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FRANK GAMBOA INTERVIEW  
*JOHN MCCAIN: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS*  
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**FRANK GAMBOA**  
**Naval Academy Classmate**  
**September 25, 2017**  
Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt  
**Total Running Time: 1 Hour 25 Minutes**

**START TC:**  
**QT: 01;00;00;00**

**QT: 01;00;09;02**

## **TITLE**

Befriending McCain, their plebe year at the Naval Academy and the making of John's reputation as a maverick

**QT: 01;00;14;19**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well, I met him plebe summer in 1954. There were 1,234 of us. We came in—most of them arrived on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Monday. I was in the Army. I got draf—I dropped out of college so I got drafted but the Army let me go when the Naval Academy released me so I didn't get here until middle of July. I don't remember meeting him plebe summer because it's very fast paced and you're trying to—the indoctrination into how to be a midshipman and how to conform with the military regulations and the academic routine so it seems like you're running everywhere. So I don't remember meeting him actually but I was meeting everybody else.

**QT: 01;01;10;04**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

I had to wait two weeks for my army discharge, so at the end of plebe's summer is when the brigade, which are the new seniors and the new second class and the new third class, come back from their training during the summer; they had been on a cruise to Europe, on navy ships; that's when

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they got their practical training and their first initial training in going to sea. So they called it reforming the brigade and we're the new freshman or plebe class and the brigade was organized into two regiments of three battalions each. Each battalion had four companies so there were 24 companies and John and I were assigned to 17<sup>th</sup> company. There are about 150, 160 midshipmen per company and we live in the same dorm area, we go to class together, we have our meals together and of course your roommates who are picked for you, you don't make any decisions on your own your plebe year. So I was assigned five other roommates and I ended up with four of 'em, one of 'em—one of 'em left and then I don't know what happened to another one.

**QT: 01;02;42;11**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Anyway, the way you—that you get to know each other is through the plebe's indoctrination, they call it plebe year where you're at the mercy of the upperclassmen, the second class and the first class. The second class are in charge of your plebe indoctrination and the first class are sort of your mentors but they can also participate but the focus is on the second class and we had a mean second class. They were the class of '56. John, he didn't have a problem with being a midshipman, he had a problem with conforming with the rigid regulations on uniform, on appearance, on decorum and on the—on the indoctrination they used to—like at lunch time or breakfast they would give you what they call professional questions about trivia, but they wanted to see how you answered these questions, how agile you were mentally because you were sitting at the three-inch edge of your chair straight back, your eyes, in the boat, and they did it deliberately, just put a lot of pressure on you.

**QT: 01;04;10;11**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

It's—they—they'd say things like, "Mr. Gamboa. I see where you were president of your high school senior class. Isn't that marvelous, we're so fortunate to have a hero like you. Would you please stand up and tell us for three minutes why you were elected president and some of the main—marvelous things you did?" And you had to stand up and response to beat. If you got nervous or they were not satisfied, they would say, "Mr. Gamboa, come around to our room at 7:30 this evening." So at 7:30, most of your classmates were back in their room getting ready for study hour, you were in

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your full uniform at this upperclassman's room and at 7:30 precisely you stand—walk into the room and stand at attention, and then they harass you some more, and that's what's called plebe year. They would do things like assign you to window closing detail, which meant that—the midshipmen liked to sleep—some of them liked to sleep with their window open, nice and cool at night.

**QT: 01;05;22;12**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Some of them liked to wake up with the window closed and the heat turned on, so you got a list of rooms to go around at 5:30 in the morning and Revelry was at 6:15 and close all the windows, turn the heat on, and they would do things like put the wastepaper basket, trip you up because if you—if you woke them up, then you got further assignments, so plebe year, they want to find out who you are, what you're made of, why you're there, what your background was. Now, I'm Hispanic. My mother and father were born in Mexico. My ancestors are French, Spanish and Portuguese and Sanora Yaqui Indian.

**QT: 01;06;13;18**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So my parents came to California during the revolutionary period in the 1918's, 1920 and mother and father met in Los Angeles and they were married in California and my six siblings and I were born in California. There were—of the—now this is the 1950's and there's quite a bit of segregation in California, the Mexican kids were segregated from other kids in school. I—I did not—in my home town we did not have that, we were a very small community, there were 25 in my senior class. But nevertheless when I arrived at the Naval Academy of the 120—1,234, there were six Hispanics. There were two—no, three Mexican Americans, two Puerto Ricans and a Cuban. No, he was Spaniard, Spaniard. So John and I became acquainted, you—they would turn you up—in other words, you would be assigned to one table of four plebes for about a month, and then they would change you to another table and mix the plebes up, so that's how you got to know each other.

**QT: 01;07;40;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We became friends and then three of us decided to room together. At the end of your plebe year if you make it, then you get to choose your roommates for your sophomore year. So Jack and John and I chose to room together and then we—we recruited the smartest guy in the company to room with us. We wanted to have some academic reinforcement for our room. He stood 17<sup>th</sup> in the class. So by the end of plebe year, John had a reputation of being a little bit of a Maverick. He had some rather notorious run-ins with the first class. I'll tell you one, this—this happened his sophomore year.

**QT: 01;08;39;20**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We were—both had the duty and we spent—we were on watch in Bancroft Hall. So, on Saturday noon's, we always have a giant formation in front of Bancroft Hall. You're inspected and then everybody else goes on to—out in town or the first classmen went on weekend liberty. The plebes, we couldn't go out beyond—we could go out in town for—until six o'clock, so we would have six hours outside but you had to be back before evening meal and you made in your room or in Bancroft Hall or in the yard all weekend.

**QT: 01;09;27;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well anyway, John and I had the duty so we went down to King Hall for lunch and they closed one third of King Hall on weekends because everybody's out. So we sat at a table where we didn't know the upperclassmen, we didn't know anybody as plebes so we just sat there and while we were eating, I noticed that the first classmen, there was one first classmen at the end of the table, he was berating the steward who happened to be a Filipino. He had asked him to bring him seconds and the—there weren't any seconds, so he was being pretty—I could sense that John was tensing up.

**QT: 01;10;17;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Then, all of a sudden, he burst out and he says, "Hey mister, why don't you pick on somebody your own size?" at the first classman. He was so stunned, he said, "What did you say?" He said, "That steward is doing the best he can and you're picking on him." Then came the standard response from an upperclassman, "What's your name mister?" And John says, "John McCain.

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Seventh—third class, 17<sup>th</sup> company. What’s yours?” Well, by this time I wasn’t breathing. So the first classman got so flustered that he just got up and left the table.” And then John got up and left the table, so I jumped up and followed him out and he says, “It really pisses me off when I see a senior picking on a subordinate, using his power like that.”

