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February 18, 1963

Dear President Kennedy:

My brother, Specialist James Delmas McAndrew, was one of the seven crew members killed on January 11 in a Viet Nam helicopter crash.

The Army reports at first said that communist gunfire was suspected. Later, it said that the helicopter tragedy was due to malfunction of aircraft controls. I've wondered if the "malfunction of aircraft controls" wasn't due to "communist gunfire". However, that's neither important now, nor do I even care to know.

My two older brothers entered the Navy and the Marine Corps in 1941 immediately after the war started. They served all during the war and in some very important battles. Then Jim went into the Marines as soon as he was old enough and was overseas for a long time. During those war years and even all during the Korean conflict we worried about all of them -- but that was all very different. They were wars that our country were fighting, and everyone here knew that our sons and brothers were giving their lives for their country.

I can't help but feel that giving one's life for one's country is one thing, but being sent to a country where half our country never even heard of and being shot at without even a chance to shoot back is another thing altogether!

Please, I'm only a housewife who doesn't even claim to know all about the international situation -- but we have felt so bitter over this -- can the small number of our boys over in Viet Nam possibly be doing enough good to justify the awful number of casualties? It seems to me that if we are going to have our boys over there, that we should send enough to have a chance -- or else stay home. Those fellows are just sitting ducks in those darn helicopters. If a war is worth fighting -- isn't it worth fighting to win?

Please answer this and help me and my family to reconcile ourselves to our loss and to feel that even though Jim died in Viet Nam -- and it isn't our war -- it wasn't in vain.

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I am a good Democrat -- and I'm not criticizing. I think you
are doing a wonderful job -- and God Bless You --

Very sincerely,

/s/ Bobbie Lou Pendergrass

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Santa Ana, California