

Michael Hastings, 'Rolling Stone' Contributor, Dead at 33

The bold journalist died in a car accident in Los Angeles

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Michael Hastings, the fearless journalist whose reporting brought down the career of General Stanley McChrystal, has died in a car accident in Los Angeles, *Rolling Stone* has learned. He was 33.

Hastings' unvarnished 2010 profile of McChrystal in the pages of *Rolling Stone*, "[The Runaway General](#)," captured the then-supreme commander of the U.S.-led war effort in Afghanistan openly mocking his civilian commanders in the White House. The maelstrom sparked by its publication concluded with President Obama recalling McChrystal to Washington and the general resigning his post. "The conduct represented in the recently published article does not meet the standard that should be met by – set by a commanding general," Obama said, announcing McChrystal's departure. "It undermines the civilian control of the military that is at the core of our democratic system."

✖ Hastings' hallmark as reporter was his refusal to cozy up to power. While other embedded reporters were charmed by McChrystal's bad-boy bravado and might have excused his insubordination as a joke, Hastings was determined to expose the recklessness of a man leading what Hastings believed to be a reckless war. "Runaway General" was a finalist for a National Magazine Award, [won the 2010 Polk award for magazine reporting](#), and was the basis for Hastings' book, *The Operators: The Wild and Terrifying Inside Story of America's War in Afghanistan*.

Image: Courtesy of Blue Rider Press/Penguin

For Hastings, there was no romance to America's misbegotten wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He had felt the horror of war first-hand: While covering the Iraq war for *Newsweek* in early 2007, his then-fiancee, an aide worker, was killed in a Baghdad car bombing. Hastings memorialized that relationship in his first book, *I Lost My Love in Baghdad: A Modern War Story*.

A contributing editor to *Rolling Stone*, Hastings leaves behind a remarkable legacy of reporting, including [an exposé of America's drone war](#), an exclusive [interview with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange](#) at his hideout in the English countryside, an investigation into the Army's illicit use of ["psychological operations"](#) to influence sitting Senators and a profile of Taliban captive Bowe Bergdahl, ["America's Last Prisoner of War."](#)

"Great reporters exude a certain kind of electricity," says *Rolling Stone* managing editor Will Dana, "the sense that there are stories burning inside them, and that there's no higher

calling or greater way to live life than to be always relentlessly trying to find and tell those stories. I'm sad that I'll never get to publish all the great stories that he was going to write, and sad that he won't be stopping by my office for any more short visits which would stretch for two or three completely engrossing hours. He will be missed."

Hard-charging, unabashedly opinionated, Hastings was original and at times abrasive. He had little patience for flacks and spinmeisters and will be remembered for his enthusiastic breaches of the conventions of access journalism. In a memorable [exchange](#) with Hillary Clinton aide Philippe Reines in the aftermath of the Benghazi attacks, Hastings' aggressive line of questioning angered Reines. "Why do you bother to ask questions you've already decided you know the answers to?" Reines asked. "Why don't you give answers that aren't bullshit for a change?" Hastings replied.

In addition to his work as a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone*, Hastings also reported for BuzzFeed. He leaves behind his wife, the writer Elise Jordan.

Matt Farwell is a veteran of the Afghanistan war who worked as a co-reporter with Hastings on some of his recent pieces. He sent this eulogy to *Rolling Stone*: "My friend Michael Hastings died last night in a car crash in Los Angeles. Writing this feels almost ghoulish: I still haven't processed the fact that he's gone. Today we all feel that loss: whether we're friends of Michael's, or family, or colleagues or readers, the world has gotten a bit smaller. As a journalist, he specialized in speaking truth to power and laying it all out there. He was irascible in his reporting and sometimes/often/always infuriating in his writing: he lit a bright lamp for those who wanted to follow his example.

"Michael was no stranger to trying to make sense this kind of tragedy nor was he unfamiliar the emptiness felt in the wake of a senseless, random death. After all, he'd already learned about it the only way he ever deemed acceptable for a non hack: first-hand. In the course of his reporting he figured this lesson out again and again in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the United States, and part of his passion stemmed from a desire to make everyone else wake the fuck up and realize the value of the life we're living.

"He did: He always sought out the hard stories, pushed for the truth, let it all hang out on the page. Looking back on the past ten years is tough for anyone, but looking back on Michael's past ten years and you begin to understand how passionate and dedicated to this work he was, a passion that was only equaled by his dedication to his family and friends, and how much more he lived in thirty-three years than most people live in a lifetime. That's part of what makes this all so tough: exiting, he leaves us all with little more than questions and a blank sheet of paper. Maybe that's challenge to continue to use it to write the truth. I hope we can live up to that. He was a great friend and I will miss him terribly."

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