

To: media fans of Senator John McCain –

What's this - McCain declaring again and again he never, ever will use his POW years for political purposes, then builds his entire campaign video around his POW years.

And then uses misrepresentations to tell the story at that!

Read what his hometown newspaper says -

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MCCAIN, THE POW SENATOR

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Byline: E. J. MONTINI, Republic Columnist

The tragedy of U.S. Sen. John McCain is not that he spent 5 1/2 years in a North Vietnamese prison. The tragedy is that 23 years after being released, McCain is still a POW.

The tragedy is watching McCain transform himself into a cheap imitation of himself.

"I'm devoting all my efforts to being the Arizona senator and not the POW senator," McCain has said.

Sounding serious. Determined.

Except it doesn't stop him from becoming the POW senator any time he gets into a bind or needs votes or figures it will be politically profitable for him, as it's been this week at the Republican National Convention.

In order to be seen on the big screen at the San Diego convention center, and all the little screens throughout America, McCain the former POW, the legitimate war hero, hocked youthful heroism for middle-age hypocrisy.

He said he'd never do such a thing.

He does it again and again.

This time, McCain tried to pump up the campaign of Bob Dole (and get himself a lot of free national exposure) by contrasting men like himself and Dole, a World War II veteran, with President Bill Clinton, a Vietnam War draft dodger.

O. RTTW#

'GOD HAS BLESSED MY LIFE'

It began even before McCain's Wednesday night nominating speech for Dole.

In his first appearance before the convention, on Monday, McCain squeezed several military-service references into a very short speech.

He said at one point, "God has blessed my life. I once lived far from home in a place of great despair. But God granted me the company of heroes whose devotion to duty sustained my own. They made for me a lantern of courage and faith to light my way home in the dark."

A photograph flashed behind him on the giant screen. It showed a thin, brutalized McCain during his POW days.

There were more references to military service and his POW status in McCain's nominating speech Wednesday.

"Others may offer you sound bites and showmanship," he said. "But Bob Dole offers you leadership - leadership evident in the stature of a man who risked his life for love of country, and considers service to America his honor."

He then tied his own war-time experiences to Dole's, talking emotionally about how "Bob Dole wore a POW bracelet that bore my name."

IF MCCAIN REALLY BELIEVED

All this from a man who once said with great conviction, "One of the things I've never tried to do is exploit my Vietnam service to my country, because it would be totally inappropriate to do so."

If McCain believed that, his early campaigns for House of Representatives might not have featured TV spots showing a recently released POW McCain limping off a military airplane.

If he believed it, he might not have said, "Even the Vietnamese didn't question my ethics," while trying to make excuses for his cozy relationship with S&L pirate Charles Keating, from whom

McCain accepted \$112,000 in campaign contributions and trips to the Bahamas.

If McCain really believed a person's character and value were determined by war experiences, like his and Dole's, he wouldn't have become the presidential campaign chairman for Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, who used a series of deferments to avoid Vietnam-era military service.

And how could McCain, if he believed such a thing, support Jack Kemp, who spent his youth throwing footballs rather than hand grenades?

For that matter, how could he sing the praises of former President Ronald Reagan?

Reagan's name has been invoked by every convention speaker looking for easy applause, including McCain.

Yet Reagan spent World War II making movies in Hollywood while hundreds of thousands of others - including Dole - were busy making war.

Is there a difference between Republican veterans and Democrats? Between Republicans without military service and Democrats? Between real heroes and actors on the screen?

John McCain, who's earned a hero's medals and a hero's title, doesn't seem to know anymore. Or to care.

I picture him in a campaign commercial saying, "I'm not a POW anymore, but I play one on TV."

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Campaign video has some footage that isn't real thing

By Jeff Barker

Republic Washington Bureau
June 4, 1999

WASHINGTON -- Some of the most dramatic scenes in John McCain's presidential campaign video, which shows spectacular Vietnam War footage of the former POW, aren't the real thing.

When the video was sent out this week to 50,000 New Hampshire voters, it appeared the producers had uncovered amazing archival film of McCain parachuting to Earth after his plane was shot down on a bombing run over Hanoi during the Vietnam War.

But it turns out the parachuting man depicted in grainy black-and-white is not McCain at all, but stock Defense Department footage of someone else, according to Mark Salter, McCain's chief of staff.