**QT: 01;11;21;06**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I said yeah, I can see that. Well, that—that episode spread throughout our class like wildfire and we sort of—that—that was a milestone in our company at least. And so we—we said, well, John is our moral compass and he never—we never heard from the upperclassman but to confront an upperclassman is almost a court martial offense, and you automatically, you get thrown out but nothing came of it.

**QT: 01;12;00;12**

**TITLE**

A maverick McCain story

**QT: 01;12;05;05**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

One day, this is when we were youngsters, we had a marine company officer. Each company had a commissioned officer who was called the company officer. He was responsible for your behavior and conduct. Captain Hunt—by this time, John had sort of a reputation as not really too concerned about full compliance with navy regulations there. So one day we came back from class and John went into his room and he came out and slammed his books on the desk and went storming out the door, and so Keith and Jack and I were wondering what was going on.

**QT: 01;13;04;03**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So we looked into his room and all his bedding was piled on his mattress so—what—John later told us what happened. He returned to his room in about two minutes. His face was flushed; he was really angry. So we said, “What happened?” He said he walked into Captain Hunt’s office unannounced, stood before his desk at attention and says, “Sir, please don’t tear up my bunk. I only have time to make it once a day. If you don’t like it,

just put me on report.” And he turned around and walked—well, we—we feared for his life. We said, “Oh no, now he’s confronted a commissioned officer and a marine.” So nothing happened. So that solidified our impression of John as our moral compass and he was fearless.

**QT: 01;13;59;23**

**TITLE**

Captain Hunt vs McCain story

**QT: 01;14;04;17**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well, let me tell you a preceding story. We were—or each year you move up one deck and our senior year we were at the top deck. So you had to climb five decks. And every day, just about every day your room gets inspected. From the time you get up at 6:15 you have to make up your room, clean the tub, go to breakfast, come back, and give your room a final inspection, then you go form up and go to class, so you’re always under pressure. And by the time you’re a first classman, they don’t harass you much, you’re—they know you, you’ve been there three years and this is your final year and unless you’re just a total screw up, you’re pretty much given a free pass on everything.

**QT: 01;15;03;18**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

But Hunt—Captain Hunt didn’t give us any free pass and one day, a marine Major was inspecting the rooms and the Captain happened to be coming out of his office and he saw the marine Major going into—so he said something like, “Whatever you give them, they deserve.” Well, there was a messenger on watch behind him so we came up, our room had a report for room in disorder, they found—either your laundry bag wasn’t in the right place or your locker wasn’t made up exactly as it should. So John went out to the hall and asked the plebe, he said, “Who inspected our room?” And he told him, and he said, “Did he say anything?” He says, “No but Captain Hunt told him that you deserved everything you got.” Oh, John got furious. He says, “I’m resigning and I’m gonna join the foreign legion!”

**QT: 01;16;10;21**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

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And we said—so he called his mother Roberta and she says, ok. So she called the commandant and she said, “I know John had deserved everything he’s gotten but I think he’s being treated unfairly.” So the commandant looked into it and he w—he withdrew the report. And by this time we convinced John that maybe resigning and going into the French Foreign Legion was not the best career path. Well, that wa—so Hunt eventually got word that the commandant had canceled so he says, “That’s just more favorable treatment for McCain.” So in our senior—the last semester, the company officers have the first classmen over for dinner, usually by room. Well, we were very curious as to whether one, we were gonna be invited and two, how we were gonna be treated because the others had a nice dining room setting with all this silver and the candelabra, all the niceties.

**QT: 01;17;22;10**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

When we—finally we did get an invitation and we went over and we wen—we were escorted to the back deck and he served us grilled hot dogs, from the grill and it was obvious that he—it was a very awkward moment for him to have the four of us there, so we left as soon as possible. And we—we had a great laugh and especially by this time, the social custom was that after dinner, all the first classmen gathered in a company room or—or—just talk about the gossip, and we told the story about Hunt and that just further enhanced John’s reputation.

**QT: 01;18;16;20**

**TITLE**

The “bad bunch”

**QT: 01;18;21;16**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

John was a close friend of the brigade commander and—Chuck Larson. Chuck Larson walked on water. He was a six striper, he was the President of our class and he had a—he was just a very smart and sharp guy and he was—obviously had a bright future in the navy and he and John had gotten acquainted during the cruise, one of the cruises and they became good friends and John would invite us to his parents’ home on Capitol Hill for parties because he had gone to school at Episcopal High, so he knew a lot of girls and he knew a lot of guys and would host parties. If you wanted to go to

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a party with John in Washington DC, you had to get an invitation from him and he would always take us and Larson included in the—well, I don't know how it came about but we—we—we just started calling ourselves the “bad bunch” because we were—we were noted for our fun parties and just cutting a wide social swath through Washington and Annapolis. And I don't know how we got the name the “bad bunch” but that's what we were called.

**QT: 01;19;57;18**

## **TITLE**

Late night escapades at local bars and “going over the wall”

**QT: 01;20;02;19**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

I was very fortunate to get into the Naval Academy; I wasn't going to do anything to risk being expelled or getting an excessive number of demerits. The—but John did and there was also a beer hall called The Town Hall, it was just beyond the seven-mile limit—the limit of liberty for midshipmen was a seven-mile radius from the center of the chapel dome. You couldn't go beyond that seven-mile limit. And the guys would sneak out there and have some beer and come back, usually it's the guys who went over the wall and John did that a couple of times and we just prayed that he wouldn't get caught.

**QT: 01;20;55;03**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

There was a physical wall but there were places in the wall where it was relatively easy to climb over it, and only those who were interested in going over knew where it was

**QT: 01;21;08;15**

## **TITLE**

John's parents, Roberta and Jack McCain

**QT: 01;21;13;19**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

We met Roberta and her husband, John's father who was a navy captain, their—they had a beautiful home and in fact they donated it to the Republican party so it's the Capitol Hill grill top and part of it is part of the



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national republican committee so it's a large house, a lot of rooms, so John saw it as his duty to fill it with midshipmen so he—he invited us to their house. They would—at first he just took his roommates so Jack and Keith and I were invited for a weekend at his house and he w—we would have dinner with his parents and then we would go out to a party that John had arranged.

**QT: 01;22;01;04**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And I remember thinking, wow, this is the first time I've ever sat at a table with elaborate china and silver and crystal and candelabras but she was so gracious, she made you feel like this is the way you normally have dinner. She was the perfect hostess, very charming, and John's father was the most inspirational Naval officer I ever met in my whole life. He just—we just loved him, he was so patriotic and he was so interesting and he would show—one—one time when we were there, he showed us a film of one of his submarine attacks on a Japanese ship, taken through the periscope so that was fascinating. And in fact, his father actually sank a Japanese destroyer in a sea battle and he shot it—he torpedoed it with the most difficult shot you can make as a submariner and that is the down the throat shot because you're coming at each other head to head and he fired the torpedo and sank it.

