

Larry Allen Johnson

Varna, Illinois

43W Line 47

MC 2/27/47 9/20/68 SGT

I have come from Kansas to remember you today with the others I know listed on these panels. It is still hard to see your name on the panel here because it brings back such wonderful memories of our youth full of promise before this war that snatched us both took you forever from us.

It is important to me that we all remember that turbulent time and the real cost of our actions which your name here before me represents. History will not be kind to our country's involvement in that war, but we must never ever forget the dedication of those who went to battle when the country asked no matter what other lessons we have learned from Viet Nam.

What I most will cherish about you are the summers I spent with you in Illinois. I remember the calf you named after me, and the liver of that same bull we ate when I returned to the farm the next summer. I remember playing in the hay loft and watching with horror as you fell all the way to the bottom on a bale you were riding like a cowboy, and the relief that you were not hurt by it. I remember getting the cows in the barn in the morning and again in the evening and spraying each other with the milk. And I remember going to the pasture to dig thistles and spending most of the time just telling stories and sharing dreams of what life would be like when we were older and on our own.

That is what was taken from us, the realization of your dreams and aspirations. As I look up other names to remember today, your absence will be foremost on my mind. It was awful that I was already away in the service when we heard you were killed. I did not get to go to the funeral and did not see your grave until years later. It has only been in recent years, with the memorials being built and the war stories finally being told, that the feelings of anger, frustration and hurt have begun to heal for me and others.

It is sad to see your name here, but it is good for me, for others who were in or directly touched by the war, and for the whole country that your name was placed here in honor of your service.

You will always be my personal symbol of the real cost of that war and all wars. I hope that the other names here and on other memorials express the same clarity that service to our country does not come without sacrifice. The price of the loss of life and its potential must never be trivialized as policies and strategies are formulated.

Your loving cousin,

Lynn E. Steele, Salina, KS