The Honorable J. Strom Thurmond  
United States Senate  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  

Dear Senator Thurmond,

You have recently received material from Mr. John A. Parillo in regard to securing the Congressional Medal of Honor and a U-2 Plane to honor Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr. In that Rudy and I roomed next door to each other during our Clemson days, I earnestly ask that you consider the following thoughts. Also, since publication of the Sherard Book tracing our genealogy, I have found that we are related, so that had a profound impact in my quest to help Mr. Parillo obtain recognition for Major Anderson.

The 1950s saw Americans building bomb shelters in their back yards and storing emergency rations in their basements - we were among that group! For the first time in 200 years America faced the prospect of a foreign assault, in this case inter-continental ballistic missiles. This devastating technology threatened the continental United States as it has never been threatened. In 1960 the “Cold War” reached fever pitch and President John F. Kennedy was compelled to take decisive action. He placed this nation under military alert, calling upon our military resources to preserve our lives and liberty from the threat.

Our first line of defense would be a mystery airplane most people had never heard of. To the civilian world the Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was an inconceivable dream of “Buck Rogers” proportions. Its existence was only rumored and its performance unbelievable. That men would fly alone, unseen, unheard and unarmed at an incredible 70,000 feet - more than twelve miles above the earth - was mute testimony to their personal fortitude. The men of the 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing were placed in the breach - the only wall of defense between the United States and Russia as Premier Khrushchev hustled missiles into Cuba.

Others played important and dangerous roles to be sure, but among the pilots charged with getting irrefutable photographic evidence of Russia’s treachery, only ONE would forfeit his life - Major Anderson. The world remembers the photographic proof that enabled President Kennedy to win the day. The world remembers that Premier Khrushchev “blinked” and that he withdrew his missiles. And American celebrates the fact that we remained free.
But it was easy to forget Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr., one of the pilots that took the conclusive photographs and the only one to lose his life. Just as, once successfully passed, it was easy to forget the grave peril this nation once faced. Such loss of memory must be corrected and that memory restored. For it is also easy to say, “I am just one man - what can I do?” It is easy to rationalize that a single individual cannot make a difference. It is easy to convince one’s self that the effort is too great - that the results will be too small and not worth the effort.

Major Anderson’s blood made very real the threat of war. His sacrifice must surely have threatened Khrushchev every bit as much as the photographic evidence itself. By shooting down the American pilot had Castro “let loose the dogs of war”? On the very dark and cold night of October 27, 1962, Major Rudolf Anderson did not shirk his duty. Alone, with no one else to judge him, without thought of personal safety, he flew over Cuba and was shot down. One man gave his life by doing his duty as he saw his obligation do so and by that act this one man saved 200 million Americans from God only can know what harm. If not the man himself, that act must be remembered. It is worthy of our nation’s highest honor.

The Anderson Families, as has been previously stated, are not publicity seekers, but let Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr. be awarded the Medal of Honor by Act of Congress so that on other nights, no matter how dark and cold, no matter how desolate or alone, no matter how far from home or how great the odds may seem, other men will remember, if not the name of Major Anderson, the more important fact that one man can make a difference. Let Congress recall and proclaim that act, just as they did for Captain Charles A. Lindbergh and General William C. Mitchell, so that every American will know that he or she, as a single individual, may truly be able to save our nation in time of crisis.

Senator, I hope you will see fit to see that Congress acts on this patriotic performance of duty that cost Rudy his life and that the Congressional Medal of Honor be awarded. We would then seek the U-2 plane to be placed in Greenville as a further memorial for the general public to visit and recount our blessings over this life given in defense of his country.

On a personal note, Dot joins with me in sending congratulations on your years of service to this State and Nation. She misses Girls’ State and seeing you at the Annual Banquet, but as you know, my health has been such that she could not attend these past three years.

Again, congratulations and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

S. Frank Sherard, Jr.

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