

Mike Cronin, Exemplary Graduate  
USNA at Large  
By Dick Nelson '64



Our Exemplary Graduate for today was certainly a heroic figure, both as a Navy attack pilot and then as a POW. However, his greatest accomplishment had nothing to do with his military service. He was instrumental in persuading Congress to pass the War Crimes Act of 1996, to further protect American POWs in captivity. Thus, his legacy lives on: CAPT Michael P. Cronin, USNA Class of 1963.

Mike Cronin was born in 1941 in Boston, Massachusetts. He entered the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1959, and was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy on June 5, 1963.



ENS Cronin next completed flight training and was designated a Naval Aviator in October 1964, followed by A-4 Skyhawk Replacement Air Group training with VA-44 at NAS Jacksonville, Florida, from October 1964 to April 1965.



His first assignment was as an A-4 pilot flying combat in Southeast Asia with VA-23 aboard the aircraft carrier USS Midway (CVA-41) from May to November 1965, and then at NAS Lemoore, California, from November 1965 to July 1966. LT Cronin then deployed with VA-23 aboard the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea (CVA-43), again flying combat in Southeast Asia, from July 1966. During that second combat cruise, he was forced to eject over North Vietnam and was taken as a Prisoner of War on January 13, 1967. He remembers that experience well:

"I was shot down on Friday, 13 January 1967 by anti-aircraft fire about twenty miles south of Than Hoa. The aircraft broke up and for a while I was pinned in the cockpit and was quite lucky to escape. When my parachute opened I was over the sea, but a strong east wind blew me inland as I descended and I landed one half mile from the water. I was quickly captured by an Army unit which had seen me land."



After spending 2,243 days in captivity, LCDR Cronin was released during Operation Homecoming on March 4, 1973. He was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries, and then served as an instructor pilot with VF-126 at NAS Miramar, California, from August 1973 to January 1976, followed by service as a C-9 Skytrain II pilot with VR-30 at NAS Alameda, California, from January 1976 until he left active duty and entered the U.S. Naval Reserve. He then served as a reserve C-9 pilot with VR-55 at NAS Alameda from 1976 to 1980, remaining in the Naval Reserve in a non-flying status until his retirement on August 1, 1992. After leaving active duty in 1976, Mike flew commercial airliners for American Airlines from 1976 to 2001. CAPT Cronin's decorations include two Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit with Combat "V", the Distinguished Flying Cross, four Bronze Stars with Combat "V", two Purple Hearts, 15 Air Medals, and three Navy Commendation Medals with Combat "V".

Silver Star #1:

"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Lieutenant Commander Michael Paul Cronin, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while interned as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from January to February 1967. Lieutenant Commander Cronin's captors, completely ignoring international agreements, subjected him to extreme mental and physical cruelties in an attempt to obtain military information and false confessions for propaganda purposes. Through his resistance to those brutalities, he contributed significantly toward the eventual

abandonment of harsh treatment by the North Vietnamese, which was attracting international attention. By his determination, courage, resourcefulness, and devotion, Lieutenant Commander Cronin reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Naval Service and the United States Armed Forces."

Silver Star #2:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while interned as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam. On 1 June 1967, his captors, completely ignoring international agreements, subjected him to extreme mental and physical cruelties in an attempt to obtain military information and false confessions for propaganda purposes. Through his resistance to those brutalities, he contributed significantly toward the eventual abandonment of harsh treatment by the North Vietnamese, which was attracting international attention. By his determination, courage, resourcefulness, and devotion to duty, he reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Naval Service and the United States Armed Forces."

Legion of Merit:

"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" to Lieutenant Commander Michael Paul Cronin, United States Navy, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States while interned as a Prisoner of War in North Vietnam from January 1967 to March 1973. By his diligent efforts, exceptional leadership, devotion and loyalty to the United States, and under the most adverse of conditions, he resisted all attempts by the North Vietnamese to use him in causes detrimental to the United States. While in daily contact with the North Vietnamese guards and officers, he performed duties in staff positions, maintaining good order and discipline among the prisoners. Under constant harassment from their captors, and due to the frustrations of the prisoners during their long internment, many difficult situations arose, requiring perseverance, endurance and ingenuity. Using his extraordinary courage, resourcefulness, and sound judgment, he reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service and the United States Armed Forces. (Lieutenant Commander Cronin is authorized to wear the Combat "V".)"

### Distinguished Flying Cross:

"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Flying Cross to Lieutenant Commander [then Lieutenant] Michael Paul Cronin (NSN: 0-668952), United States Navy, for heroism and extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight on 2 January 1967 while serving as a jet attack pilot in Attack Squadron TWENTY-THREE (VA-23), embarked in U.S.S. CORAL SEA (CVA-43) during a mission in support of a strike into the Red River Delta, North Vietnam. When his aircraft was severely damaged by a surface-to-air missile during a strike against an enemy missile site, Lieutenant Commander Cronin regained control of his aircraft which had lost all hydraulic power and elevator control, by using horizontal stabilizer trim and manually controlling the rudder and aileron. Despite low ceilings and reduced visibilities which necessitated an instrument approach, Lieutenant Commander Cronin flew the stricken aircraft through adverse weather to a safe field arrested landing, thus saving a valuable operational aircraft. His superb airmanship, courage and professionalism were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

(Sources: [valor.militarytimes.com](http://valor.militarytimes.com); [veterantributes.org](http://veterantributes.org); [usna.com](http://usna.com); [pownetwork.org](http://pownetwork.org))

Photo legend, clockwise: Mike Cronin in flight suit before capture; by his aircraft; VA-23 A-4 dropping 1000 lb. bomb over Vietnam; Mike during his release in 1973.