

SERVING THE TRUTH

Writing yesterday in the Daily Beast, Lt. Col. Daniel Davis provides a moving tribute to the late Michael Hastings. In the piece, we learn that Hastings didn't merely help Davis by publishing Davis' long-form unclassified report detailing how "progress" in Afghanistan as reported by the military has no basis in reality, but Hastings actually provided some of the inspiration for Davis to enter into his process of exposing military lies:

I first met Michael in early May 2011, while I was in Washington on leave from the combat zone in Afghanistan. I agreed to meet him at the behest of a mutual friend, though I was hesitant. Prior to that meeting the only thing I knew about Hastings was that he had authored the *Rolling Stone* piece that led to the firing of Gen. Stanley McChrystal. Most people I knew in the military believed Hastings to be a raging liberal who hated the military. Yet because our mutual friend held him in such high esteem, I agreed to meet. I am so thankful I did so.

Within 10 minutes of meeting him my opinion had changed dramatically. I found him to be a very rational, honest, and respectful guy. He also showed real interest in and concern for the regular combat troop and was definitely not some "military hater." Over the course of lunch that day I shared with him my frustration at what I believed to be a significant chasm between what some of our senior military leaders were saying in public and what I knew to be true behind the scenes. Michael told me that didn't surprise him, because he'd seen it in his own experience over the years and had many soldiers tell him the same thing.

Note what fuels the relationship between Davis and Hastings. Both care deeply about regular combat soldiers and see that high-ranking officers are lying about what is taking place in Afghanistan. It is clear from Davis' piece that this meeting with Hastings, and the understanding of Hastings' motivations that the meeting provided, served as inspiration for Davis:

Within days of that meeting I returned to Afghanistan to complete my combat deployment, but our meeting had left an impression on me. Shortly after my return to the U.S. in October 2011, my concerns about the observed truth deficit began to grow to the point where I could no longer remain silent. In part I was motivated to take the risk of publishing my experiences because of the courage I saw in Michael Hastings. I spent virtually the entire month of December 2011 writing my story, which I shared with numerous members of Congress and then in the *Armed Forces Journal*. On February 5, 2012, the story broke in *The New York Times*; five days later Michael wrote a very supportive piece in *Rolling Stone*.

Davis, a military veteran with multiple deployments, saw Hastings as courageous because he dared to lift the veil that hid the duplicity of McChrystal and his band of "operators". I wrote about parts of what Hastings exposed here and here, but my overall reaction to Hastings' book was that it laid out in detail how McChrystal, Petraeus and their band of merry operators were artful in the practice of self-promotion after discovering that they could promote themselves primarily through false claims of success in the programs they advocated.

What stands out in the interaction between Davis and Hastings is what is missing from those operators. The false claims of success by

McChrystal and Petraeus place no value at all on the lives of the soldiers on the front lines. Davis found that he could no longer take part in a process where those lives are sacrificed at the altar of self-promotion by officers angling to get ahead in Washington.

I found much value in what Davis published. Both the short report in *Armed Forces Journal* and Davis' long report, first published in draft form by Hastings, inspired me to continue digging through public reports on US war efforts with an eye toward finding how the reality on the ground does not mesh with the rosy outlook favored by the military.

Davis closes his piece with a moving tribute to Hastings:

Mike personified, in my view, what a journalist ought to be: challenging of authority when the facts don't square with statements, holding officials accountable for their words and deeds, and showing a willingness to report the truth even when threatened with loss of access; in a word: *fearless*. Too many reporters today, it seems, cower and go silent when so threatened, and as a result the American public is shielded from the truth necessary for a democracy to properly and efficiently function.

Though I will forever regret that I didn't say this face-to-face when I had the chance: "Thank you for your service to this nation, Michael Hastings. May you rest in peace."

Such courage is rare in our world. Another courageous figure, Matthew Hoh (who resigned from the State Department in disgust instead of the military), turned up in the comments to the post linked above on Davis' long report.

Another figure who shows the same high level of courage is Col. Morris Davis (whom I had the great pleasure of meeting at Netroots Nation

2013 in San Jose), who resigned as Chief Prosecutor at Guantanamo once he realized that the Bush Administration wanted only convictions and not justice in the trials there.

While Davis salutes Hastings for serving our country, I see Hastings' service in a slightly different light. I see Michael Hastings, Daniel Davis, Matthew Hoh and Morris Davis serving a higher calling than country. They serve the truth. To me, there can be no higher calling.