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LINDSEY GRAHAM INTERVIEW
JOHN MCCAIN: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
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LINDSEY GRAHAM

Senator

September 25, 2017

Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt

Total Running Time: 18 Minutes

START TC:

QT: 01;00;00;00

QT: 01;00;00;05

CREW:

Take one, marker.

QT: 01;00;05;00

TITLE

How John McCain and Lindsey Graham's friendship began

QT: 01;00;09;08

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Well, he came over and asked me in 1999, would I help him with his Presidential campaign and I said yes, and he was shocked. He said, "Why'd you say yes so quick?" I said, "Nobody else ever asked me." So I was an impeachment manager during Clinton's impeachment trial so it's an odd way to meet somebody, but my job was to go to the floor of the Senate every day and tell the Senate why they ought to kick Bill Clinton out of office and he sat there and I think he liked my style and you know, he came to me after it was over and says, "I'm thinking about running in 2000." I said, "Sign me up." 'Cause, he's a legend in the military. I've been in the military 33 years, retired a couple of years ago so I knew him, sort of a legendary figure, I didn't know him that well, but then I started traveling with him; he's funny as hell, he's got the energy of ten people, so the rest is history.

QT: 01;00;56;01

TITLE

Graham's admiration for McCain

QT: 01;01;00;13

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

He's a mentor; he's like a brother. All I can say is, I admire who he is and what he's done. He's lived one of the most incredible lives of any American. When it comes to writing the history of the Senate, he's gonna be in the first paragraph. When it comes to naval aviators, and patriots, he's right at the top. He's helped me a lot. I've traveled all over the world with him, I've been to every crap hole you can go to. You know, John's an interesting guy. You read in the paper, '500 protestors killed in blank-stan.' John says, "Let' go." I said, "Why?" "Sounds interesting." So, he's just the most unusual guy I've ever met.

QT: 01;01;34;14

TITLE

On his travels with McCain and Lieberman

QT: 01;01;38;22

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

All I can say is, is that the three amigos, we enjoyed our time together, but I learned a lot from John. When you go overseas with him, he has access to every leader in that country because he's a legendary figure throughout the world. In cultures where warriors are respected, he really does get a lot of attention and by osmosis, you sort of learn through him so I have traveled all over the world, to every conference in the world on national security. One of my favorite stories of John is just, like I think he misses being shot at. So, we're going to—you know, we go to Iraq and Afghanistan like 42 times and we go to places you probably shouldn't go but we go anyway but there was a riot in one of these stans I was telling you about and John said, "Let's go."

QT: 01;02;23;08

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LINDSEY GRAHAM:

And I said, "Well why not—let's don't go." but we end up going. So we land and the ambassador comes and meets us and he's sweating profusely, white as a ghost. And I said, "This is not good." So we get in the car and he tells us, you know, "This is really dicey, that you—we may wind up closing the embassy." John's just upbeat as he can be. He can't wait to meet the government that chastised them for killing their own citizens. So we get to the embassy, which is in an old hotel with a disco ball. You know, this is Soviet architecture. So you got Marines in full battle gear, you got the shredder going where they're putting all the documents through, they're taking the picture of Bush down. And John says, "Hey, how's it going?" And I said, "John, it is not going well." That's John McCain. And we stayed there and met with dissidents and John spoke up on their behalf and thank god we got out of there.

QT: 01;03;15;08

TITLE

Why John McCain, Joe Lieberman, and Lindsey Graham were called the 'three amigos'

QT: 01;03;20;23

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Joe Lieberman, John McCain and Lindsey Graham. We were named that by General Patreus. The thing about John and Joe you need to understand, there was only one democrat that voted against leaving Iraq and that was Joe Lieberman. John McCain's running for President; the Iraq war is about as popular as a toothache and John said, "No, we can't leave, we've got to win." And he stood behind President Bush, the surge, adding more troops at a time when everybody wanted to get out was not really good politics but John believed passionately along with Joe Lieberman. Joe Lieberman deserves a lot of credit, 'cause he kept us from pulling the plug on Iraq at a time that it had been a complete disaster. But that's how the three amigos were named, is by General Patreus.