**QT: 01;23;14;04**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well in the—when y'all have to report these incidents and one of the endorsers said, "Well he could've done it a lot easier than a head to head shot." I said, "Nah, he was a McCain." But our routine when we arrived at the house on Saturday was to go to the study where the captain would be and he would talk to us about how—we always had to tell him how we were doing academically and so forth and if everything was ok. And usually there would be a congressman visiting him, so he would introduce us as the future leaders of our navy and our nation and pump us up. We used to call that our—our regular shot of blue and gold, but it was always a thrill to be with him.

**QT: 01;24;15;04**

**TITLE**

John's father, Jack McCain

**QT: 01;24;20;00**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well he's a—he's a very handsome guy, grey hair and looked very much—you could—he just emanated power and strength and charm. And he had a great sense of humor and John had great respect for his dad. They often clashed but he—he would never be insubordinate to his father.

**QT: 01;24;49;22**

**TITLE**

The similarities between John and his dad

**QT: 01;24;54;21**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I don't even know how the argument started but we were—John's father, he was a captain then, he'd come down on a Saturday to take us to lunch and for some reason it was just John and me and we were—they had gotten into a discussion—it might have been related to the treatment of the first class of the Filipino steward, I don't remember. But they were—John was questioning his father about how—how that could happen in today's ??? or a senior would treat a junior so disrespectfully and his father was trying to explain it to him but John was—would not accept, so they got into a bit of an argument as we were walking back and John was walking at a fast pace swinging his left arm and I remember distinctly watching, I said, "These guys are so much alike." His father was walking the same way, swinging his left arm. So they just finally accepted the fact that John was not going to yield on his perception that the first classman had been unfair and had deserved to be punished and that was that. But it—it was the only time I ever witnessed the intensity of both men, I said, "Wow, these are powerful individuals."

**QT: 01;26;26;14**

**TITLE**

On McCain qualities and John's grandfather

**QT: 01;26;32;00**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

They're combatants. That's the best way I can describe it. Their natural combative instincts, their courage, their fearlessness in a confrontation with the enemy. That's the way I interpreted their behavior. I did not have a military background and I had never been around sailors or naval officers. So

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I would just say that they were strong and courageous and inspirational naval officers with a penchant for leadership, it was just a natural ability. You can't teach that kind of leadership. You have to be born with that and they were and are. His grandfather commanded a Task Force under Bill Halsey—Bull Halsey.

**QT: 01;27;37;01**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

They were all close friends and John's father—I think John's grandfather commanded Task Force 38. Admiral Spruance commanded Task Force 58. They would rotate the task force—it was the same task force but when Admiral McCain was command under Bull Halsey, it was Task Force 38. They'd go out on a mission and officers of operations, usually they'd return to Ulithi, which is a huge base of islands and lagoons where the fleet could anchor and replenish and refuel, get replacement pilots and so forth. So McCain would go out on an operation on Task Force 38 and then come back, then Spruance would take over and they would go out while McCain's staff planned for the next operation. This was pretty much the—the—the routine in the last year of the war. And when the war ended, John's grandfather was in command of Task Force 38 off the coast of Japan, bombing and attacking the Japanese land targets. So I believe he fired the last shot of World War II.

**QT: 01;29;03;05**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And of course, they were—he—he had—he was not in good health, and these are stories that John has told us, and he wanted to go home. In retrospect, they think he might have had a heart attack. Anyway, Bull Halsey says, "You're going to the Missouri—you're gonna be here for that surrender ceremony, I don't care how you feel, because you're one of the reasons we won." So his grandfather stayed, his father was bringing a Japanese submarine—in command of a Japanese submarine—bringing it into Tokyo Harbor so he wasn't at the ceremony, but they met afterwards and had lunch and then he flew home the next day and arrived home two days after the ceremony and they had a big reception at his house and he died—he had a heart attack and died at the party, so he was posthu—he was a three-star Admiral, he was posthumously promoted to a four-star Admiral. And when

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his f—when John’s father made four-star Admiral, they were the first four-star Admiral father-son in the US navy history.

**QT: 01;30;26;11**

**TITLE**

The McCain legacy and the Society of the Cincinnati

**QT: 01;30;32;19**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well, John was aware of his legacy. I mean, the McCain’s go all the way back to the American Indian wars before the revolution and he is a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, which is an association of officers from George Washington’s staff who got together with their French counterparts at the end of the war and formed the order of—the Society of the Cincinnati. The Cincinnati is a Roman farmer who takes up arms in defense of the empire, so that’s probably the most prestigious Revolutionary War association and yet he’s a direct descendant and I think one of the—one of the McCain’s was a West Point graduate and one of them was a general in the—in the confederacy during the Civil War so—they’re just a family that has a dedication and a heritage and legacy of military service to America.

**QT: 01;31;44;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And so with that, we always felt that that was a tremendous weight of responsibility on John and which in my opinion is what made him a little bit rebellious because he didn’t have a choice like we did to select what we wanted to do in the navy. It wasn’t that he was pre-ordained but he certainly couldn’t say, “Well I’m not gonna serve in the navy, I’m gonna go in the air force.”

**QT: 01;32;13;08**

**TITLE**

On the pressure John felt from the McCain legacy and packing his parent’s house with friends

**QT: 01;32;17;04**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We just intuitively felt it. But all the time we were rooming together, there would be visitors to the Naval Academy and a lot of them, flag officers during World War II, they all knew each other and whenever one of them who was a close friend of his grandfather or his father was visiting the superintendent, he would ask to see John. So we would come back from last class, say, “Admiral so and so will be in the Rotunda at 4:30 and would like to say hello to you.” So after dinner he would tell us who admiral so and so was. We were just in awe, I mean, we would read about these guys in the history book and then we’d meet one of them through John, so with that kind of relationship and that kind of association with his grandfather’s peers and his father’s peers had to have a tremendous psychological and emotional impact on him because he was—and in fact we had to write a term paper for our senior year history class, and what he did is, he wrote to all the admirals and said, “Could you send me your impressions of my father or my grandfather?”

