

## HONOR, COURAGE, COMMITMENT: The Lasting Effects of the Chief Petty Officer

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 Guest blog written by a Retired Senior Chief Petty Officer

Last week our nation eulogized late Arizona senator John McCain as a steadfast friend, reluctant hero, and unwavering patriot. As our Navy's newest Chief Petty Officers (CPO) prepare to don their anchors of gold at ceremonies across the fleet on September 14, it is prudent for them and the collective Chief's Mess to briefly pause and consider how the CPO brand of leadership can have a positive and lasting effect.

During a 2008 U.S. presidential debate, Senator John McCain said, "Everything I ever learned about leadership, I learned from a Chief Petty Officer."

I'd like to put that quote into perspective. Before recently losing his battle with brain cancer, John McCain was a six-term U.S. Senator who chaired the Armed Services Committee. He was a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, a former Navy fighter pilot, and Vietnam prisoner of war. He practically came from U.S. Navy royalty – both his father and grandfather were four-star admirals – also U.S. Naval Academy graduates who have a U.S. warship named for them.



(Lower Right) Naval Officer John S. McCain III poses for a photo with fellow Naval aviators.

So how is it that the power of Chief Petty Officer anchors influenced a man who in his own right was extremely powerful and influential?

Because a Chief Petty Officer somewhere many decades ago, took a young Ensign McCain under his wing.

Through personal example, good management, and moral responsibility – the Chief made his mark and influenced a life.

I can only guess that Senator McCain's Chief was sincere, enthusiastic, and squared away in both deed and appearance.

Perhaps he was an HONORABLE man of unsurpassed integrity – one who led with his beliefs – and McCain followed him because of HIS actions. I am confident he held himself and his team 100% accountable and to the highest of standards.

My guess is that this Chief was a COURAGEOUS man – not absent of fear, but not afraid to make difficult decisions. His courage was likely born of mental, physical, and ethical strength. The Chief was fair but tough, because that's what his leaders and subordinates wanted and expected of him.

I would be willing to bet my paycheck that McCain's Chief was COMMITTED – he had a spirit of determination that pushed him to don his anchors everyday and work to make a difference. Understanding that his success was measured by the efforts of his Sailors and junior officers, McCain's Chief likely didn't take a "time out" from his commitment – and I am sure he didn't force it either.

I'd like to believe this Chief's CORE VALUES defined his thoughts, actions, and leadership. He put them on display everyday, leading by example and practicing what he preached. Through mentorship, motivation, and humility he earned the respect and trust of his team. They followed him *not* because they had to, but because they *wanted* to.



Fiscal Year 2017 chief petty officers stand at attention during a chief pinning ceremony aboard the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77).

During that debate, Senator McCain didn't say who that Chief was, but it could've been any one of us soon to be pinned, current or retired Chiefs. We train, guide, and develop junior officers and Sailors into future leaders. The men and women who will be pinned next week and truly know the honor, weight, and burden of CPO leadership were selected to join the CPO fraternity not only for what they have accomplished, but what they will do on September 15 and beyond – after initiation is finished and they are the "Chief."

Whether it is advocacy, tradition or trust, thanks to this year's initiation season, our new Chiefs have more tools in their toolbox to do what the CPO Mess does best: provide leadership on the deckplates.

As our new Chiefs are pinned, I am confident that my active-duty brothers and sisters in the Mess will rededicate themselves to their craft and ensure that its newest members will put their initiation experience and lessons learned to good use.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from the late Steve Prefontaine, one of America's greatest distance runners:

"To give anything less than your best, is to sacrifice the gift."

Wearing the anchors of a Chief Petty Officer truly *is* a gift – one that must be payed forward every day.



*Chief petty officer combination covers rest on the charge books of the Navy's newest chief petty officers.*

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