



# Tennessee Patriot: The Naval Career of Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence

*William P. Lawrence, Rosario "Zip" Rausa*

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Bill Lawrence served his country for thirty-seven years in a remarkable naval career filled with triumphs and adversities. A naval aviator and test pilot who commanded a fighter squadron in the Vietnam War, he was shot down in combat and held by the North Vietnamese at the notorious Hanoi Hilton prison for six years. During his imprisonment he became a hero among heroes, demonstrating superior qualities of leadership, physical strength, and mental acumen, tap-coding messages to keep his sanity while withstanding solitary confinement and regular torture sessions. Upon release from captivity, Lawrence learned that his wife and the mother of their children had divorced him and remarried. Although these events had a severe emotional impact on him, he resumed his distinguished naval career, rising swiftly through the ranks, remarrying, and being named to such prestigious positions as Commander of the Third Fleet, Superintendent of the Naval Academy, and Chief of Naval Personnel.

In this autobiography, Lawrence credits much of his resolve and ability to overcome difficulties to his strong and nurturing parents, his youth in Nashville, Tennessee, his experiences at the U.S. Naval Academy (where he served as brigade commander and earned letters in three varsity sports), and to the love and support of his wife Diane. With the help of his friend and writer Zip Rausa, the admiral tells his story without glossing over the darker elements. This recounting of his path on an extraordinary journey through life is uniquely American and filled with lessons for us all.

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