

McCain, John Sidney "Slew"

(August 9, 1884–September 6, 1945).
USNA (Miss.) 1906 (80/116).



Navy Department: National Archives

A World War II naval aviation leader, McCain had over four years of initial duty on the Asiatic Station with the battleship *Ohio* (BB-12), cruiser *Baltimore* (C-3), gunboat *Panay*, and destroyer *Chauncey* (DD-3), and as assistant to the captain of the Cavite Yard where at the end of 1908 he joined the *Connecticut* (BB-18), flagship of the "Great White Fleet," en route home. Once there he briefly saw West coast duty on the armored cruiser *Pennsylvania* (ACR-4), then returned to the Atlantic while assigned to the *Washington* (ACR-11). After directing the machinist mates' school at Charleston (1912–14), he was executive and engineer officer of the *Colorado* (ACR-7) patrolling the Pacific side of politically-troubled Mexico until September 1915 when he joined the Pacific Fleet flagship *San Diego* (ACR-6). In her, McCain escorted Atlantic wartime convoys until assigned to the Bureau of Navigation in May 1918, to which he returned three times, in charge of the Officers Records Section (1923–26), the Recruiting Section (1929–31), and the Planning Section (1933–35). Helping to outfit the *Maryland* (BB-46) as her navigator in the Atlantic (1921–23), he briefly (1926) commanded the cargo ship *Sirius* (AK-15) in that ocean before becoming exec of the *New Mexico* (BB-40) in the Pacific. Duty as Naval War College student (1928–29) and skipper of the ammunition ship *Nitro* (AE-2) cruising between oceans (1931–33) preceded his enrollment for flight training at Pensacola in June 1935 after nine years of trying for the assignment.

Captain McCain became a naval aviator in August 1936 at the advanced age of 52 and was assigned to command Coco Solo air base and its squadrons in the Panama Canal Zone. He then commanded the aircraft

carrier *Ranger* (CV-4) in the Pacific and Caribbean (1937–39) and Naval Air Station San Diego until February 1941 when he was promoted rear admiral and given command of the Scouting Force's aircraft and U.S. Fleet patrol wings on the West coast. His planes, which included all aircraft of the Western Sea Frontier, patrolled coastal waters during the first six months of the Pacific war, and in May 1942 he transferred to command of all Navy land-based aircraft in the South Pacific, flagship the seaplane tender *Curtiss* (AV-4) at Nouméa, New Caledonia, from which base he participated in the Guadalcanal campaign until late September. The next month Admiral McCain became Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics and in August 1943 was upgraded to be the first Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air) in the rank of vice admiral. Twelve months after that he was designated Commander Second Fast Carrier Force Pacific and led Task Group 38.1, flagship *Wasp* (CV-18), in the Philippines for three months, then Task Force 38, flagships *Lexington* (CV-16) and *Hancock* (CV-19), in Southeast Asia air strikes until late January 1945. After leave, from late May through August he again commanded TF 38, flagship *Shangri-La* (CV-38), in the final attacks on the Japanese home islands. Relieved at the beginning of September, Admiral McCain died en route to becoming Deputy Director of the Veteran's Administration and was advanced posthumously to admiral. His uncle, Henry P. McCain, and his brother, William A. McCain, retired from the Army as general officers, and his son (*q.v.*) achieved prominence in the Cold War Navy.