



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 31, 2013

Col. “Bud” Day, MOH Recipient and Vietnam War Hero, Dies at 88

Medal of Honor recipient Col. George “Bud” Day (shown), who was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for over five years, sharing a cell with future U.S. Senator John McCain at the infamous “Hanoi Hilton,” died July 27 at the age of 88.



Day, who was one of America’s most highly decorated U.S. servicemen, garnering over 70 medals and honors during service in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, received the Medal of Honor for escaping his North Vietnamese captors after the aircraft he was piloting was shot down August 26, 1967, and evading them for 10 days though severely injured. After his re-capture he continued to aggressively resist, giving false information during torture and interrogation. “His personal bravery in the face of deadly enemy pressure was significant in saving the lives of fellow aviators who were still flying against the enemy,” reads Day’s [Medal of Honor citation](#).

The [New York Times](#) noted that “Colonel Day’s life was defined by the defiance he showed in North Vietnamese prison camps, where, besides McCain, the future senator from Arizona and Republican presidential candidate, whose Navy fighter had been downed, his cellmates included James B. Stockdale, also a Navy pilot, who became Ross Perot’s running mate in his 1992 presidential campaign.”

Stockdale also received a Medal of Honor for his role as a main leader of the POW resistance.

In February 1971, in one memorable episode during their imprisonment, Day and Stockdale joined other American POWs in boldly singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” with rifles pointed at them after North Vietnamese guards discovered them holding a forbidden worship service.

Day was promoted to the rank of colonel during his captivity, and was released in March 1973. At a March 4, 1976 White House ceremony, President Gerald Ford presented both Day and Stockdale with their Medals of Honor.

In a 2008 interview, Day recalled that being a POW “was a major issue in my life and one that I am extremely proud of. I was just living day to day. One really bad cold and I would have been dead.”

In his memoir, *Faith of My Fathers*, Senator McCain recalled that Col. Day “was a tough man, a fierce resister, whose example was an inspiration to every man who served with him.” Recounting how Day comforted him after he had been severely beaten by his captors, McCain wrote that Day “had an



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indomitable will to survive with his reputation intact, and he strengthened my will to live.”

The [Washington Post](#) recalled that in 1967 a severely injured McCain arrived at a North Vietnamese POW camp dubbed the “Plantation,” where Day had been taken only a few weeks before and where guards unceremoniously threw McCain into Day’s cell. “We were the first Americans he had talked to,” Day later wrote in his memoir, *Return With Honor*. “We were delighted to have him, and he was more than elated to see us.”

Day said in a later interview that he was “stunned” by McCain’s condition. “My first thought was, ‘They dumped him on me so they can claim we let him die,’” he recalled. “I did not think he would live through the night.”

Speaking on the floor of the Senate on July 29, McCain recalled how Day and fellow POW Norris Overly nursed him back to health. “Bud and Norris wouldn’t let me die,” McCain recounted. “They bathed me, fed me, nursed me, encouraged me, and ordered me back to life.”

Col. Day, who was born in February 24, 1925 in Sioux City, Iowa, got his first taste of combat after he quit high school and joined the Marines in 1942, serving with an antiaircraft battery in the Pacific during World War II. He later graduated from Morningside College in Sioux City and received a law degree from the University of South Dakota before receiving his officer’s commission in the Iowa Army National Guard. Day later moved over to the Air Force Reserve, became a pilot, flew a fighter-bomber during the Korean conflict, and remained in military service through the Vietnam war.

After coming home from that conflict, Day continued to fly, serving as vice commander of a flight wing at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, retiring in 1977 after being passed over for brigadier general — a slight he speculated was due to his tendency to “tell it like it is.”

He later practiced law in Florida, representing veterans in disputes against the Veterans Administration. He also campaigned for McCain during his 2000 and 2008 presidential bids, and was a part of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth that targeted Senator John Kerry, discrediting his status as a Vietnam war hero.

Following Day’s death, McCain recalled his commanding officer and friend, saying, “I owe my life to Bud, and much of what I know about character and patriotism. He was the bravest man I ever knew, and his fierce resistance and resolute leadership set the example for us in prison of how to return home with honor.”

Photo of Col. George “Bud” Day in 2008: AP Images



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