

NAVY AIR BOSS

BY KYLE CRICHTON

John Sidney McCain is no story-book admiral; the dignity of the service is the least of his worries. But he is tough and he gets results. As one of his aides put it: When nothing can be done, McCain does something

AT FIRST glance, Vice Admiral John Sidney McCain, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), looks like a cowboy. His face is lined and weather-beaten; he is thin and wiry; he moves with the deceptive aimlessness of a man who is accustomed to being successful.

When interviewed, he looks quizzically at his questioner as if to ascertain the visitor's seriousness in asking such a momentous question. He drops his chin on his chest, closes his eyes fleetingly as his head drops and looks up at an angle, his lower jaw chewing briskly on nothing at all. His left eyebrow seems at least half an inch higher than his right and his words, coming from the subterranean portions of his being, are invariably illuminating and startling. Obviously, he has never minced a word in his life.

Admiral McCain is the boss of Navy aviation, a job he won by his work in the South Pacific around Guadalcanal. He took up flying in 1935 at the age of fifty-one and among the remarkable military leaders of our time, he belongs right up at the top.

When he reached Noumea in New Caledonia, shortly after Pearl Harbor, he had only one small job to do: help keep the Japs out of the islands north of Australia and keep the sea lanes clear from San Francisco to New Zealand. With him as a staff were Capt. M. B. (Matt) Gardner and Commander Frederick Funke, Jr., not a soul else for over a month, not even a yeoman to type reports for them. What they found in the way of fighting aircraft were eighteen Consolidated PBY flying boats and the Army with forty P-39s.

Under Divine Protection

"From a military point of view, it sometimes seems that we had a crust in just being there at all," says the admiral. "Had the Japanese come down in August with the power they showed in October or November, or even in September, I don't see how they could have lost. Why didn't they? I don't know. God was with us!"

They say of the admiral that he has two languages, English and profane. He is also the despair of all proper officers who fret about the dignity of the service. His uniforms have a disconcerting habit of creeping up his back with the intent of strangling him, and on the way to any formal function, he will invariably manage to get caught in the rain or be splashed by the residue from a gas-station hose.

But nobody was worrying about the sartorial McCain in those early days in the South Pacific. He was tough and undiscouraged and he inspired the few men he had to a course of work that literally threatened to kill them.

