

CounterPunch

APRIL 1-15, 2008

ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

VOL. 15, NO. 7

Bill's Bad Year

From Charmer to Sleazeball

By Alexander Cockburn

She may not end up as the Democratic nominee, but the fall default option isn't so bad for Hillary Clinton, namely an active life in the public eye as the junior senator from New York. Substitute Illinois for New York, and the same is true of Barack Obama. But there is one person for whom the nomination battle has been bad news ever since March, and that's Bill Clinton.

Clinton left the White House eight years ago with the highest job performance rating – 65 per cent – of any president since World War II. He was one point ahead of Ronald Reagan. That didn't mean that Americans thought much of his character and morals. Almost four out of five gave him an F on moral and ethical standards.

Two terms of George Bush Jr. improved Bill's lowly F-character rating, particularly among liberals and blue-collar workers. They forgot Clinton's endless political liaisons with the Republican right, his onslaughts on welfare, his job-exporting trade deals. They just remembered that America of the mid to late '90s was more of a fun place than it is now. People were happier, and, in a perverse way, the essentially trivial Lewinsky scandal helped Bill in retrospect. If the worst thing about him was a fling with an intern, was that really so bad?

The clamor over the stained dress drowned out whimpers from the prudish that Clinton was as corrupt as any president in U.S. history and had put the White House up for sale. Tycoons ponied up \$200,000 for a night or two in the Lincoln bedroom. Among the last documents he signed as president was a pardon for the fugitive financier Marc Rich.

War Hero?

Meet the Real John McCain: North Vietnam's Go-To Collaborator

By Douglas Valentine

If you have no idea what war is about, thank God. It's not what you see in movies or told by your government.

When my father was in New Guinea with the 32nd Division in 1942, his fellow American soldiers would point their long Springfield rifles skywards and shoot at American pilots flying overhead.

"Glory Boys," the ground troops called them.

The pilots had comfortable quarters beside the airstrip in Port Moresby. When orders for a mission came down, they'd climb in their planes, rattle down the runway, and soar over the Owen Stanley Mountains with the clouds, breathing fresh, clean air. The Glory Boys weren't trapped in the broiling jungle, in the mud and pouring rain, their skin rotting away, chewed by ghastly insects, bitten by poisonous snakes, stricken with cerebral malaria, yellow fever, dysentery, and a host of unknown diseases delivered by unknown parasites.

If the Fly Boys died, it was in a blaze of glory, not from a landmine, or a misdirected mortar, or a Japanese bayonet in the brain.

One day, my father and his last remaining friend, Charlie Ferguson, were walking through the jungle up to the line. On the way they passed a group of bare-chested Aussies in shorts, sitting round a grindstone sharpening their knives. Every once in a while one of the Aussies would hoist his rifle and casually put a bullet into a Japanese sniper who had tied himself into the top of a nearby tree. Not in any place that would outright kill him but some place, painful enough to make the point.

A little further toward the front line, my father and Charlie came upon Master Sergeant Harry Blackman, a man in his forties, regular army, a grizzled combat veteran. A few days earlier in a fight with the Japanese, a young lieutenant, a "90-Day Wonder", had curled up in a fetal position when he should have been directing mortar fire. As a result, U.S. Army mortar rounds landed on several U.S. Army soldiers up on the line. Blackman, in front of everyone, took the lieutenant behind a tree and blew his brains out.

As my father and Charlie walked through the jungle, they saw Harry Blackman perched on the lower limb of a huge tropical tree, babbling incoherently, driven stark raving mad by sorrow and jungle war with the Japanese.

Several days later, my father was sent on a patrol into Japanese held territory. He was the last man in a formation moving single file through the jungle. Plagued by malaria and exhaustion, he kept falling behind. Around noon, a group of Japanese soldiers sitting high up in trees dropped concussion grenades on the patrol. As he lay on the ground, unable to move, my father watched the Japanese slide down the trees. Starting with the point man on patrol, they pulled down the pants and castrated each man, before clubbing him to death with their rifle butts or running a bayonet into his gut.