QT: 01;04;00;12

TITLE

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On McCain's personality and deep love for the country

QT: 01;04;06;03

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Absolutely, he can be an asshole one minute and your dearest friend the next, but the thing about him is that you know he loves you, and we've had some fights. We've got one going on right now. There's no doubt in my mind that he loves me and I love him. He has a loyalty that's missing. He's not my political friend, he is my friend. And he is so passionate about his causes whether it's campaign finance reform, the military, reform; just he truly is motivated by passion and love for this country. Of all the places I've gone and all the times I've been with him, there's one that sticks out the most. In 2007, John was fifth in a four person race for the Republican nomination. He went from being the front-runner to like a nobody, carrying his own bags, we were doing events with ten people and everybody had written John off.

QT: 01;04;56;10

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

So in July of 2007, General Patreus asked him and myself to come over and speak to the troops in Baghdad who were gonna re-enlist and about 3 or 400 were gonna get their citizenship expedited by serving in the military. It must've been 130 degrees, we're in this big old Saddam Palace. It was packed from the rafters with thousands of soldiers coming to hear John talk. And you had two groups. One group that was going to re-enlist in a war zone, another group that was about to get their citizenship and on the front row, there were two empty seats with boots in the chair. And General Patreus said, those two got killed a couple of days ago. They're gonna get their citizenship posthumously. When John spoke, you could hear a pin drop. He spoke from the heart and he stayed around and had a photo with everybody that wanted to have a photo.

QT: 01;05;46;14

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

And I've never been so hot in my life. We're stuck on the runway trying to leave in a C130. Coming over, he was thinking about dropping out because he had run out of money. After meeting the soldiers and talking to General

Patreus, we left saying the no surrender tour. That's where it came from. They're not quitting, we're not gonna quit. So we started the no surrender tour I think in someplace in New Hampshire. We went to American Legion, there were like ten people there and it was steak night. The bottom line is, he fought like a tiger to get back in the game in 2008, he stood behind President Bush not to give up on a war that was unpopular and he did it because he understands what happens if we lose, but seeing those young men and women in the middle of the battle not quitting, that's John McCain.

QT: 01;06;36;09

TITLE

McCain's reputation

QT: 01;06;39;16

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

You can go too far with anything, but he has earned a reputation that—that people will take things from John that they wouldn't take from anybody else because they know he's passionate, they know he's an American hero and at the end of the day, they know that he's a good man. You know, he's the guy that normalized relationships with Vietnam, he and John Kerry. So after being in jail for five and a half years and being tortured, he's able to let things go unlike anyone I've ever met. He'll fight like a tiger, be down on you one minute, then he's ready to let things go. He's always looked his—lived his life looking forward. I think the key to John McCain to me is just, he wants to be relevant. He wants to be in the middle of the fight and he—he forgives and he can fight.

QT: 01;07;25;09

TITLE

McCain is funny

QT: 01;07;30;17

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

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He's incredibly funny. I mean, stupid funny. Same stupid ass jokes but he tells them all the time, and I still laugh. **(Cross talk)** Ya know, there's no water in Arizona, the trees chase the dogs. Ya know, where everybody in America says, one day you're gonna grow up to be president unless you live in Arizona where so and so and so and so ran and they didn't get to be president. Same old stupid ass jokes but he's got a cleverness about him. I can't tell you half the stories, ya know, I'll write a book one day.

QT: 01;08;01;18

TITLE

On being a Senator

QT: 01;08;05;21

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

It can be lonely sometimes when you're like wanting to—say, we need more troops in Iraq and like nobodies with you except Joe and me. You know, I think John if he's right, doesn't mind being by himself. He has the confidence of his ideas but yeah you can get isolated in this job. But John has always been about staying engaged, being relevant and one of the things that have kept him, I think energized, is ya know, we do a lot of traveling. We go to places where America's presence needs to be known. As you can tell he hates Putin. Ya know, one thing I like about John, most people he hates, I hate.

