



Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel

April 30, 1970 - September 22, 2018

Lieutenant Colonel Jess William Keel, of Nicholson, Georgia passed away Saturday, September 22, 2018 at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, from complications from a bone marrow transplant after a seven-month battle with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS). Jess was born in Memphis, Tennessee on April 30, 1970 to Doug and Jane Darnell Keel. Jess was married to his wife of almost 15 years Rana Cole Keel.

Jess grew up in Decatur, Georgia and was a 1988 Graduate of Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, GA. He received his Bachelor of Science Degree in 1992 with emphasis in Aviation from Georgia State University. He then graduated from Officer Candidate School as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force and attended Undergraduate Pilot Training in 1995 where he received his wings at Vance Air Force Base. His first assignment out of UPT was flying the C-5 aircraft out of Dover, Delaware. In 1997 he joined the 700th Airlift Squadron, 94th Airlift Wing, at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, flying the C-130 aircraft. Over the course of his career in the 94th Airlift Wing, Lt Col Keel served as an Aircraft Commander, Supervisor of Flying, Drop Zone Control Officer, Instructor Pilot, Chief of Operations Plans and Chief of Tactics. He also served a significant role as Director of Operations for the 700th Airlift Squadron on one of his multiple deployments to the Middle East in the global war on terror. He amassed over 3500 hours military flying time and 100+ hours of combat flight time earning an Aerial Achievement Medal, an Air Force Commendation Medal and Meritorious Service Medal, among other awards and decorations. In 2016 he began service as an Air Force Academy Liaison Officer helping young men and women fulfill their goal to attend the United States Air Force Academy.

In addition to his service with United States Air Force he received his MBA from Kennesaw State in 2002 and was also a commercial pilot for Southwest Airlines since 2005. Jess loved riding motorcycles and snowboarding. He was an avid tennis player and played A level tennis for Alta and 4.5 for USTA, and was the 2013 Fall Atlanta City Champion at singles. He was described as “competitive but fair and generous to opponents.” His favorite past time was spending time on his farm in Nicholson with his

wife Rana, their dogs, horses and pig Gilbert. He lived life to the fullest, was big hearted, tender, loving, generous and hysterically funny. He was genuinely loved by all who knew him and he was quite simply the best little brother in the world.

He is preceded in death by his father, Douglas Keel and sister Linda Harris. He is survived by his wife Rana, mother Jane Darnell Keel, sister Shannon Keel Cartrett, brother-in-law, Chris Cartrett and also his niece and nephew Keely and Jake Cartrett. He is also survived by an older brother Larry Keel and nieces and nephews Blake Maddox, Brooke Douglas, Chris Keel and Amanda Madge in addition to several great nieces, nephews and many cousins.

A memorial service to honor him will be held Friday, October 5 at 3:00 at Cornerstone Church in Athens, Georgia. The family will receive guests one hour before the service and also after.

In lieu of flowers donations may be sent to Top Dogg K9 Foundation at Vdogs.org. This organization partners dogs with veterans who are suffering from trauma from service to our country. Also, donations can be made in Jess' name to The Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation at aamds.org.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies....."

Isaiah 40:31, "Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

Condolences may be sent or viewed at www.wagesfuneralhome.com. Tom M. Wages Funeral Service, LLC, A Family Company, 3705 Highway 78 West, Snellville, GA 30039 (770-979-3200) has been entrusted with the arrangements.

Events

OCT **Visitation** 02:00PM - 03:00PM

5

Cornerstone Church

4680 Lexington Rd, Athens, GA, US, 30605

OCT **Memorial Service** 03:00PM

5

Cornerstone Church

4680 Lexington Rd, Athens, GA, US, 30605

Comments



“ So sorry to hear of Jess's passing. He was a good friend and tennis buddy for over 20 years. My prayers are with his wife Rana and his whole family.

C. J. Cox

C. J. Cox - October 18, 2018 at 04:27 PM



“ Praying for the family as well as his Air Force Family! May God provide you comfort and peace at this time. I have not seen Jess in many years but, I knew him from Glen Haven Baptist. So sorry to hear about him. He was always smiling!!