War. If you're a Glory Boy like John Sidney McCain III, you really have no idea what it is. You drop bombs on cities, on civilians, maybe on enemy forces, maybe on your own troops. Glory Boys like McCain rarely get a taste of the horror they inflict on others. Their suffering

rarely extends beyond the worry that they might get shot down.

Magically, my father was spared that day when his patrol was slaughtered. Against regulations, he had stolen a cross-swords patch and sewn it on his shirtsleeve. At the age of 16, he thought it looked cool. On the morning of the patrol, when the new lieutenant told him to take it off, my father said, "Sure." He and the lieutenant started at each other for a while, and then the lieutenant moved away. Insubordination was the least of his worries. No one was expected to survive the patrol, anyway.

When the Japanese who had ambushed the patrol got to my father, they stood poised to mutilate and kill him. Then they saw the cross-swords patch. They apparently felt that dear old dad was an important person with inside information about American forces. Instead of killing him, they took him prisoner. When they realized he was just a stupid kid, the Japanese sent him to a POW camp in the Philippines.

Being a POW is what my father and John McCain have in common; although their experiences as POWs were as different as their class and their character.

McNasty

In the fall of 1967, Navy pilot John McCain was routinely bombing Hanoi from an aircraft carrier in the South China Sea. On October 26, he was trying to level a power plant in a heavily populated area when a surface-to-air missile knocked a wing off his jet. McCain and what was left of his plane splashed into Truc Bach Lake.

A compassionate Vietnamese civilian left his air raid shelter and swam out to McCain. McCain's arm and leg were broken, and he was tangled up in his parachute underwater. He was drowning. The Vietnamese man saved McCain's sorry

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.

ass, and yet McCain has nothing but hatred for "the gooks". As he told reporters on his campaign bus in 2000, "I will hate them as long as I live".

You have to hate people to drop bombs on them, which is why the U.S. and Israeli governments stir up so much hatred against Muslims. That's why Saddam Hussein became a symbol of Iraq and why Bush tied him to 9/11 – so American soldiers would hate Iraqis enough to kill and abuse them in a thousand ways, everyday, for five years. Or, according to McCain, for 100 years if necessary.

The flip side to the equation is that people generally hate those who drop bombs on them. When the Germans dropped bombs on London, the Allies called it terror bombing. Everyone hated the Germans. Most Iraqis hate the Americans (who more and more resemble the Germans of 1940) for occupying their country. They especially hate our Gestapo – the CIA – and its torturers. But that's war for you, and John McCain is lucky the locals didn't eat him – like Uzbek nationalists trapped in a hor-

rid prison camp chewed on CIA officer John "Mike" Spann shortly after Spann summarily executed a prisoner. Spann (the John Birch of the war on terror) was killed in the ensuing riot, shortly before the CIA and its Afghan collaborators massacred the majority of prisoners on November 28, 2001. On his previous 22 missions, McCain dropped God knows how many bombs, killing God knows how many innocent Vietnamese civilians. "I am a war criminal", he confessed on *60 Minutes* in 1997. "I bombed innocent women and children."

If he is sincere when he says that, why isn't he being tried for war crimes by the U.S. government?

In any event, the man who rescued McCain tried to ward off an angry mob, which stomped on McCain for a while until the local cops turned him over to the military. McCain was in pain but suffered no mortal wounds. He was, however, in enough pain to break down and start collaborating with the Vietnamese after three days.

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.

There are certainly degrees of collaboration. As a famous novelist once asked, "If you're a barber and you cut a German's hair, does that make you a collaborator?" Being an informant for the Gestapo and/or informing on the resistance and sending resistance fighters to their death is different than being a barber. 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. A number of U.S. officials and politicians have commented on McCain's eruptions of temper. 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. In

CounterPunch

EDITORS

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

ASSISTANT EDITOR

ALEVINA REA

BUSINESS

BECKY GRANT

DEVA WHEELER

DESIGN

TIFFANY WARDLE

COUNSELOR

BEN SONNENBERG

CounterPunch

PO Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

1-800-840-3683

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

www.counterpunch.org

All rights reserved.