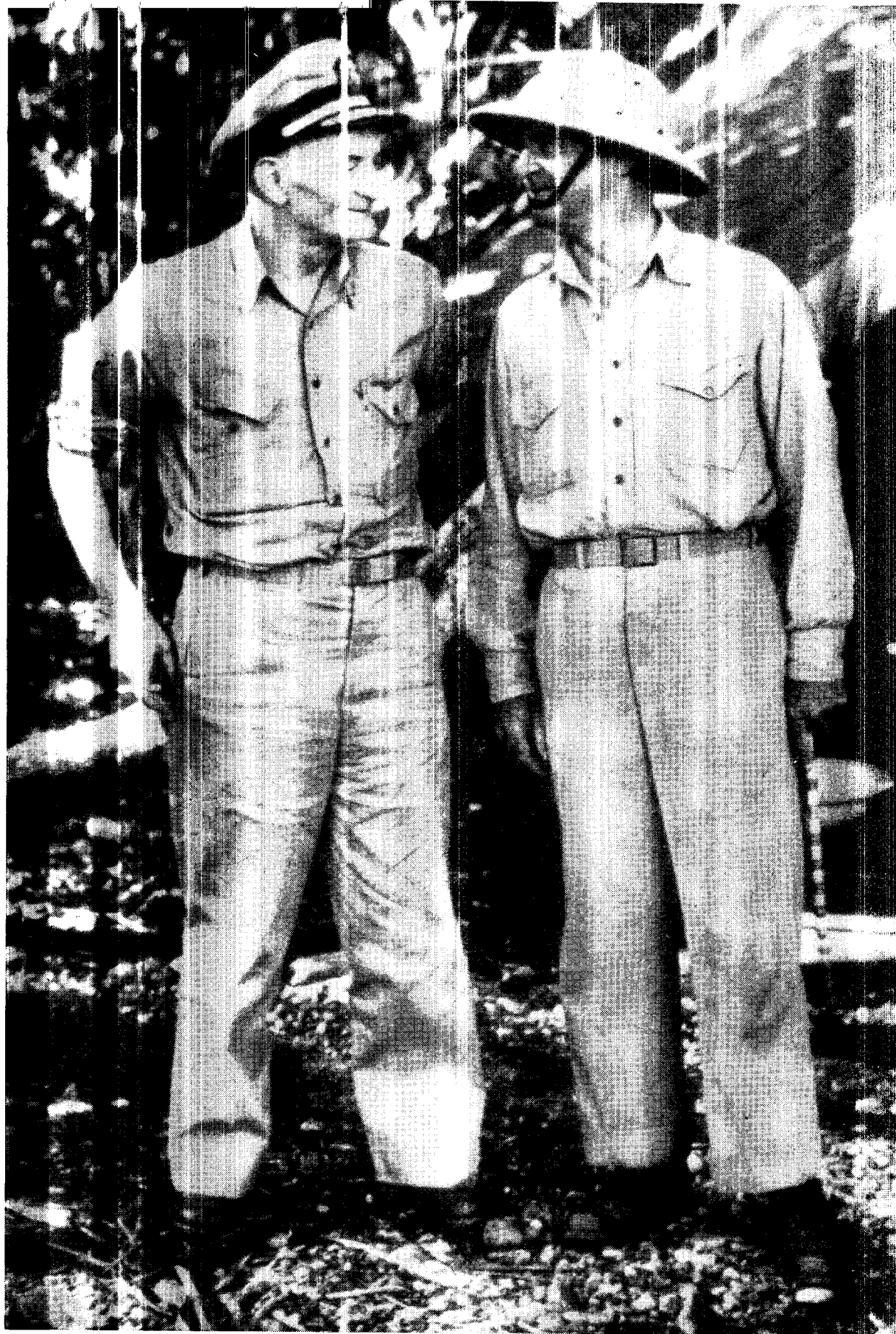
When asked what he considered to be Admiral McCain's outstanding characteristic, Captain Gardner thought a minute and then said, "When there isn't anything to be done, he's the kind of fellow who does something."

They were hanging on by their eyelashes, knowing that the Japs could come down and occupy the islands one by one, leave a small garrison to defend them and make it the work of months to get them off.

"Damned if I know why they didn't do it," says the admiral, with some bewilderment.

It was all right to pray for more planes and men and more dumbness by the Japanese, but in the meantime, preparations had to be made for reinforcements that might never come or might come too late.

They pored over maps, flew over hopeless-looking islands, scoured the territory for airfields and sea bases.



Admiral McCain (left) talks things over with Lieutenant General A. A. Vandegrift, commander of the Marines on Guadalcanal, at an American base in the Solomons

What they needed most was a harbor and a base from which they could get at the Japs at Tulagi. They were attracted by a place called Espiritu Santo, which seemed pretty good from the maps. They went up to investigate and found, to their delight and amazement, the best harbor in all the South Pacific, a landlocked, mineable body of water capable of harboring hundreds of ships. But when they wanted to build an airfield on the island, the higher command at Auckland said nothing doing—until July 12th.

In the meantime, they were keeping an eye on the Japs in the Solomons and particularly on the airfield the Japs were building on Guadalcanal.

"The date set for the attack on Guadalcanal was August seventh," says the admiral. "We'd send up our scout planes, and they'd bring us back photographs of the progress of the airfield. It was nip and tuck whether they'd finish the field and occupy it before we could move in. As a matter of fact, there was about two days' more work on the field when we did move in."

