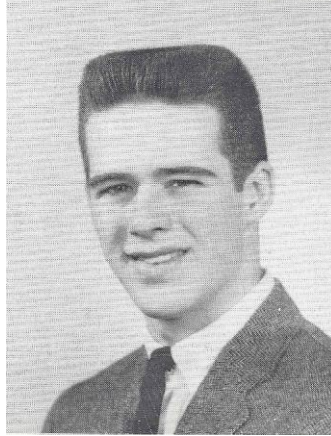


JOHN CALEB SMITH JR

JOHN CALEB SMITH JR.

Football 1; Intramurals 1; Junior Class 3; Senior Class 4; Sophomore Class 2; Student Council 1, 3.



EDITORIAL

The need to honor a native son

Liberty Sailor forgotten here



Members of the armed forces who gave their lives in the line of duty are honored throughout Tompkins County, from Dryden to Groton to Lansing, to the centerpiece monuments in Ithaca's De Witt Park. Noticeably absent in these tributes is John Caleb Smith Jr., a 23-year old Ithacan killed on the U.S.S. Liberty in the spring of 1967. It's a situation that needs to be rectified.

As detailed in a recent History Channel special and the Aug. 8 Ithaca Journal, the story of the Liberty is a nightmare. On June 8, 1967, the intelligence ship was stationed off the Sinai Peninsula during the Six-Day War and attacked by unidentified jets and torpedo boats. In all, 34 sailors were killed, including Smith. Another 171 Americans were wounded.

Deep into the attack, the captain realized that the aggressor was their ally, Israel, who claimed they couldn't identify the ship as American. The History Channel investigation examined crew members' contentions that the attack was intentional and that both governments covered up the true details.

The debate may go on forever and survivors are still angry that Congress never launched an investigation.

But for the Smith family of Ithaca – John was one of seven children and had a wife and young daughter – the intrigue surrounding the Liberty was nothing compared to their loss.

“I still get upset and choked up about it,” says one of Smith’s brothers, Jerry.

Now, 34 years after the fact, Smith, a communications technician who enlisted in the Navy shortly after graduating from Ithaca High School, needs to be remembered by his hometown with a sense of permanence.

In the coming months, The Ithaca Journal will be working with American Legion Post 221 to raise money for a fitting tribute to John Caleb Smith. Our goal: A dedication ceremony on Memorial Day 2002.

Donations (checks only) may be sent to Smith Memorial Fund, c/o The Journal Newsroom, 123 W. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850. For more information, or if you or your organization would like to help in this effort, contact Journal Senior Editor Gary Stewart at 274-9213.

The Ithaca Journal