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Article Title: Selection from "Locksley Hall," "All the World's a Stage," "Where the Flag Still Floats"

Full Citation: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Selection from 'Locksley Hall'"; Mary McVicker, "All the World's a Stage"; A E Sheldon, "Where the Flag Still Floats"

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1944Introduction.pdf>

Date: 9/06/2017

Article Summary: Two poems and a brief essay by a member of the Nebraska Defense Committee provide an introduction to an issue featuring articles about Nebraska heroes.

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Cataloging Information:

Keywords: Advisory Defense Committee, Certificate of Honor, casualty lists

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ADVANCED AIRDROME — LINCOLN ARMY AIR FIELD

From the farms, the towns, the cities they come . . . new men, young men to fight with
new weapons for the old cause of free people.

"All the World's a Stage"

MARY McVICKER

Nebraska Defense Committee

This is a true story. If you don't want to be hurt, don't read it. . . . It is a drama of the death of heroes, all from Nebraska, who so far have given their lives in this war, while people with small minds and greedy hands postpone the day of victory and, so doing, cause the death of thousands of other boys.

Converging on a desk in the office of the Advisory Defense Committee from all "Theaters of War," and rapidly filling a card index file, are the names of those Nebraska boys — several hundred of them. The reason for this file is so that the State of Nebraska, through its defense agency, not only can keep the record clear but can extend its sympathy and understanding to those who receive the fateful telegram, by sending to them a Certificate of Honor inscribed with the hero's name. Each card filed bears the name, rank, branch of service, field where he met his death, home town, and the nearest of kin. The task of compilation never grows routine. Each new name brings to the worker its own particular pang and induces a flight of imagination to the place of this boy's death, trying to visualize the final scene in this last act of his drama of life and death.

You read, "Pfc. John Jones. Killed in action in Pacific Area." And you wonder, "How did Johnny die?" You try to think it through. . . . If Johnny were a marine, you see the jungles of Guadalcanal, its steam, smells, and lurking danger — danger from man and beast and creatures myriad and infinitesimal. If he were a flyer you see his plane flaming into the ocean, and Johnny swimming through burning oil until he cannot swim another stroke. If Johnny were a sailor, you see Pearl Harbor, exploding warships, sailors trapped in their dark holds without even the mercy of drowning in clean cold sea water. You see the march of the Jap Zeros straight across the Pacific to Bataan, and Corregidor, and the Battle of the Coral Sea where the tide turned. Perhaps he was a flying student — the card says, all too often,

"Killed in crash of training plane." You see Johnny go down, and the rest of the crew. You see a bomber, magnificent creation of the mind of man, lost without fulfilling its intended destiny. Johnny and the crew, magnificent creations of the mind of God, are gone forever, but the plane can be replaced.

Sometimes a mother sends us the official telegram from the War Department, or the letter written by her boy's commanding officer telling a little about how Johnny died. These letters are masterpieces. They always tell the folks back home that Johnny's death was a credit to his outfit and to his family. They tell a little about his lovable disposition, how popular he was with the rest of the boys, what a fine soldier he was and how he will be missed. And they usually say that his poor little personal effects are being sent home. So his folks watch for a package; meanwhile they read in the papers, hear over the radio, news of strikes, black markets, empty stockyards, absenteeism, and ache with a desire for power to transmit to these aides of the diabolic trio the imperative need of stopping this shameful, this tragic waste of young American blood while they sit at home and haggle over trivial details while there is a war to win.

The casualty lists keep coming in. There are never many names from Nebraska, but there is a steadiness about the flow. The blackest day for the compiler of cards was the day that brought the list of men who died in a Jap prison camp in Korea. There were three Nebraska boys on this list, which bore the notation that all deaths were due to illness. Each tells its own story of exposure, malnutrition, neglect and epidemic. That day the typewriter itself almost rebelled, but soon these "nearest of kin" will receive their certificates of honor, offered with the deepest humility it is possible to feel.

Another type of casualty lists brings a different reaction. It is the list of those missing. Your imagination pictures the boys tossing about in life rafts, and conjures up all the horrors of that experience gleaned from reading recent tales of such survivors. You see them lost behind enemy lines, hiding by day and trying to get a little nearer to safety at night, or interned in prison camps, or blown to bits so there will never be a trace of them. But while they are listed as "Missing" there is still a faint hope that they are alive, and no certificate is issued.

Our Johnny also stands as the symbol of many and many a mother's boy who will never get the Congressional Medal nor any medal at all, yet none die more heroically than those who quietly volunteer for patrol action and go out alone in the darkness to face God knows what skulking enemies, unseen, unknown.

Nebraska boys have spilled their blood in every battle area in which our country has been fighting. The total number, though unknown, is mounting into the hundreds. And while it mounts, each little card added to the file inspires a silent memorial service, a renewal of at least one personal vow to leave not the smallest stone unturned to hasten the return of our heroes who yet are living and to ring down the final curtain in all the theaters of war.

Where the Flag Still Floats

And, O Splendid State of mine —

Nebraska Land!

From the Prairie to the Pine,

From the Mighty River to the Hills of Pine;

From the fields where the cattle and the corn

Greet the fields where alfalfa meets the wheat;

Where the home of Pershing stands; —

From the Forests of Argonne

To the Islands of the Sun —

At home and overseas,

We shall never sound retreat!

* * *

Flag of Freedom, it shall stand

In every land,

With the Spirit of MacArthur in command!

— *Addison E. Sheldon,*

February 21, 1942.