

Reflections on Matt's death:

Most would agree that a strong, well trained, and adequately equipped defense establishment is necessary to preserve our freedoms. Ill-advised use of these defense resources by our elected leaders does not release the professional personnel in that defense establishment from their duty to preserve the defense resources as best they can until sanity returns, regardless of their personal opinions. Neither does it release them to broadcast whatever personal doubts they may have about decisions made by their leaders and officers if that might in any way affect the performance or morale of those whose duty it is to follow orders.

All premature deaths are a tragic waste, many earlier and more tragically than Matt's. But Matt's life was not wasted on an ill-conceived war because that war was not his personal mission. His mission was to protect the lives of the troops for whom he was trained to provide aerial reconnaissance and observation. That was a noble mission that he performed heroically and with great reported success.

Matt had the good fortune to have great certainty about his reason for being from a very early age. He never wanted to be anything other than a military pilot. He never wavered from that purpose despite disappointments and discouragements. He was and we are very proud of who he was and how he lived out his life.

Matt also had the good fortune to find a way to do his duty without reservation while doing something he truly loved to do and which he did with exceptional skill. He was confident enough in his skill and his mission in life that he never had a need to brag about professional accomplishments. Matt set his own course and judged his own race. Few of us could follow that course and fewer yet could maintain the pace.

Matt had achieved an extraordinary balance between duty and fun. Duty was always first, but when duty was done he was rarely without an idea for something fun to do. Most of his fun was almost childlike in its innocence and in the enthusiasm he brought to it. He never gave up any of the passions of his youth.

Matt died doing his duty with his last breath. I'm absolutely sure that is the death he would have chosen. It is the death I would choose for myself, but without the physical heroism required of him.

I would have chosen a far less physically dangerous and less militaristic path for Matt had it been my right to determine his duty. He knew it was not; he knew that each of us must determine for ourselves the purpose for which we were born.

Many, including myself, tried to discourage him from the demanding and dangerous path he chose. It is some comfort to know that he was so sure of his calling that he could not be dissuaded by any of the tactics we employed. I hope he knew how much we respected him for his total dedication to his calling and for the honor he brought to that cause.

We will all have to live with memories now because that's all we have left. Thank you Matt for making those memories so good.

Most of us could learn a great deal from Matt's life.

The world would be better if there were more people with doubt and less people with the arrogant faith that they are 'right', and that therefore everyone else must be wrong. There is something terribly wrong with the view that there is only one 'right' for everyone.

Because our nation is so strong, we must be very careful to use our strength only in selfless causes. In the affairs of nations as in the affairs of individuals, the strong should not dominate the weak, but rather protect them from uncivilized behavior. To do otherwise is uncivilized.

There are patriots fighting and dying on both sides of every war. Maybe patriotism is too parochial. Maybe we all need to embrace all of humankind, or maybe we should embrace the entire natural world as a counter measure to excessive patriotism. Would Jesus be a patriot?

Those who rely on doctrine to determine right from wrong are placing little faith in their own conscience to guide their words and deeds. Maybe they are right to place little faith in their conscience, but mine seems to me to be quite sufficient to keep me on the straight and narrow and mostly uphill path.

Jay and Nondo never knew each other. Jay died before Nondo was even born. But Matt had a very close relationship with both of them. Inexplicably it comforts me some that Matt provides a link between Jay and Nondo that did not exist before. Quite a happy and fun-loving crew they make.

Matt lived thirty-five years longer than Jay, and fifteen years longer than Nondo. I believe Matt was proud of the use he made of those added years of life. I know I am proud of him and I believe Jay and Nondo would also be proud. I have already lived almost sixty years longer than Jay, almost forty years longer than Nondo, and over twenty years longer than Matt. I try to use the gift of all these additional years of life pursuing goals that are mostly selfless and that would make the three of them proud.

This war and many other current political happenings make one question the perpetual viability of democracy. Too many of the less affluent vote on social issues against their economic interests, and too many relatively affluent people vote their economic interests over any other consideration. The result is a government whose economic benefits are skewed toward the affluent and whose non-economic policies become increasingly reactionary. This is a recipe for political disaster.