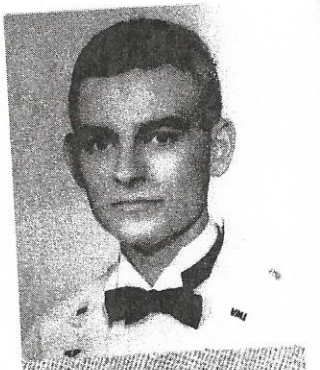
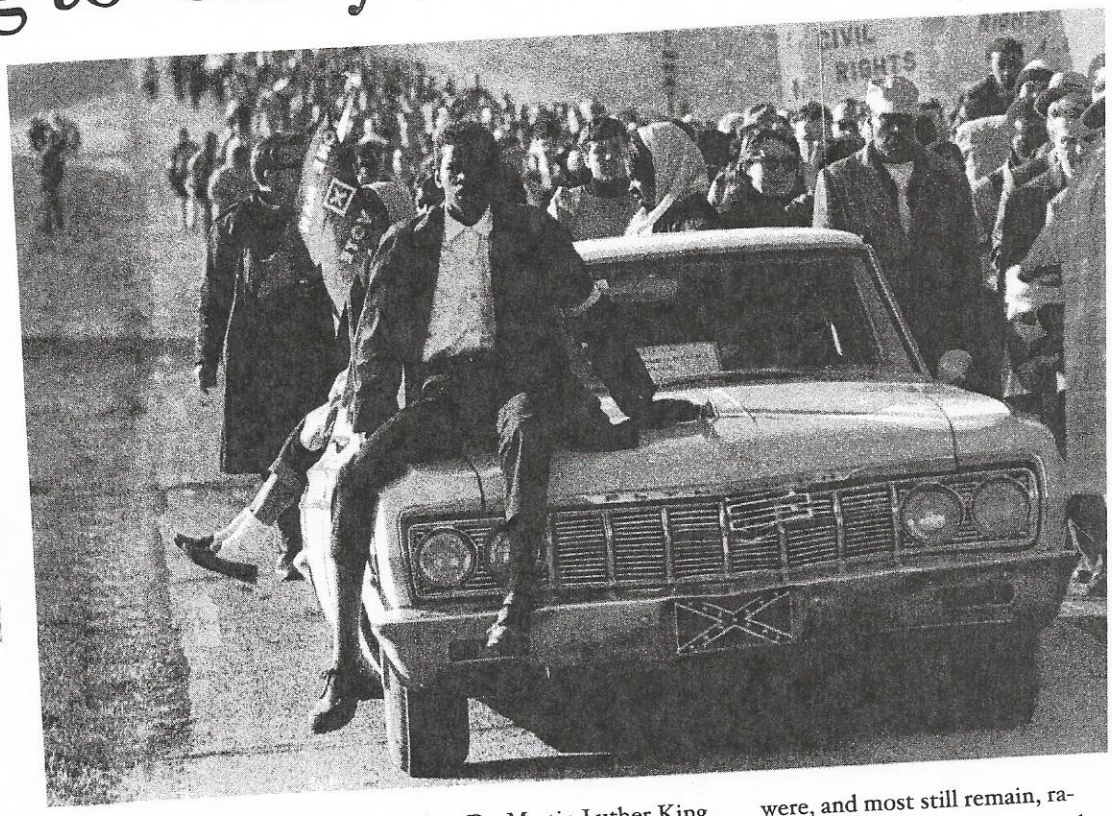
learning to 'carry on'



JONATHAN DANIELS
1939-1965
Seminary student
killed by deputy
Hayneville, Ala.



It was not an easy road that led Jonathan Daniels to the ministry. The son of a doctor and a schoolteacher in Keene, N.H., Jon had always been active in his church. But his teenage years were a long storm of rebellion, during which his grades dropped and his parents despaired. Sensing his own need for discipline, Jon attended Virginia Military Institute for his college studies, and he graduated with top honors.