**QT: 01;33;36;08**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So he would read us these letters about how Bull Halsey felt about Slew McCain and it was—it was like having live history and so we learned a lot about the navy and the culture and the tradition of service. And I know it was a big factor in my choice of being a naval officer, the indoctrination. Now, let’s go back to Roberta. We—we never knew how many people were gonna end up at the McCain household because after we would leave the party and coming home, John wanted to circle around to the favorite midshipman’s watering hole like the Willard Hotel and see if anybody had a place to stay. So we would usually pick up two or three classmates and he’d find some place to—probably kicked his brother out of his bed. Anyway, one morning I came down early and Roberta was in the kitchen cooking and she said, “How many of you are there, Frank?” I said I don’t know Mrs. McCain, I’ll go check.” So I came back, I said, “There are 13 of us.”

**QT: 01;34;48;06**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

She said—so she gave me a 20-dollar bill and says, “Run down to the corner store and get me some milk and eggs and bacon, I haven’t got enough to feed you all.” So I always thought, well if she kept feeding us, we kept coming back. But they were tremendous and when I was in the navy, whenever I had an opportunity to call on them, I did. And when I was a lieutenant, he was in

command of the Atlantic fleet amphibious force at Little Creek and I was stationed in Norfolk and I went to see them, I was a lieutenant, and I told Roberta, I said, "I'm thinking of becoming a career naval officer." And she said, "Well if you're gonna do that, then pick all the hard jobs because that's how you're gonna get promoted. And that's what Jack did." Her husband. So I ended up doing 17 years of sea duty but I ended up with command so she was right.

**QT: 01;35;51;18**

**TITLE**

Frank was the first Mexican American Surface Warfare Officer

**QT: 01;35;56;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Surface warfare officer. There is a—he doesn't claim to be a Mexican American but he was born in Los Angeles and he—class of '42. He was an aviator and he commanded a carrier during the Vietnam War so I'm very careful to stipulate that I'm the surface warfare first. And I even wrote a letter to the CNO, said I'm gonna—in my memoir I make the claim. I said, "Could you please tell me if I'm the first?" Well, President Nixon changed the 1970 Census to count for the first time ever in US history the Mexican Americans, the Puerto Ricans, the Cubans, the ethnics. He—they identified their ethnicity, otherwise they were Caucasian or negro or white or yellow. So President Nixon changed all of that. So the navy did not—but the navy did not identify Mexican Americans until 1977. Well, I had already been out in the fleet and they had listed me as Hispanic so when I was trying to verify this, I called the registrar of the Naval Academy and she said—she—for about two weeks they tried to search it and they said, "We can't." So I—I estimate that I'm among the first 20 to graduate from the Naval Academy and I'm the first to command a ship.

**QT: 01;37;40;20**

**TITLE**

On McCain being sloppy in the Naval Academy

**QT: 01;37;45;06**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

That's a little exaggeration, nobody's sloppy at the Naval Academy but you—one of the rituals especially when you're wearing your navy blues is to brush them off. And we were issued clothes brushes and we—the ritual was, before you went out to formation is your roommate brushed your uniform off to make sure there was no lint or dirt or food and he went through all that ritual. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder and the senior inspecting you can overlook some imperfections in your collar or the way your tie is tied or whether you got a close shave or your hair—you haven't gotten your haircut. All of the—the grooming standards are pretty much what your impression is but no one is ever sloppy. I think they were just exaggerating to make a point. He did just enough to get by.

**QT: 01;38;46;14**

**TITLE**

John's confrontational manner

**QT: 01;38;51;11**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Nobody is cast from the same mold at the Naval Academy. You come from 50 different states, different cultures, and there's obviously gonna be clashes of opinion. John was not a good person to clash with because he could martial his facts very forcefully and very adept and he just had a way of confronting you not belligerently but forcefully and I never saw him lose an argument. And they would argue about anything, you know. He loved history so nobody ever challenged him about history. But he was a little bit temperamental too so I'm sure there were times when he had—what others would consider a pretty strong confrontation but it was just John's mannerism but he never held a grudge and he was friendly and outgoing and he attracted a lot of friendships because he was entertaining and interesting to be around, and he was charming with beautiful women. And so you could do no wrong to associate with him but I would never characterize him as sloppy. I would say he didn't measure up to the highest standards of like, Chuck Larson who was the brigade commander, he had to have a spotless uniform and a perfect shoe shine every time and he managed to do it.

**QT: 01;40;26;09**

**TITLE**

Aviation culture vs surface warfare

**QT: 01;40;31;00**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

The aviator world is quite different from the surface warfare world in the fleet. I would say that navy pilots exhibit a different personality and comradery and spirit than do destroyer sailors for example. It's just the nature of their culture of that community, the aviation community has a different culture than the surface warfare or the submarine community or the civil engineers, they all have their unique culture. And that—and if—there are strong personalities everywhere and inevitably there are clashes but the difference is John would never bear a grudge. Once an argument was over and it settled, it was over. So he didn't create an enemies list as far as I know. He—he—he remained pretty popular. Because of his name he was always well known but he never considered that a burden, it was a source of pride to him.

**QT: 01;41;52;17**

**TITLE**

Sports

**QT: 01;41;56;17**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

He was a wrestler and a boxer. And we all—we all had to play sports but we had intramural sports like softball and flag football and—or battalion football and baseball and wrestling and boxing and he ended up as a bo—he'd been a wrestler and a boxer in high school so he followed that up. I had played football in High School so my first classman was the battalion coach so I played football whether I wanted to or not. I'm not sure if he won the company boxing championship but if not he probably got pretty close to it. He was a fearless boxer.

**QT: 01;42;43;17**

**TITLE**

McCain as a student

**QT: 01;42;48;00**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**



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As a student? Well, he did enough to get by but he just wasn't interested in being a star man. And if you don't start off your first year in building a reputation of being a serious student who is going to excel at the Naval Academy, then you'd just struggle to make it through. I—in our—in our room, here's what I mean. Keith Bunting was the smartest—one of the smartest guys in the class. He went into nuclear power and commanded submarines, but he stood number 17. Jack was equally smart but he was fun loving, not as disciplined as Keith so he stood about 350, I stood 669, 667, and John was five from the bottom by choice. So we always used to say that the leaders of the class and the fleet came from the lower half of the academic standings. Nobody ever believed it but you had to have something to say.

**QT: 01;44;04;11**

## **TITLE**

McCain is not to be underestimated

**QT: 01;44;10;00**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

For example, if you assumed because of his class standing that he was an ignoramus or not very bright, then you would be quite surprised when you had a dialogue with John McCain on a topic of interest. So even though he finished low academically, nobody considered him to be anything less than an intelligent person. Very, very well-informed.

