

Career government official Robert Matteson dies

By David Chanen

Staff Writer

Robert E. Matteson, 79, former director of the White House disarmament staff under President Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950 and chief of staff for the Foreign Operations Administration, which was directed by former Minnesota Gov. Harold Stassen, died of Parkinson's disease Monday at his home in St. Paul.

He had a long and varied career as a government official, college faculty member and administrator, intelligence agent, arms control and Russian expert, author, canoeist and explorer. He had lived in St. Paul the past three years.

"He had one of the most brilliant minds I've ever seen," Stassen said from his home in Sunfish Lake. "He had a philosophy from the very beginning that he was going to lead a life that was full of service and adventure"

He graduated from St. Paul Academy, where he was an honor student and a varsity football, baseball and hockey player. He graduated from Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., and was cocaptain of its Midwest Conference championship football team. He earned a master's degree at Harvard University.

During his government career from 1953 to 1972, he was assistant director of the Foreign Operations Administration, director of the White House disarmament staff, member of the National Security Council Planning Board and director of the disarmament policy staff in the U.S. Disarmament Administration. He also was a member of the Central Intelligence Agency's Board of National Intelligence Estimates, director of the Agency of International Development's foreign training program, director of civilian operations in the II Corps sector in Vietnam and director of the State Department's foreign affairs executive seminar.

In World War II, he served in the 80th Infantry Division in Europe. While working in counterintelligence, he won the Silver Star for the capture in the Austrian Alps of Gen. Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Hitler's Gestapo and intelligence chief. He was tried and hanged at the Nuremberg war crimes trials, where Matteson was responsible for security of key military personnel.

He also captured several German rocket experts who were experimenting with underwater ballistic missiles.

Matteson initiated the idea of a permanent U.S. Disarmament Agency in a 1959 letter to Eisenhower. He also initiated the general disarmament policy of President John Kennedy, which became the basis of his "Sword of Damocles" speech to the United Nations in 1961.

In 1972, disagreeing with President Richard Nixon's Vietnam and Cambodia policies, Matteson founded the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College in Ashland, Wis. He was instrumental in converting Northland from a liberal arts to a liberal arts-environmental college.

He was an avid canoeist and took trips with family members across Canada to the Bering Sea, on Lake Superior and down the Mississippi River to New Orleans.

In 1976 he was chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on the Quetico-Superior, and helped keep it a wilderness area. He also climbed the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc in Switzerland and visited the North and South poles as a military consultant.

He was a member of the Carleton College Athletic Hall of Fame, board member of the Minnesota Historical Society and Science Museum of Minnesota and the Cable (Wis.) Natural History Museum. He was also a board member of the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities.

In 1981 Matteson helped develop and secure funding for the Harold Stassen Center for World Peace at the University of Minnesota

After five trips to Cuba, he started a Minnesota-Cuba cultural exchange program in 1985. He has spend the past 20 years writing columns and books.

Matteson is survived by his wife of 53 years, Jane; two daughters, Adelaide Donnelley, Of Berkeley, Calif., and Elizabeth Matteson, of Bainbridge Island, Wash., and three sons, Robert Jr., of Los Angeles; Fredric, of Bainbridge Island. and Sumner IV. of Madison, Wis.

Services will be held at 11 am. Wednesday at St. Clements Episcopal Church. 901 Portland Av., St. Paul, followed by a reception. Arrangements are by the Adam-Bradshaw Hague Funeral Home, St. Paul.

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