Amber Bailey - October 06, 2018 at 04:06 AM



“ Brooke lit a candle in memory of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel



Brooke - October 05, 2018 at 08:16 PM



“ Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



October 05, 2018 at 10:08 AM



“ I am saddened to hear of Jess's passing. He was a great guy, a great Airman, officer, pilot and a true gentleman. I always will remember his kindness. His sweet spirit. His smile. And last and most importantly, our deep deep talks about Jesus. I know he is with Him now. Tim Tarchick



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



October 04, 2018 at 05:01 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



October 04, 2018 at 01:46 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



October 04, 2018 at 10:59 AM



“ My heart is filled with sadness at the loss of my sweet cousin, Jess Keel. He was an accomplished man brought up in the church. A commercial airline pilot and a man of rank and standing in the US Military! My heart cries for his wife, mother, sister and family that he was taken from us so early in life not yet reaching 50 years of age. I hope and pray they can work through their grief and sadness of his loss and find comfort in a not too distant reunion for all who believe in Christ Jesus. He will forever be in my minds eye that happy little blond boy I knew in his youth, the strong tall man in his adulthood and a servant of our heavenly father! God speed to your rest and refreshment Jess.



“ Jane, Shannon and family: Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers as you travel this difficult road. My heart aches for you all. Know that you are loved and we rejoice in knowing that this parting is only for a while. Jess is safe with Jesus now. Much love, Michelle Davis



Michelle N. Davis - October 02, 2018 at 03:15 PM



“ To Jane and Shannon and family members:
Even though I only visited with Jess on few occasions, I appreciate the many accomplishments he made and his emphasis on a Christian lifestyle. Having been a life-long pilot myself, I can appreciate all the opportunities/accomplishments he had in both the military and civilian areas of flying as well in his personal interests. My wife Patsy and me send our deepest condolences to all of you for the loss of a fine young "soldier", husband and friend of many. May God continue to guide and bless your lives as the many memories you have of Jess and his family will remain with each of you forever.

In Christian love, Rollin and Patsy Jackson

Rollin A.Jackson, Jr. - October 02, 2018 at 02:55 PM



“ Jane, I am so sorry to hear about the passing of your son Jess. There are no words to express how you must feel. Just know you and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. God be with you.

Barbara Prather Wood - October 02, 2018 at 12:33 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



October 01, 2018 at 10:03 PM



“ Jess has always been a brother to me and the Keels, my GA family. His sister Shannon introduced me to my husband of 26yrs and my husband introduced him to his C5 squadron. Gods grand design! I'm looking for you to greet me at the gate one day when it's my time, brother! My love for and devotion to Rana and the Keel Family



suzy mclaughlin - October 01, 2018 at 09:12 PM



“ OMGoodness this is a FABULOUS pic of my most favorite family. Just can't love it enough. My heart is so broken for my precious friends.

Pam Boone - October 02, 2018 at 09:31 AM



“ Shocked to hear this sad news. Rana, praying for you.

Ruby Heaton Chatham

Ruby Chatham - October 01, 2018 at 05:52 PM



“ Jess was a shining star at the DARB. A donation to Top Dogg K-9 Foundation was made in his memory from Chip & Lori Kaczynski

CHIP KACZYNSKI - October 01, 2018 at 10:03 AM



“ Mary Ruth Woolum sent a virtual gift in memory of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel





“ Jess was an amazing man and we, (The Top Dogg K9 Foundation) will dearly miss him. Jess and Rana believed in our mission to train service dogs for veterans from day one. Jess was always very enthusiastic and passionate about wanting to help with EVERYTHING!

Our deepest condolences to Rana, his family, and friends. Please let us know if we can help in any way.

Bow Wow
Sheila & Blake Rashad
Top Dogg K9 Foundation



Sheila & Blake Rashad - September 30, 2018 at 12:37 PM



“ I only had the pleasure of knowing Jess over a 3 day trip, but he made an immediate impression on me. It was clear he adored his wife and he liked to help people, especially the kids trying to get into the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was such a positive and personable guy. I truly enjoyed getting to know him.
Rest in Peace Jess.

Greg Sanders

Greg Sanders - September 28, 2018 at 09:01 PM



“ A great man and a great friend. Still shocked. You will be missed my friend. Thanks for some great memories.