**QT: 01;44;36;07**

## **TITLE**

McCain was always a leader and loyal

**QT: 01;44;41;22**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

In our company and in forming the bad bunch but yes, he was—he was very serious about any leadership assignment. But let me—let me tell you about the bad bunch again. I had pretty high grades which was aptitude and so our senior year, I was called in by the—Captain Hunt for an interview for company commander, 'cause you had a midshipman command organization of platoon leader, squad leader, company commander and company sub-

commander. So I came in to see Hunt and he said, “Mr. Gamboa, you’re one of my candidates for company commander.”

**QT: 01;45;38;00**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I said, “Thank you sir.” But I have a problem with you. I said, “Oh.” So I just kept my mouth shut and he said, “You hang around with a group I call the backroom boys,” he said, “if I select you to be company commander, will you disassociate yourself from that group?” I said, “No sir, I only have so many friends, I’m not going to leave—lose any of them.” He said, “Thank you very much.” So I came back to the room and John and my roommates were waiting. John said, “What’d he say?” So I wasn’t about to tell him what Hunt had told me. I said, “Oh, he just asked me some innocuous questions about leadership, but I didn’t get the feeling that I was one of his top candidates.” Oh, because John probably would’ve gone down and confronted him, that you’re being unfair to Frank. So I didn’t want to provoke another confrontation between John and the Captain. And that’s the kind of loyalty he displayed to his friends.

**QT: 01;46;42;21**

**TITLE**

On military values

**QT: 01;46;47;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Our values are like anybody else, but there’s a greater emphasis on integrity, on truthfulness, on loyalty, on honor, on faith, and loyalty—we—we pledge our service to—to protect and defend the Constitution. That’s a sacred oath. So that focuses your mind and your energy and your outlook, so I think that’s what makes us different from a graduate of the University of Virginia or Maryland or Harvard. They’re devoted to making money or being a doctor but nowhere in their oath or their diplomas does it say, “And you’re dedicated to support the Constitution of the United States. That’s unique among the military, so I think having that kind of commitment to our country sets us apart a little bit.

**QT: 01;47;58;06**

**TITLE**

What makes a good leader

**QT: 01;48;03;04**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Concern for people. If you—if you're not interested in being responsible for the behavior, the welfare and the performance of a group of people, then you're not cut out to be a leader, because the only way you're going to get things done is through your people. You can't do it all, so you have to learn to delegate and if you're gonna delegate, you have to have trust. You have to be able to inspire confidence in an untrained, relatively inexperienced subordinate to take a share of the leadership load and the management responsibility for the group and I think a leader who enjoys that, who is motivated by trying to inspire his subordinates and who has genuine concern for their performance and their welfare has the basic requisites for leadership.

**QT: 01;49;00;19**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

If you're not interested, if you're a loner, if you'd rather—if you're not comfortable standing in front of a group of sailors or marines or soldiers and tell them that they have to do some unpleasant things and to be able to demonstrate by your precept of example what you mean and at the same time maintain your sense of honor and trustworthiness; they have to believe in you, they have to trust you.

**QT: 01;49;30;15**

**TITLE**

McCain as a leader

**QT: 01;49;36;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I saw him among his crewmen, a picture and I was just watching the way he related to them without his—just the way he smiled and engaged with each person. So I sensed—he just looks like a normal leader to me. There was nothing spectacular or thing, those are created by situations, not by your own aspirations for leadership. You're put into situational leadership where you have to perform and that's when your leadership skills really come in to the forefront.

**QT: 01;50;20;13**

**TITLE**

Treatment of plebes when they were upperclassmen

**QT: 01;50;26;20**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

With a lot of humor. They—they enjoyed coming around to his room—to our room because we would make ‘em dance and sing and entertain us. We weren’t interested in brow beating them, there were plenty of people who could do that. So we—we just enjoyed run—we knew how to run ‘em and if we found their personality wasn’t—they weren’t—have the proper attitude, then we would get a little more serious, but we were never mean. We were hard but fair.

**QT: 01;50;58;04**

**TITLE**

On marine culture and Captain Hunt’s treatment of John

**QT: 01;51;02;18**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I just think marines have a different culture of discipline and subordination and it’s a lot different than the aviation community and a lot different because they’re at a—they’re at a real life and death situation most of the time when they’re engaged in their military occupation. I mean, I admire the leadership they are able to demonstrate and have to. I mean, I—my last operation was on Iwo Jima as a squadron commander and after the—we were simulating rescuing an ambassador and his staff evacuating into my helicopter. There was a company of marines who flew over from Okinawa to be the ambassador so it’s called an MVAC and the marine amphibious group always practices because that’s one of our missions, if there’s a public riot or civil unrest and we have to safeguard the American embassy, then we’ll—we always have a plan to evacuate them. So I went over afterwards to pay a call on the two Japanese Captains, one commanded Iwo Jima, the other commanded the air base.

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**QT: 01;52;33;05**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And they took me down—the escorts took me down to invasion beach and I walked on it because I had read a book about—there were like 26 sailors and marines that were awarded the Medal of Honor for that invasion, most of them posthumously, and I sank in to the sand and I said, how did they possibly come across that beach under withering fire, so they took me around and we went up to Mt. Sirabachi and there's a surveyor's mark in the dirt where the pipe went in and so I—there was a little pebble next to it so I picked it up and put it in my pocket, so I had a little pebble from that site. But the—you're overlooking the entire island and the invasion beach. There were like 1,000 ships there for that invasion. So I thought—I read about the marines and how the battle went. I mean that kind of leadership and heroism, I—I seriously doubt I would have that capability. So, all this is to say that John McCain and Captain Hunt were vastly different in personality and the way to relate and I think Hunt was misassigned at the Naval Academy.

**QT: 01;54;07;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

He should never have been in charge of it, he just didn't have the personality to deal with sailors. You can maybe treat marines a little rougher but you can't treat midshipmen that way and I think it was just a basic difference in personalities. I don't think he had any grudge against McCain or vice-versa although John thought he was treated unfairly.

**QT: 01;54;30;13**

**TITLE**

A story about Captain Hunt

**QT: 01;54;34;23**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Ok. Let me tell you one short story about Captain Hunt and me. One day when I was a senior, I came up to my room alone, I don't know why. But anyway, the mail had just arrived on the deck. It was next to the watch keeper's stand. He had a kind of a table on four legs and so he would gather up the mail and sort it, deliver it to each room. And on top of the pile on the desk was a Sports Illustrated Magazine. And so I picked it up and I walked into my room and then right behind me, I didn't know he was there, was Captain Hunt, and he

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said, "Mr. Gamboa, is that your Magazine?" I said, "No sir. It's midshipman so-and-so's, he said that we could read it." He said, "Put it back." So I put the magazine back. He didn't say anything else. I came back from last class and I had to report to the battalion office and sign a form too which was a misconduct report. And then the charge was, I was tampering with US mail. I said, God!