QT: 01;08;43;12

TITLE

McCain thrives around people and his belief in the shining city on the hill

QT: 01;08;51;06

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I guess if you're in jail by yourself, you miss people. But if I spent five and a half years in jail, I'd be looking for a crowd too. He just—you know, John thrives off people but one thing I can tell you when we travel, he always

wants to take younger members of the Senate with him and the house, to show them something. You know, John wants a legacy not only of just passing bills but also you know, engraining in the Republican party in particular a sense of the Ronald Reagan view of the world, the shining city on the hill. It is our destiny to lead the world, not to be run over by it. I buy into that. He is the most poetic, gifted speaker for American values I've ever met. When he speaks, I still cry. He can describe America in a way worth dying for. I mean, he—he's in love with America. He—there's a romance between him and America that's gonna—gonna laugh—last to his very last day.

QT: 01;09;49;23

TITLE

McCain on the road

QT: 01;09;54;08

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Oh, he reads voraciously. He'll read like ten books and ya know, I'll watch a movie. He's a passionate reader, he enjoys his, ya know, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, simple diet. Tireless, I mean, you know, the goal is to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner in three different countries. If you travel with him, it's like the—you know, the foreign legion death march, tireless, passionate and a lot of fun. And he makes sure that you get something out of it. So when we go to these meetings, all the tensions on him and he makes sure that every member of the delegation gets to ask a question. He'll introduce the—that person to the leader, the defense minister, the president or potentate or whoever they are and he'll make sure that they know something about you, that you traveled from your state, that you took time away from your family to be here and learn. He is very attentive to the people that travels with him.

QT: 01;10;50;13

TITLE

On their friendship and McCain's willingness to support others

QT: 01;10;56;02

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

He's a friend. I mean, you know, in Washington if you want a friend, get a dog, you know? John McCain's my friend, I don't have a dog. Bottom line is, I talk to him about everything. We don't always agree, you know? I've got a job to do, he's got a job to do, but I never doubt his motivation as to why he's doing it and there's no vote he could take that'd ever change my opinion of him. I have learned over the last 20 something years, I've seen him when nobody else is around, I've seen him with his back against the wall, where he was completely dealt out, and come back.

QT: 01;11;30;22

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I saw him help President Bush when nobody else would. I saw him before I got here, he helped President Clinton get authorization to go into Kosovo to stop the Genocide. He tried to help President Obama on Immigration. The one thing I can say about John McCain, when the campaign's over, it's over. Ya know, we tried to have a relationship with President Obama. We were gonna stand behind him when he drew the red line in Syria. We flew up to the White House on labor day week—weekend I think and talked with President Obama about using military force against Assad because he used chemical weapons and John was willing to stand behind President Obama, so was I. But he also took on President Bush, he challenged Rumsfeld to be fired because of Abu Gharaib. The one thing about John, you know, the Detainee Treatment Act is one of his great accomplishments, I was there with him, but he does not believe America is a place that tortures people, he does not believe torture works; he believes that's against the values of a professional military, against the goodness of our country and that was one of his finest moments.

QT: 01;12;37;05

TITLE

McCain's stance on torture and the way we treat prisoners

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QT: 01;12;41;23

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

All I can say is that John's voice won the day. I've been a military lawyer for over 30 years. In the military, it's about when we capture somebody, it's about us, it's not about them. I don't care that the Al Qaeda or the Taliban will cut your head off, we're not going to be like them. Our goal is to be different than our enemies, to show the world a different path. There are plenty of people who would cut your head off but there are not enough people that will give you a fair trial. So John has been passionate about the way we treat prisoners because he's been a prisoner. He's passionate about the values that make us different than our enemies.

