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# Tribune

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## McCain funeral rites hit close to home

SENATOR'S NAVAL ACADEMY

CLASSMATES INCLUDED  
 1954 HHS GRADUATE

**JOHN HUTHMACHER**  
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Like millions of Americans, former Hastings resident Roger Holthaus spent time in front of the television last week watching tributes and ceremonies marking the death of U.S. Sen. John McCain.

The senator, who died Aug. 25 at age 81, was eulogized in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda and Washington National Cathedral before being laid to rest Sunday in the cemetery at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland.

McCain, who as a young man served as a naval aviator, was shot down during the Vietnam war, then spent 5 1/2 tortuous years as a prison-

er of the North Vietnamese. Following his eventual retirement from the Navy, he was elected twice to the U.S. House of Representatives and then six times to the U.S. Senate from Arizona. He was the Republican nominee for president in 2008.

While McCain received almost universal adulation for his sacrifice and service on behalf of the nation, Holthaus, now a retired Omaha lawyer, was able to watch the pomp and ceremony surrounding his death through the lens of memory — the memory of a young Naval Academy midshipman who was his late brother Hollis's friend and classmate at Annapolis.

In earlier years, Roger knew both McCain and Charles Larson, another

member of the Naval Academy Class of 1958 who was McCain's close friend. All three men now are buried in the academy cemetery.

"Like my brother, he was married to the Navy," Roger said of McCain. "But then because of his captivity (as a prisoner of war) and health problems, I just remember him being just like everybody else. I was constantly reading about him and remember feeling empathy for the family (upon his death).

"I don't travel much anymore, but I watched his funeral on TV. I told people I wish I had the Kleenex concession. It was a real tear-jerker."

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## Holthaus: Annapolis classmates remembered

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### LIFE OF SERVICE

Roger and his older brother, Hollis Lee Holthaus, navigated the streets of Hastings as youngsters on bicycles while helping run errands for their father at the family's drugstore, Holthaus Drug Co., in downtown Hastings.

Their parents were William and Luella Holthaus, who moved with their two sons to Hastings in 1948 and operated Holthaus Drug for more than 16 years.

Hollis was a scholarly student with an ear for music. In 1951, he earned an Eagle Scout award with the Boy Scouts as a member of Troop No. 192 of First Methodist Church at age 15.

The 1954 Hastings High graduate entered the Naval Academy on congressional appointment and graduated in June 1958. His first tour of duty was at Pearl Harbor.

The Holthaus home on Seventh Street and St. Joseph Avenue is no more, the land paved over for parking at Mary

Lanning Healthcare.

After a long and distinguished career in the Navy, Hollis retired in 1978 to devote the remainder of his life to helping America's homeless, first as director of the Union Rescue Mission in Los Angeles, then as director of the Chicago Christian Industrial League city mission.

It was while performing his duties for the mission that Hollis discovered he was a natural at raising money. He began to put those skills to use in earnest in 1988 for multiple

organizations, including Ball State University, the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association, U.S. Naval Institute, and U.S. Navy, Marine and Coast Guard Residence Foundation. He also was a licensed minister.

Hollis died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack on March 4, 1993, at his home in Annapolis, Maryland, at age 56. His death came as a shock to all who knew him, particularly since he had just been given a clean bill of health following a physical just 23 days earlier. His death created a void

still felt by his younger brother to this very day.

"It's hard to accept something I can't understand," Roger told Hastings Tribune Managing Editor Gary Johansen shortly after Hollis's passing.

Roger was a regular contact of Johansen's at the time, correcting mistakes he would find in the newspaper and offering ideas for Johansen's column.

**CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

It was during his stint in the Naval Academy that Hollis Holthaus became friends with Larson, a graduate of Omaha North High School, who rose to the rank of admiral and twice served as superintendent

of the academy. By extension, he also came to know McCain, a close friend and roommate of Larson's.

McCain now is buried alongside Larson in the U.S. Naval Academy cemetery, where the two deceased men and their widows have adjacent plots. McCain had attended Larson's funeral following the retired four-star admiral's death from leukemia at age 77 in 2014.

Roger remembers well how conversations between Larson, McCain and his brother would inevitably turn to naval topics. He likened their banter to that heard in episodes of the television series M.A.S.H.

"If you ever watch M.A.S.H.,

they talk about some of the staff being 'Regular Army.' Well these guys were Regular Navy," he said. "The topic would always be their adventures on naval craft.

"Like doctors talk about medical operations in medical school, midshipmen talk about being in submarines and so forth. Their conversations would be about the things they were doing, things they were going to do, and things they were going to take away from campus."

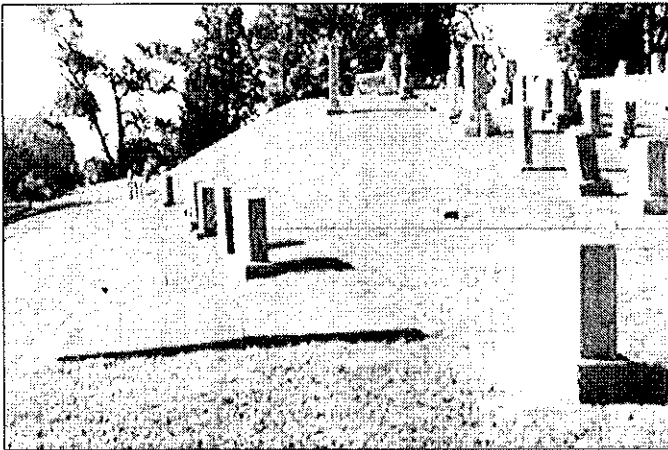
As a student himself at the time with exams to take at Carleton College in Minnesota, Roger was unable to attend Hollis's graduation from the academy, but did make it back

to serve as best man at his wedding in the academy chapel the following day. He remained friends with Hollis's academy classmates following his brother's death, attending reunions and other functions by invitation where McCain and Larson were present.

"I was very flattered that his classmates included me in some of their events after he died," he said. "They said I was part of the family."

Like McCain and Larson, Hollis is buried in the academy cemetery — a fitting final resting place for the brothers in arms, Roger said.

"As classmates, they were all very close," he said.



SUSAN WALSH/AP

**The covered burial plot for Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., sits quietly Monday, the day after McCain's burial in the cemetery at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. In the foreground is the grave marker for McCain's close friend and academy classmate, Adm. Charles Larson, a graduate of Omaha North High School.**



Tribune Archives

**This photo of Hollis Lee Holthaus, then a student at the U.S. Naval Academy, appeared in the Hastings Tribune in December 1955.**



MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 2ND CLASS NATHAN BURKE/U.S. Navy via AP

**Navy Body Bearers move the casket of Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., Sunday from his processional hearse into the United States Naval Academy Chapel at Annapolis, Md.**