**QT: 01;55;45;10**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So I had to write a statement and about three or four days later, I was called down to the Commandant's office and the Assistant Commandant who was a navy commander said, "Mr. Gamboa, I just read your statement. Let me see if I understand it correctly. You're charged with tampering with the US mail. Now, that's a federal offense and you'll be expelled." I said, I went, "Oh my god." So I said, "Well, our plebes told us, maybe incorrectly but that we could read their magazine whenever it was available. So I just came up and it was there on the floor, hadn't been delivered yet, so I just picked it up to take it into my room, scan it and I was gonna put it back. And Captain Hunt observed all of this and he placed me on report." He says, "Are you still—do you have possession of that magaz—" I said, "No sir, I put it back on the—on the mail." He says, "Is that all there is to this?"

**QT: 01;56;50;18**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I said, "As far as I'm concerned sir, I never thought I was tampering with the US mail." He said, "I hope not because that's an expulsion offense. That'll be all, Mr. Gamboa." So I went back and told my roommates, John once again got pretty fired up and he just stomped around the room, said a few expletives about Hunt and his character but the charge was dismissed. It was changed to conduct unbecoming or something, but I got 40 demerits and lost a weekend, so that's the kind of guy Hunt was.

**QT: 01;57;25;14**

**TITLE**

Captain Hunt and an illegal television

**QT: 01;57;30;03**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

John was an avid boxing fan. Sugar Ray Robinson was his hero, so he decided his first class year he would talk to some of the guys in our company and he got five guys including our roommate Jack to buy the TV set. John never asked me and I never volunteered to participate. I was one of those like, brigade commander that would come to a room Friday night after dinner to watch television. So we—pretty soon the word spread, so if you want to watch the Friday night fights, just go to the McCain room. So we got ??? and this went on for about a month and nothing happened. Then, one day, Jack Detrick was alone in the room and Hunt came in. He said, “Mr. Detrick, would you come with me please?” Acting like a real detective sleuth, you know? So he took Jack into the pipe room, it was called the pipe locker and he had a separate entrance and there was the TV set, right?

**QT: 01;58;37;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

He says—he told—and Jack played this out very dramatically, he’d given us every comment and grimace on Hunt’s face so we would derive the full benefit of the impact of the moment. We were laughing like crazy. And so he says, “Yes sir, Captain.” He says, “It looks like a television!” He says, “Yes sir.” He says, “Do you know who it belongs to?” He says, “yes sir, I’m one of the owners.” He says, “Oh, there are more of you than one.” So he just drug on this interrogation full of drama and we—we—we just got all the first class into our room that night so Jack could relay the whole story of the confrontation with Hunt. Well anyway, so when Hunt ended the meeting with Detrick, he said, “Mr. Detrick, I want one name. That’s all I want is one name. So you get together with your cohorts who own this TV illegally and give me one name.”

**QT: 01;59;39;08**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So the way we made decisions in the Naval Academy was scissors, rock, and paper. Or we called hop, hop, ho. So by this time, John had ten demerits to go before he was thrown out of the Naval Academy. And we—we—we could earn 150 demerits. If you had reached 150, they could throw you out. If you went over 150, you were told to start packing. So the group wanted to exclude John from the Shake. He says, “Absolutely not, I’m the instigator of this whole thing.” So they shook around and it didn’t fall on him, it fell on a guy who had zero demerits, Hank Margo. He got 40 demerits and a loss of a—

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a loss of a weekend. So that was the end of the television story but it was very popular and we really enjoyed it.

**QT: 02;00;41;09**

**TITLE**

The Century Club

**QT: 02;00;46;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Plebe year, you're allowed 300 demerits. Your youngster year, you're allowed 250. Your junior year you're allowed 200 and your senior year you're allowed 150. So it goes down 50 every year. Our second class year, there were about ten of us including Jack, John and—and me, who had over 100 demerits so we formed the century club in our company and we took the picture in our room and I'm holding the regulation book and Jack is in the background and John is holding the bayonet in his right hand. We were all like—looked very serious but—**(Cross talk)**—that just—that just added to our fame.

**QT: 02;01;34;22**

**TITLE**

On putting John in the sick bay so he wouldn't get more demerits

**QT: 02;01;39;04**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

What happened to him one day, he went over to play squash racquets and he didn't have a mask on and a ball hit him right in the eye, and so they hospitalized him for about a week. And he had to lay flat on his back or he was gonna lose his eyeball. But he recovered fully but he had a—we knew how to get him to the hospital so—there was another time when he was—we took these shoes(?) to just get him out of Bancroft Hall so he would—???—especially when he got that close to the finish line. So we got him to the hospital twice, once for a legitimate reason, I don't know what reason we got him over the next time but I think he had a cold or the flu or something but we just wanted to have him out of Bancroft Hall for a week or so he wouldn't get any more demerits.

**QT: 02;02;30;16**

**TITLE**



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Learning John had been captured

**QT: 02;02;35;06**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Linda and I were—and our two kids were in Korea. I was assigned to the US forces Korea headquarters which was—and it was a joint UN command, so UN command/US forces Korea and I was in the communications staff. We lived out in town in places—in a village called UN village ‘cause my wife was not an authorized sponsor—I mean, an authorized dependent and neither were my kids but since she told me that I’d been so bu—on sea duty then, all she had was unaccompanied tours so she was going to Korea and what she did was she was able to get a job in the army headquarters because they—she could get a clearance, so there were a lot of wives over as clerk typists because they could get a clearance. So she went with me so we were in Korea in 1967 and we heard over the radio, the armed forces—all—we had no television, all we had was armed forces radio.

**QT: 02;03;40;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And we heard that he had been shot down but they didn’t know whether he was alive or dead. So, Linda cheerfully asked me what will happen to him, I said, “Well if they capture him, if they don’t deliberately kill him, I think he’ll survive. Then about three days later we heard that he was alive and he was a prisoner. And I remember thinking, 26<sup>th</sup> October, that’s my mother’s birthday. So that’s how I found out.

**QT: 02;04;14;10**

**TITLE**

He kept up with information on the POWs

**QT: 02;04;19;21**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Oh, well, what information we could get from the wives, from the prisoners’ wives. By this time, organizations started to sprout up to support the prisoners of war and to publicize how they were being treated to gain pressure on the Department of Defense and the State Department to negotiate for their release. So whatever information was available, I didn’t

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correspond with him because I figured that was for his wife and his parents because they weren't gonna let much mail through.

**QT: 02;04;57;19**

**TITLE**

The Christmas bombing

**QT: 02;05;02;13**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We didn't know about that until afterwards when—when all the stories broke after they came back. I was on sea duty and we—I was executive officer of the cell, and we were in the Middle East. So I wasn't in the states when he came home.