Matthew Priser - September 28, 2018 at 11:21 AM



“ A great man, a true friend and a super patriot. His spirit was always outgoing, upbeat and positive. He walked me into the chief pilot's office at ASA and got me the job. He will be missed and I look forward to seeing him again on the other side.

Gary Poore

Gary Poore - September 28, 2018 at 08:15 AM



“ Jess was one of the most genuine and caring people I have ever known. He was a great officer, and an even better human being. My sympathy to all of his family and friends, it is hard to lose somebody as special as Jess.

Tom Vidamour - September 28, 2018 at 07:48 AM



“ Jess was a perfect example of what a Christian should be. He was loved by so many. May Gods give peace to all his family and friends who loved him so much. With all our love and sympathy . Ron and Nancy Cardwell

Ronald Cardwell - September 26, 2018 at 08:27 PM



“ Bill Petit and the TFS Family purchased the Reflections of Glory Wreath for the family of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel.



Bill Petit and the TFS Family - September 26, 2018 at 09:44 AM



“ GODSPEED my friend! Jess you will be missed. From all the time we flew together at the 700th and TFS. You meant a lot to so many people. You had such an endearing faith in God, we all know you are with Him now! Blue Skies!

Bill Petit and the TFS Team

Bill Petit - September 26, 2018 at 09:40 AM



“ Loved Jess he was such a special young man. You couldn't help but smile when he walked into a room, his beautiful smile was infectious. Walking with the Angels . Shirley Harbin

Shirley - September 28, 2018 at 08:49 PM



“ Jess made life better for all those around him. He was made of the right stuff. A great guy and a true American Hero he will be missed.
Roy Ayers

roy ayers - September 26, 2018 at 08:45 AM



“ He was my teammate in the Varsity Baseball team and always remember him as a good starting left-hand pitcher and myself the reliever. Great one-two punch when we pitch!!!

RIP my rat-brother!!!

Adolfo Boyd - September 25, 2018 at 03:14 PM



“ Pam lit a candle in memory of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel



pam - September 25, 2018 at 01:36 PM



“ Your infectious laugh and friendship will be forever missed by all. Rest.

Jeremy Angel - September 25, 2018 at 07:46 AM



“ Yes! What an amazing sweet man! Thankful for his service to our country and his friendship. Fly high and rest peacefully my friend.

Ashley Lucas - September 25, 2018 at 05:57 PM



“ Cheryl Darnell lit a candle in memory of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel



Cheryl Darnell - September 24, 2018 at 05:54 PM



“ What an awesome man and a great friend. Thank you for being a shoulder to lean on the deep talks and great laughs. your home now love you boy
Lance Avery



lance avery - September 24, 2018 at 03:31 PM



“ It's truly unfortunate to loose a charismatic gentleman of Jesse's character in his prime. Jesse's renowned greeting, "Hey Man" and captivating smile will be forever missed. R.I.P. Lt Col Jesse Keel!

Sincerely, Maj Jonathan Lipsey

Jonathan Lipsey - September 24, 2018 at 03:23 PM



“ Jess was like a brother to me. He always made me laugh, even when I didn't feel like it. Jess was fascinated my my glassblowing stories. I'm proud he owned a piece of my art. Bob Tettelbach

Bob Tettelbach - September 24, 2018 at 12:00 PM



“ What an awesome man and a true friend. I'll miss you so much my brother. Thanks for the shoulder to lean on, the deep talks and all the good laughs. You are home now. Love you boy!
Lance



lance avery - September 24, 2018 at 10:41 AM



“ You will be missed my brother. A guy who would give you the shirt off his back and was a selfless, true friend. He loved life and lived it to the full. Rest in peace, Jess, now that you are free from the pain of this world.



Brian Ferguson - September 24, 2018 at 09:17 AM



“ Pam lit a candle in memory of Lt. Col. Jess W. Keel



pam - September 23, 2018 at 09:32 PM



“ Jess is home sooner than any of us would have liked but I can only imagine the joy he is experiencing now. Our love and prayers are with you, Jane, Rana, and Shannon, and the rest of your sweet family. Stacy, Robie, Erica and Evan Robinson

Stacy Simril Robinson - September 23, 2018 at 09:21 PM