

John M. Steward

Lt. Col. John M. Steward's life was taken on Dec. 17, 1993 when an F-15 collided with John's F-16 during a training mission over the Atlantic Ocean 40 miles east of the Georgia coastline. John was engaged in simulated air combat with another F-15 at the time. He is survived by his wife, Cynthia; son John Michael II; mother, Catherine; brothers Fred and Mark, and his sister Cathy.

The Air Force lost an officer whose past contributions promised unlimited future potential. Colonel Steward's 18-year Air Force career included flying A-7, OV-10 and F-16 aircraft. His past duties were all centered around flight operations. They included positions of forward air controller, flight commander, assistant squadron operations officer, fighter wing operations staff officer, and operations staff positions at PACAF headquarters. His final assignment was advisor to the commander, 188th Fighter Group, Arkansas National Guard. In 1986 he was a distinguished graduate of Air Command and Staff College.

Stew was a participant. He made things happen. Nobody worked harder and with more loyalty to his unit. His efforts always aimed at the mission objective and selflessly making others look good. In his words, "There was nothing more worthless than an officer who failed to contribute." Despite lucrative offers of civilian employment, Stew held fast to an Air Force career. He loved his job and considered the F-16 the ultimate airplane. John was also an especially effective briefing officer.

When Stew married Cynthia in 1983, it was the beginning of a honeymoon that lasted until death. The birth of John Michael II in 1988 was the proudest day of his life. Love and pride of his family knew no bounds in Stew's life and was obvious to the most casual observer.

Participation was the watchword in all facets of Stew's life. Socially, nobody enjoyed a party more than Stew. He was a devout practicing Catholic. He participated in a myriad of different sports on a daily basis. He especially enjoyed Alpine skiing. Cold stormy days when "he could have the whole mountain to himself" were special to him. He had a habit of late afternoon solo climbs to untracked powder snow. He always returned late, having gone further and higher than originally intended. Last summer Stew recruited and coached his son's soccer team composed of four and five-year-old boys. Competitive participation was the only goal, but the result was a winning season.

If Stew could speak to us now, he would humbly acknowledge these accolades. They are obviously true. What he would not know is the impact of his death on those of us who survive. His optimism, energy and pure love of life had a sustaining influence on those around him. These influences are suddenly gone and leave a void that can best be described as a broken heart. Hopefully, time will heal the hurt associated with this grief. John's contributions to our past will always be a cherished memory. We will meet John again in the comforting arms of our Creator. (Cynthia's father, Ellery Voge)