**QT: 02;05;18;02**

**TITLE**

Connecting with John after his release

**QT: 02;05;22;03**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well, when—when we were detached from the cell in September that year—he got home in March and I was in the Middle East. We detached in September and I was being sent to the Panama Canal Zone to command a naval communications station at Balboa. So we decided that we would drive to Panama so we would come to Washington DC, buy a car, visit with my wife's sister and her husband and then we would drive across to California to pick up my mother, and then we would go all the way down there.

**QT: 02;06;01;05**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And I got extra leave to do this. So when we were in Washington, I called Jack Detrick, he was in Norfolk. I said, "Jack, have you had an opportunity to talk to John," he said, "or see him?" He says, "I've talked to him on the phone." I said, "How is he?" He says, "I'll tell you what he said." And I said, "John, how are you?" He said, "Hey Deacon, I'm great. Hey, no booze or broads for five years, what do you think?" I Said, "He's fine." So I got a hold of him and I said, "Hey John, it's Frank." He says, "Where are you, pal?" I said, "We're—we're here in Washington and would like to come over and see ya." So his wife

Carol invited us to have a reunion dinner, so I saw him in about the middle of September. And when I saw him, I gave him a big hug, he said, "I thought of ya every day, pal." And I said, "I prayed for ya every day, John." And we had a great reunion.

**QT: 02;07;17;18**

**TITLE**

John was the same person when he returned

**QT: 02;07;23;05**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We were at dinner, the conversation was as if we'd never stopped talking. It was remarkable. I couldn't help—I kept looking at him very closely, his facial expressions, his manner of speaking and behavior and it was as if his POW experience had not happened. I was absolutely amazed. I could tell he was moving with a limp and awkwardness and I knew—by this time, the physical condition of the prisoners because of their injuries when they ejected out of the aircraft as in John's case or their torture. There were many with physical difficulties in just moving their bodies, so I could tell John was physically injured just by the way he moved.

**QT: 02;07;23;05**

**TITLE**

Seeing John again years later

**QT: 02;08;24;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

That was the only time I had a chance to see him but we were—we had to go around to all the embassies to get visas and to get the car and to visit with family and then start our trip across California, so I only saw him that once. But when I relinquished command in Balboa, I l—he was at Cecil Field with ??? his command and he hosted me overnight. And so I stayed at his house and he had a dinner party in my honor, brought his staff but it was just delightful. And he told us war stories about how the prisoners were treated and how he related to the other prisoners. So that was the only time I've had an opportunity to hear a first-hand account from John of what his treatment was like and how he related to the fellow POW's.

**QT: 02;09;16;18**

**TITLE**

A story John told about the other POWs

**QT: 02;09;18;18**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I remember—yeah. One—one of his closest friends is Orson Swindle who was shot down, six years. He was there half a year longer than John when John arrived. He was a marine 8—FA8 pilot. I asked him how he shot—got shot, and he says, “Oh I hung around the target after I dropped my bombs like a dumbass and I got shot down.” Anyway, he was—through the tap code one day, John was talking to—to—happened to be talking to Orson. And Orson said, said he was a marine and they identified each other, introduced each other through the tap code. And then he—John said, “Orson, I would’ve joined the marines but I wasn’t qualified.” And Orson says, “What do you mean you weren’t qualified?” He said, “No, my parents were married.” That was difficult—so they remained very close friends.

**QT: 02;10;25;11**

**TITLE**

The tap code

**QT: 02;10;29;16**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

That’s a five by five grid of the alphabet, vertical and across and if you tap two—two times, that means you go over two rows and then tap 3 times, you go down three columns or th—no, two columns, three rows, that’s the letter R for example. So you tap out each letter, it’s—I mean, they’d gotten very good at it after years of using it but it took a while. And one of the prisoners who was a rear admiral, Bob Shoemaker, he was the number 2 shoot down in Korea—I mean Vietnam. Ed Alvarez, a Mexican American like me was the first one and he was there eight years. So what they did is they remove one letter so they have 25 rather than 26. So they had a perfect square. I forget what the letter was that Bob removed but that’s the tap code.

**QT: 02;11;35;04**

**TITLE**

McCain’s ethos

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**QT: 02;11;39;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

That he took his—the life events, included in his life, as just part of the human journey. Maybe part of it is destiny but he took life as it came.

**QT: 02;11;53;22**

**TITLE**

When John's father died

**QT: 02;11;53;22**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I don't know where I was when he died, probably on the West Coast in command 'cause I had commands for eight years in San Diego, two ships and a squadron of ships, so I rarely got to Washington until I—until 1984.

**QT: 02;12;15;06**

**TITLE**

Their Naval Academy class is coming up on the 60-year reunion

**QT: 02;12;20;13**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

I'm the class vice-president and we're in the midst of planning our reunion 60 next year. I said, you gotta come to that one John, it's the last hurrah. So it'll be in October next year.

**QT: 02;12;33;06**

**TITLE**

The Navy is like a family

**QT: 02;12;38;03**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

If you had similar experiences and you're in the same community, there was a greater opportunity to interact and experience the same life changing events. And the bonding at Annapolis is intense. I mean, when I—when you get together with your roommates, with your classmates, your conversations continue like they started 50 years ago, so the bonding that takes place at

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Annapolis between classes, among classes, and that—a lot of that is imposed on you, or instilled in you in your plebe year when you learn to look out for each other and help each other through adversity. So that's one reason—one thing in the navy family. Secondly, if you're assigned to a ship, that's your home and that's your family. I would go on seven month deployments and my association with my crew was my closest thing. My closest—in a relationship. I wrote to my wife all the time but I would see my sailors every day.

**QT: 02;13;47;07**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So that's the kind of bonding you get with navy people. You're on isolated difficult duty, you depend on each other so that leads to much more intense human relations and a band of brothers.

**QT: 02;14;04;18**

**TITLE**

Learning John's diagnosis

**QT: 02;14;11;12**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Like everybody else on the news. I talked to him a couple of days later, and he always calls me pal, so he said, "I'm fine pal, don't worry about it." Said, "We'll lick this." He's very optimistic so—but that's—and I've talked to him a little bit, he says he's doing fine, he looks good.

**QT: 02;14;36;03**

**TITLE**

On McCain's career

**QT: 02;14;40;15**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well because of his political accomplishments, he's rather unique in the family. The war interfered with his professional development as a naval officer. I think he would've had a fair shot at making flag had he not been a prisoner of war and followed the normal career path but it was

foreshortened by the war and he knew he couldn't command a carrier so he was not going to make the flag. So he foreshortened—and he felt a lot of excitement and natural inclination with his political—he had tremendous social skills and he just likes people and people like him and he's always for what's right for America. So it was natural, it was a natural evolution and I think his evolution as a congressman, as a senator, as a presidential candidate, I mean him being a candidate, I was with him in his campaign, both of his campaigns. We were called the patriots. My job was to round up POW's to round up with him on the straight talk express, so I heard a lot of these amazing stories but I never saw anybody command a town hall like John McCain.

