted into law in 2002 the landmark legislation on campaign finance reform co-authored by McCain and Democratic Senator Russ Feingold. An advocate for a strong national defense policy, McCain supported the decision to invade Iraq in 2003, although he later turned sharply critical of the way the war was conducted in its early stages.

Re-elected to the Senate for a fourth term in 2004 by a 77 to 21 percent margin, McCain initially was viewed as one of the strongest contenders, if not the front-runner, for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. Yet, as a large field of Republican candidates entered the race and began to organize in 2007 for the following year’s marathon of primaries and caucuses, the McCain campaign began to implode, with staff shake-ups, serious financial problems and fading polling results.

McCain’s tenacity—the very quality that had gotten him through his POW years—again proved the indispensable factor in getting him through this rough period. “I have a very complicated strategy for you,” one of his advisers told him. “Stay in the race until you’re the last man standing.”

That is precisely what McCain did. Skipping the first-in-the-

nation contest of the Iowa caucus, McCain gambled and focused his efforts on the January 8 primary in New Hampshire, site of his great success in 2000. Spending months in that state and holding 101 town hall meetings with New Hampshire’s famously independent voters, he was rewarded with a key victory over his major Republican rivals. Although victories in other early voting states were split among McCain, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, McCain solidified his front-runner position in the February 5 Super Tuesday primary election held simultaneously in more than 20 states. McCain won in such populous states as California, Illinois and New York, amassing a lead in delegates that none of his rivals could catch. On March 4, 2008, victories in Ohio and Texas allowed McCain to cross the threshold of 1,191 delegates needed to secure the Republican presidential nomination.

### A McCain presidency?

The question of McCain’s age has arisen during the campaign; if elected, McCain would take the oath of office at 72, the oldest first-term president. He has attempted to defuse concerns about

his age and fitness for the job with an active campaign schedule and with his trademark humor directed at himself—cracking that he is “as old as dirt” and has “more scars than Frankenstein.” McCain perhaps also sends a subtle message that his health and energy level are up to the demands of the presidency by sometimes bringing along his robust, 96-year-old mother, Roberta, to campaign rallies.

McCain’s campaign platform reflects his support of many traditional Republican policies, but also a willingness to chart a new course where he believes it necessary. An early and outspoken advocate of the 2007 U.S. troop surge in Iraq, he has argued for maintaining a U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan until those nations achieve stability, as well as for continuing an aggressive fight against international terrorism, all tenets of current U.S. policy. His energy plan calls for greater use of nuclear

power and more offshore oil drilling, while his economic policy favors making permanent the large tax cuts enacted during the Bush presidency.

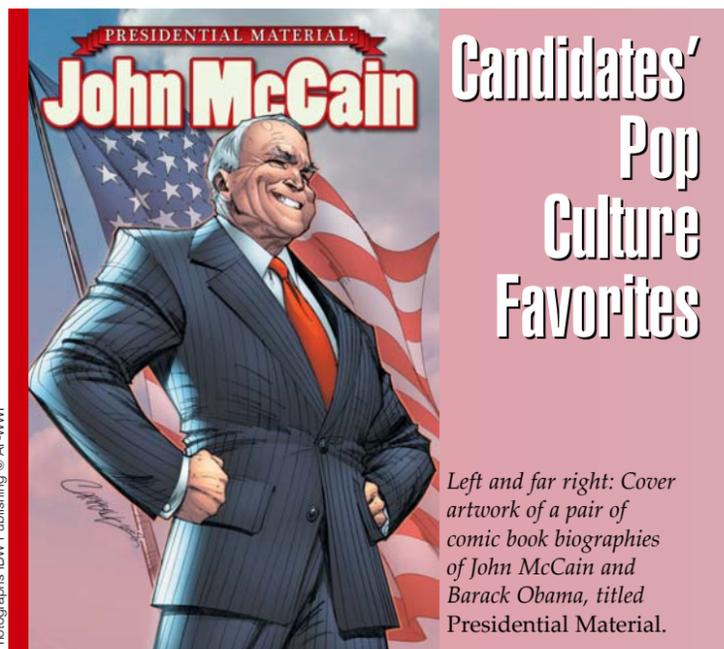
On other issues, however, McCain has promised an approach different from that of the current administration. He has emphasized, for example, a more collaborative approach with U.S. allies on foreign policy questions. He also has pledged a more activist response to global warming and climate change, including a 60 percent cut in U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Whatever the outcome of the 2008 election, John McCain undoubtedly will continue to serve the country to which he has devoted a lifetime. The reason is found in a simple yet eloquent passage from his autobiography in which he reflects upon a lesson learned while in captivity in North Vietnam.

“It wasn’t until I had lost America for a time,” he wrote, “that I realized how much I loved her.”

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## Candidates’ Pop Culture Favorites

Left and far right: Cover artwork of a pair of comic book biographies of John McCain and Barack Obama, titled Presidential Material.

Will it be ABBA playing in the Oval Office next year or Jay-Z? Will children’s movies be standard fare in the White House screening room after inauguration day in January, or another Harrison Ford adventure flick where the old guy is the hero? Both Barack Obama and John McCain want to be America’s favorite choice for president. But which movie president do the candidates like best? What kind of music and TV shows do they favor? Someone had to ask the tough questions, so *Entertainment Weekly* stepped up. The magazine’s interviews are posted at <http://www.ew.com>

	McCain	Obama
Favorite singer(s)	ABBA	Jay-Z
Favorite movie or TV president	Dennis Haysbert 24 (TV show)	Jeff Bridges <i>The Contender</i> (movie)
Favorite movie	<i>Viva Zapata</i>	<i>The Godfather</i>
Which superhero would you be?	Batman	Spider-Man/Batman
First movie you remember seeing	<i>Bambi</i>	<i>Born Free</i>
Did you cry?	Oh, yeah	May have teared up