Despite his success, something inside him was unfulfilled. During his first year in graduate school at Harvard, Jon was overcome by doubt and depression. Then on Easter Sunday in 1962, he had a religious awakening that changed the rest of his life. He left Harvard and decided to become a minister.

Jonathan Daniels was a 26-year-old student at an Episcopal seminary in Cambridge, Mass., when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. issued his nationwide call in 1965 for clergy of all faiths to come to Selma to support the voting rights marchers. Daniels knew that he was meant to go to Selma, and he went eagerly.

During the long hours of waiting, meeting and marching in Selma, Daniels was buoyant in the knowledge that he was living his faith. He made fast friends with a black family who opened their home to him, and he quickly saw the urgent need for economic and political reform in the region. When the Selma-to-Montgomery march was over, Daniels decided to stay and work in Alabama.

AN ABUNDANCE OF STRENGTH

One of his first goals was to integrate a local Episcopal church. Despite their common creeds, Southern churches were, and most still remain, racially separate. Daniels believed churches should be the first to reach out to people of all races, but his efforts met with stubborn resistance from white churchgoers and ministers.

Daniels soon turned his attention away from reforming white consciences to helping poor Blacks exercise their rights. He helped them obtain welfare and farm assistance, encouraged them to register to vote and tutored many of their children who had inadequate educational opportunities because they were black.

Jonathan Daniels, said a fellow civil rights worker, helped give people the courage they needed to exercise their rights. "He had an abundance of strength that came from the inside that he could give to people," said Stokely Carmichael. "The people in Lownde

County realized that with the strength they got from Jon Daniels, they had to carry on, they had to carry on!"

On Saturday, August 14, black teenagers in Fort Deposit, Ala., gathered to picket white stores that discriminated. Daniels and two fellow ministers joined in the protest. There were threats of white mob violence, and police had already informed the marchers they would be arrested for their own protection. As the group approached downtown, the police kept their word, and Jon Daniels and the Rev. Richard Morrisroe, a Catholic priest, were among the 30 marchers taken to the jail in Hayneville.

A LICENSE TO KILL

The marchers spent nearly a week in jail, and then suddenly, on August 20, 1965, they were released without explanation and with no transportation back to Fort Deposit. While one of them went to telephone for a ride, two teenagers, Joyce Bailey and Ruby Sales, walked with Daniels and Morrisroe toward a nearby grocery store to buy a soda. When they got to the door, they were met by a man with a shotgun who told them to leave "or I'll blow your damned brains out!" In a split second, Daniels pushed Sales out of the way as the gun went off.

The shot hit Daniels in the stomach, killing him instantly. Morrisroe was hit in the back, critically injured. (Morrisroe eventually recovered after months of hospitalization and physical therapy.)

Tom Coleman, 55, a part-time deputy sheriff of Lowndes County, put down his shotgun, walked over to the courthouse and called Col. Al Lingo in Montgomery. "I just shot two preachers," he told the state trooper commander. "You better get on down here."

A grand jury indicted Coleman for manslaughter instead of murder, after hearing Coleman testify Daniels had pulled a knife on him. The members of the all-white jury took less than two hours to find Coleman not guilty and shook his hand as they filed out of the courtroom.

It was an old and bitter story of Southern justice, but this time even the attorney general of Alabama could not contain his outrage. The acquittal, Richmond Flowers said, represented the "democratic process going down the drain of irrationality, bigotry and improper law enforcement ... now those who feel they have a license to kill, destroy and cripple have been issued that license."

Jon Daniels had died without fear, for he knew the dangers of doing civil rights work in the South. He wrote after arriving in Alabama, "I lost fear in the Black Belt when I began to know in my bones and sinews that ... in the only sense that really matters I am already dead and my life is hid with Christ in God."

Years later, Ruby Sales followed in Daniels' footsteps, attending the same Episcopal seminary as he to become a minister.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Voting rights demonstrators walked from Selma to Montgomery, Ala. They were joined by clergy from all over the nation after Martin Luther King Jr. made a nationwide call for support.

BELOW
A Boston seminary student, Jonathan Daniels made himself at home with the children of Lowndes County, Ala.