**QT: 02;16;03;09**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Orson, and I, and Ed Alvarez and usually a couple of other POW's on Monday. He was always with us; it was so inspirational just associating with these guys. But we would do interviews on television, on the news shows, but the main event was always the town hall meeting and John would introduce us all on the stage and then we would sit and he would talk to the voters and he would take any question from anybody, and he wouldn't close down the town hall until everybody was exhausted with questions. He's—and—and the people just—he just set up a kind of electric atmosphere in the room with his presence and his magnetic personality and what he was saying, I mean he reflected the interests of the American people. And yeah, I think he would've made a great president and I wish he had.

**QT: 02;17;09;03**

**TITLE**

On the straight talk express during the 2000 presidential primary

**QT: 02;17;14;01**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Oh, it was fun. I would sneak in and watch him dialoguing with the media and he was just in his element. He loves the free flow of information. He doesn't think there's any illegitimate question. So I would marvel at watching some of these noted reporters talking to him in a very normal fashion recording every word he said. So I—I was tremendously impressed with the openness of his campaign and the enthusiasm and energy.

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**QT: 02;17;47;20**

## **TITLE**

South Carolina during the 2000 presidential primary and getting involved with McCain's campaign

**QT: 02;17;53;01**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

It was like a—going to a wake. It was awful because some of the dirty campaign tricks they pulled on John and just mean stuff they were saying. So then we learned the hard side of politics. If you lose it's awful but you recover. I asked Orson, when John asked me to—well this actually happened when he went—when he was gonna run to be a maverick, an insurgent campaign the first time against George Bush, the incumbent. He called me up, he—one of the call had—one of his staffers, first name was Paul, his last name escapes me for the minute but he called me, Paul called me and he said, "Frank, the boss wants to see you." Now, we had been to a party, he invited Linda and I to a Christmas party at his condo and there was all media and the buzz was, is John gonna declare?

**QT: 02;19;06;19**

## **FRANK GAMBOA:**

And so we talked to him and he says, "Well, thank you for coming." And he wasn't gonna tell me if he was gonna run or not. So in January when the buzz came out that he was gonna run, he called me and—through Paul, and Paul says, "The man wants to see you." I said, "What does—what does he want to see?" He says, "You know what he wants to see you about." I said, "No I don't. You tell me exactly what he said." He says ok, so we got into it, he says, "Tell Frank to get his ass over here." So I showed up at eight o'clock in the morning the next day and they escorted me into his office and he's sitting there with his feet up on the desk reading the Times—New York Times and he says, "Hi pal, thanks for coming." Then he starts pacing, and he said, "Ok, you know I'm gonna run?" And I said yeah. He says, "Ok, I want you to start rounding up veterans, I want you to organize the class, I want you to have an event, and yeah you're going to have to raise money." And then the phone rang and he said, "Excuse me I gotta take this call from New York."

**QT: 02;20;17;16**



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**FRANK GAMBOA:**

So I was sitting there, holy cow, I've never been in politics, the only politics I ever knew was when I was president of my high school class. So I was sitting there stunned, and then he hung up, he says, "Well what do you think, Pal?" I said, "Well the only thing you haven't asked me to do is measure the oval office for drapes." He says—oh, he says, "Ok, come with me, I gotta go to the barber shop." So I ran with him downstairs, he got in the barbershop, and he starts talking to the barbers. I'm standing there and he looks at me and says, "Well go ahead, you know what to do." I said "Ok, I'll be in touch." So I went home and I called Bob(?), I called his campaign manager I didn't know. He says, McCain told me to come see you, so the outcome of it all was we held a terrific event at the navy memorial for John and that got me involved with both campaigns.

**QT: 02;21;13;16**

**TITLE**

What he'll miss about John

**QT: 02;21;18;08**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

His friendship. Just being able to talk. We never discuss political issues. We talk about friends and classmates and the good times we had together. It's a little nostalgic but just being with him is interesting. If I want to ask a probing question, I will. I like his kids, and his wife.

**QT: 02;21;45;08**

**TITLE**

On Trump saying McCain was not a war hero

**QT: 02;21;49;23**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Well it was a stupid comment, a most thoughtless thing to say and the most hurtful thing he could've said. But I admire John's response, which was, "He's free to say anything he wants and he doesn't need to apologize to me." But I resent it.

**QT: 02;22;07;09**

**TITLE**

Meeting McCain's father

**QT: 02;22;11;10**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

Let me tell ya how we met his father. We had been roommates about a month. We were—had a small room. Steel bunks on top of each other and all our desks crammed together. One night we came back to the room, the—the protocol was you took your uniform off so you didn't soil it and then you either studied in your pajamas or in your skivvies. We were all in our skivvies and we were studying and then John got up, went over to the sink basin and filled up with a glass of water, then he threw it on us. So he started a big water fight and I thought, maybe he thinks he's gonna baptize us. Then we heard the double knock on the door and so the—that's the signal that an upperclassman, either a first classman or an officer is entering your room. So the protocol is, you leap to your feet, you stand at attention. So my back was to the door, John was facing the door, and then he says, "Dad!"

**QT: 02;23;11;09**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

And the Captain said, "Carry on gentlemen." And I turned around and there was this navy captain with gold stripes all over his—and he introduced himself, he says, "I'm John's father." We were absolutely terrified. He said, "God dammit Johnny no wonder you're flunking, get dressed and come down to the Rotunda." So we cleaned up the room while John was there but that's how we met Captain McCain.

**QT: 02;23;36;22**

**TITLE**

A stage play and their nicknames

**QT: 02;23;41;13**

**FRANK GAMBOA:**

We were putting on a stage play mocking all the professors and the admiral and the faculty. It's called a No More Rivers ceremony and it's traditionally when you poke fun at your professors and I was dressed as one of the hall stewards. So I was Hispanic so I looked like a steward to them. So it was all in good fun. My—I forgot to tell you our nicknames. John's nickname was John Wayne McCain. We gave him that. I was the Mex. Jack Detrick—I don't know

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why it was, the Deacon. And whenever I called John, he'd say after a few minutes, "How's the Deacon." Keith Bunting, we called him the straight arrow. And his—the Rab—for rabbit for bunny or bunny rabbit.

**END TC:**  
**02;24;41;03**