

*Bourque 60*

12 November 1965

Mr. and Mrs. Valmore V. Bourque  
381 N. Main Street  
South Hadley Falls, Mass.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bourque:

Since a considerable period of time has passed between receipt of your early September letter and this reply I think perhaps I owe you an explanation for my tardiness in replying. As you may or may not know, I no longer work for General McDermott but am now in a new job in a new office with the title of Alumni Secretary. Quite by coincidence your letter to me arrived during the creation of my new office and I was at that time unable to attend to obtaining copies of the film and pictures of Val's funeral which you mentioned in your letter. The proceedings and details of establishing a new office were rather lengthy and time consuming and until the office was fully established I was not in a position to secure duplicates of the pictures, films, etc.

However, we have been in business for about a month now and during that time I have succeeded in locating the inclosed photos and films. I sincerely hope the delay encountered is outweighed by the results achieved. I think you will find that the film and the nine photos inclosed will give the youngsters in the Football League a good idea of who Val really was.

One last point. In talking to Linda on various occasions she has indicated that a confusing amount of information has reached you concerning the exact circumstances of Val's death. In hopes that you will place final trust in the accuracy of what I have to say, I would like to assure you that the following is an accurate and factual description of what actually transpired. Val's aircraft suffered extremely heavy and well concentrated ground fire which rendered both engines of the C-123 inoperative. Another classmate of Val's, Captain Gary Crew, was flying in the third aircraft in Val's flight and has described to me what subsequently transpired. As all power was lost Val managed to circle and land the aircraft in the only available clearing, a tiny patch of treeless ground in the center of a very dense jungle. The aircraft skidded through the clearing and struck the trees at the far end causing the aircraft to come apart and burn. Captain Crew, who is also a pilot, indicated to me that Val died fighting and flying to save his crew and

did everything humanly possible to land the aircraft safely. In fact Captain Crew, as an experienced C-123 pilot, was amazed that Val was able even to make the clearing since his aircraft was totally disabled. Further, the personnel who fought their way in to remove Val's body from the aircraft have indicated to me that Val's body was found in the aircraft commander's seat, that he was still clutching the steering wheel and that it was obvious to them that Captain Bourque had struggled unto death to save himself and those with him. The aircraft finally came to rest in a very shallow ditch just beyond the end of the clearing into which Val had flown.

I am furnishing the above information for two reasons. First I think you have every right to know how your son died and why; and second I hope that this will finally put to rest any rumors or information which you may have heard to the contrary. I sincerely hope that what I have said will provide more pride than pain to you and the other members of your family. Certainly Val was a close personal friend of mine of whom I am quite proud. But beyond that I think you should know that I have talked to literally dozens of graduates who still regard your son as a fine young officer, a truly professional pilot, and the Academy's first real hero who has established in dying a pattern of performance for the rest of us to emulate. It is difficult if not impossible for me to convey in a letter the deep pride which so many of us gained by virtue of the fact that Val was part of our group. That Val died serving his God and his country goes without saying; but I wanted to make you aware of the magnificent service he has rendered to the rest of us by the quality of his life and death.

Please feel free to correspond with me at any time in the future if I can possibly be of assistance to you. Perhaps sometime in the future if you have the opportunity you will come to visit us at the Academy. We would be most happy to have you as our guests and hope that you will feel at home here at USAFA. In closing I wish to add my own personal pride in Val and let you know that he lives on with me as an example of the skill and courage that I hope I too have within myself.

Sincerely,

RICHARD T. MATHEWS  
Executive Secretary  
Association of Graduates

P.S. The inclosed movie film can be shown from any standard 16mm movie projector. It's black and white film with no sound track.