Not until the history of the war is written will it be known how close we came to getting driven out of

Guadalcanal. The Japs could have done it by coming down in force, but even their minor efforts were tough enough, a hundred Zeros at a time being faced by far smaller groups of our planes.

"Our fliers from all branches—Army, Navy and Marines—went up there and shot them down," says the admiral. "Those young pilots took a beating unequalled in the annals of war. Without relief, they fought day after day, night after night, for weeks."

The toughest job was getting in supplies and there were dozens of instances of heroism in the Navy in that work. In the early stages of the invasion, the planes at Henderson Field were running short of fuel, mainly due to losses of stored gasoline from enemy bombing. It was finish for the Marines if the Japs ever got control of the air. It was absolutely necessary to get aviation gasoline in there in a hurry and there were no fast tankers or cargo ships available for the job.

"We held a conference with the commanding officers of the small seaplane tenders," says the admiral. "They were converted from old four-stack destroyers, leftovers from the first World War. We (Continued on page 24)



ROME'S BLACK MONDAY

These photos are more than technically good; they are historic. They are rare, not less for the picturization of the Italian mass fright than for the Pontiff alone in a mob

AT ELEVEN o'clock on the morning of Monday, July 19th, Rome's 1,200,000 persons bent themselves to their new week's tasks after a warm week end. Wash was strung on clotheslines. Babies were sunned in parks. Betasseled Fascist officers exchanged salutes with dour Nazis. Everyone wondered how the Sicilian campaign was going. Far to the north, Mussolini stepped off a train, hunched in his fat stomach, and smiled a greeting to his master.

At 11:20, Romans shaded their eyes

against the yellow sun. The hum was growing louder in the north and it was beating against the ears and the windows and the sidewalks underfoot. They saw four-motored bombers. Big, lazy-looking dragonflies, a black cloud of them. At 11:23, Colonel Samuel Gormley, a blond Californian, was sitting in the bombardier compartment of the leading Fortress. He saw the curving streets and ancient churches in the cross hairs. Then they disappeared, and the shiny rails of the San Lorenzo freight yards came into his ken. He glued his face to the eyepiece and pressed his thumb against the little cable release.

The first 500-pound demolition bombs swam gracefully from the belly of the Fortress and curved down and down until they were lost to the eye. Then there was a slight jar, and a great exclamation point of black smoke, shot with orange flame, stood up from the yard. War had come to Rome.

Other Fortresses followed Gormley's. And soon the unhit buildings of northern Rome were rocking with the concussion, and a pale, spectacled man in the Vatican knelt on a prayer bench and murmured his fervent plea through the incessant drone of five hundred American planes and the splitting shock of thousands of explosions.

At noon, just as the bells of Rome's thousand churches tolled, a second wave of bombers passed over San Lorenzo. As the last one flew southward, a wave of big Liberators plastered the Littorio yards with 700,000 pounds of high explosive.

At 12:15, the people of Rome, great-eyed with fright, crouched in dank cellars and wept and prayed and stared slack-jawed at the incomprehensible fact that Rome was being bombed. At that moment, the medium Marauders and Mitchells whistled low across the rooftops and sped south to Ciampino airport, four miles away. High in the sky, twin-tailed

Lightnings patrolled back and forth, looking for opposition.

It was done at 1:45 P. M. It was done, and so, in a sense, was Rome. People ran hysterically in the streets, looking for kin. Shouts and cries filled the air, and bands of people moved toward the smoke areas.

Then, above the bedlam, the shrill cry, "Pax," was heard. It was then that the pale, ascetic Pope Pius XII left his prayer bench, got into his black limousine and left the Vatican to see the damage and to console Rome.

The abject fright of the people of Rome is clear in these photos. The effort of the Pope, his own heart weighted with worry, to bring order and reason to the mob, is also clear.

Two churches, both near freight yards, were hit. The nearest bomb to the Vatican was one that hit the Church of St. Mary of the Garden, 6,900 feet from the dome of St. Peter's. JAMES A. BISHOP