Start of Tragedy: Pilot Hears a Blast As He Checks Plane



Radiophoto of The New York Times Lieut. Comdr. John S. Mc-Cain 3d describing blast.

By BERNARD WEINRAUB

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, July 30—At 10:30 A.M. Saturday, Lieut. Comdr. John Sidney McCain 3d climbed aboard his A-4 Skyhawk for a mission over North Vietnam.

"I closed the canopy and started the plane and then went through the normal checks of the gauges and the settings," the 30-year-old Navy pilot recalled today. "Suddenly I felt and heard an explosion. It was either my plane or the one to the right. Flames were everywhere."

In the following moments

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TRAGEDY'S START:

aircraft carrier aboard the Forrestal, the 150-pound An-napolis, Commander napolis graduate climbed out has served on the carriers Inof the cockpit, stepped precari-trepid and Enterprise. foot-long refueling pipe then leaped onto the burning flight deck and ran.

"I turned around and saw another pilot leaving his airplane in the same way I did," Commander McCain said quietlv. "I saw him jump into the fire and roll clear, but his clothing was burning.

"I ran toward him," the pilot went on. "He was 50 feet in front of me. I got closer and then the first bomb exploded. I was knocked back about 10

Commander McCain spoke evenly — and quite coolly about the explosions and fire aboard the carrier. At random moments, however, his flickered and his voice softened as he recalled the heroism and death of large numbers of enenlisted men.

"We're professional military men and I suppose it's our war," he says, "and yet here were enlisted men who earn \$150 a month and work 18 to 20 hours a day—and I mean manual labor — and certainly would have survived had they not stayed to help the pilots fight the fire."

"I've never seen such acts of heroism."

The son and grandson of two A BLAST IS HEARD noted admirals, Commander McCain has a disarming disregard for formal military speech or style. He is wiry, prema-Continued From Page 1, Col. 7 turely gray and does not take himself too seriously.

Since his graduation from An-McCain ously onto the plane's three-months ago he was assigned to and the Forrestal.

Today, hours after the fire that ravaged the flight deck and killed so many fellow crewman, Commander McCain sat in Saigon and shook his head. "It was such a great ship," he said.

Commander McCain was born in Panama, where his father was stationed, on Aug. 29, 1937. His father, Adm. John Sidney McCain Jr. is the Chief of Naval Forces in Europe, and his grandfather, Adm. John Sidney McCain, was in command feet. I never saw him again." all aircraft carriers in the Pacific in World War II.

> frigate McCain named after Commander Mc-Cain's grandfather, who died in 1945.