More Information

TITLE OF VIDEO: The Character to Do What's Right. The Courage To Fight For it.

RUN TIME: About 9 minutes.

PRODUCER: Stevens Reed Curcio & Co., a media firm based in Alexandria, Va. Other clients include Ohio Sens. George Voinovich and Mike DeWine, Maine Sen. Susan Collins and Minnesota Sen. Susan Collins.

DISTRIBUTION: Sent to 50,000 New Hampshire households. Other distribution plans to be announced later.

QUOTE: McCain "continued (Barry) Goldwater's tradition of plain-talk conservatism."

Watch the Video

- The [McCain campaign video](#) in it's entirety. (low band)
- Click [here](#) for the high

This and other liberties taken in the nine-minute video are commonplace in such productions as long as the facts are in order, Salter said. The videomakers never intended to deceive anyone, he said.

- Click [here](#) for the high band version of the video.

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However, since they are not told, viewers will have little way of knowing that some scenes in The Character to Do What's Right. The Courage to Fight for It are genuinely part of McCain's story -- a part of American history, really -- while others are representations.

For example, a clip of an "angry mob" seen ready to grab the unconscious McCain, is actually a generic group shot of some Vietnamese people, not really the hostile bunch that confronted the fallen Navy pilot after he landed in a lake, Salter said.

The look-alike scenes, some of them quite heroic, are interspersed with the others and often appear in the same jerky, black-and-white footage as the real McCoy.

The tape dramatically tells the story of how McCain, on a bombing mission, ejected from his plane and was captured, beaten and imprisoned from October 1967 until March 1973.

The actual McCain clips in the video are dazzling. Some were obtained from the Vietnamese government and helped to fill in gaps in the history of the war and to illustrate the experience of McCain, regarded by many as a U.S. hero.

Some scenes seem very real, but are not.

During the parachute sequence, for example, the voice-over declares, "McCain ejected as his plane spiraled violently to earth. The force of the ejection knocked him unconscious. Both of his arms and one leg were broken."

The video seems to perfectly match the narrative by showing a grainy, unrecognizable figure who appears to be unconscious falling through the air.

There's no indication that it's not a shot of McCain, now an Arizona senator.

The voice-over then declares that an "angry mob" formed on the ground that was "seeking retribution for the rain of bombs. Dragging (McCain) from the lake, they broke his shoulder with a rifle butt and bayoneted him repeatedly."

A mob is seen forming, but, "I don't think that's the mob that approached McCain," Salter said. "I think that's just a Vietnamese mob."

In another scene, the narrator refers to the "infamous Hanoi Hilton" where McCain spent most of his captivity. In fact, the video shows a clip of another prison where McCain was first held that Americans had nicknamed "The Plantation."

"I actually know what prison that is (in the video) because I've been there," Salter said. "It's the first prison John was held in. It's not the Hanoi Hilton."

There was no attempt to mislead anyone, said Greg Stevens, whose Virginia-based media firm produced the video.

"It's just a representation of what happened," he said. "I don't know any footage that exists showing John McCain parachuting from the plane. We have to put something up there that represents what's going on. I've probably done 30 or 40 of these (videos) and it's very common."

While most newspapers will inform readers if representations are used to depict people or events, the standard is different for videos and often for television, Stevens said.

"Do the words reflect the truth and do the pictures illustrate the words? We're absolutely on target," he

said.

The video producers said they enjoyed making the video because they consider McCain a hero.

More than other presidential candidates, McCain is relying on his personal story, particularly the war years, to support his campaign theme that he has the courage to be a leader.

The video also features a clip of a dazed McCain lying on his back and being interviewed by a French film crew after he was captured.

There is even a shot of the Hanoi sky and landscape as McCain and the other Americans were over a power plant on his ill-fated bombing run.

"If you look at that very closely, you'll see a little fireball up in the top right hand corner, and that is his (McCain's) plane. All the smoke and stuff is the power plant they were bombing," Salter said. The photo was taken by another pilot.

"You look at anything on TV, for example, and even in news reports there are demonstrations and depictions," said Howard Opinsky, McCain's campaign spokesman. "When you're telling the whole story, you don't want to be limited to just what you have footage of."

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