QT: 01;13;18;11

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

So at the end of the day, it was his voice above all others that got the United States Senate and the country as a whole to rally behind the idea that what happened at Abu Gharaib and other things in Iraq was wrong and nobody else could have done that, 'cause most Americans, you know, are pretty upset at this war and look what they do to us, you're worried about them, you want to give them rights, they're not gonna give you rights. And John would say, "No, no, no, don't compare us to them. Compare us to our ideals. What are we fighting for?" And no one else could have done that but John McCain.

QT: 01;13;55;18

TITLE

Finding out that McCain had brain cancer

QT: 01;14;00;20

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I got a call from Rick, I knew he was having problems. He wasn't his old self. I thought it was probably something related to Melanoma but when I heard the diagnosis, I—you could've—felt like I'd been hit by a bat and just shell shocked and ya know, I knew it hit him hard but you know, basically every major thing I've done in politics has been with John and it hit me hard and then there's a time when he said, "Alright, knock it off. No more woe is me. We're gonna take what time I got and use it well."

QT: 01;14;33;16

TITLE

What he'll miss and McCain's legacy

QT: 01;14;39;14

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

The traveling, the ribs, the stupid jokes, the ability to pick up a phone call and vent—phone and vent, the man, but here's what I would say. What he's left behind will endure long after he's gone. He's left a sense of purpose in me and others. He's talked about an America worth fighting and dying for. So when that day comes and he may—I may go before he does but when that day comes, I'm gonna dedicate myself to continuing these fights and to continue the attitude. It is about the country, it's not about you. It is about serving a cause greater than yourself.

QT: 01;15;22;12

TITLE

How McCain will be remembered

QT: 01;15;28;04

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I think it depends on who you ask. I think most Americans are going to remember him as a patriot who was willing to die for his country, a Senator that would take on his own party to expose truth—truth to power, to try to take broken systems and make 'em better, a reliable voice in difficult times. Some people are gonna remember him as a guy that didn't always agree with them, that stood in the way of their agenda on the left and the right. His family's gonna remember him as a loving father and a good husband. I'm gonna remember him as a dear friend and nobody is going to say he was a perfect person. We're all gonna say he was a one in a lifetime unique American icon. When they write the history of the Senate as I said before, he's gonna be in the first paragraph.

QT: 01;16;19;05

TITLE

McCain's interests

QT: 01;16;24;15

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Well John's spare time is thinking about something else to do. John loves to read. He likes movies, we watch a lot of movies together. He loves history, he's a student of history. I think a good day for John is having a bunch of people around him he finds interesting, have a good meal and maybe a drink or two and sit down and ya know, just share thoughts and ideas. John loves people, and part of it probably goes back to being isolated in prison but he—he loves to read, you know, he likes movies, more than anything else he likes engaging with people.

QT: 01;17;02;16

TITLE

McCain's ranch in Arizona and his love of birds

QT: 01;17;07;14

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

John has got an oasis there in Arizona, the ranch. And whether you want to or not, he will tell you about every bird there and I just sit there and say, "Ok." There are like 89 different species of birds and they're the same as they were the last visit but he's obsessed with birds. Here's what I would do. I would let John interrogate prisoners at Gitmo by describing to him how many birds there are in his ranch and they would all spill their guts after a while because it was painful.

QT: 01;17;45;16

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I think all of the Gitmo detainees say, "I'll talk, no more birds."

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QT: 01;17;51;03

TITLE

What McCain means to him

QT: 01;17;54;18

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

One of the best things that ever happened to me as a person, as a Senator, member of Congress is meeting John McCain. Some of the best times in my life had been with him fighting fights that were hopeless but worth fighting, being with his wingmen during his presidential campaign, sharing moments with him when nobody else was around so you could see the true nature of the man. My life has been enriched. That's enough.

END TC:

QT: 01;18;26;19