

Written In Stone

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Remembering Fallen Soldiers

Remembering our fallen heroes this past week, as we observed Memorial Day, we placed wreaths of remembrance and flags upon their headstones. Some of us attended memorial services at various cemeteries; looked upon the Memorial Walls; watched moving programs on television or listened to patriotic musical programming on radio. As a youngster, I remember hearing my father talk about his service as a young Seabee, and uncles talk about their service. For a young teen, the war in Vietnam was a common topic, though most of the ones who went there in service were older than me, I remember the sadness hanging over the community when we would see the flags at half mast.

Reading old issues of *The Evergreen Courant*, the March 14th, 1968 edition headline read of our first Vietnam casualty from Conecuh County. A young man, barely 20 years old, having graduated from the Class of 1966 of Lyeffion High School, enlisted in the Army in 1967, shipped out to Vietnam in service to his country, died little over a month after his arrival. He was Joel Kenton 'Kent' Brown, born 23 Jan. 1948 and died Feb. 1968. He is buried in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery.

The second casualty for Conecuh was Sgt. Grady Gantt, Jr., age 25, of Belleville, who was killed in action March 18, 1968. He was on his second tour of duty in Vietnam, wounded in his first, and died in service to his country, leaving behind a grieving family and community still reeling from the first casualty. Sgt. Gantt is buried at Belleville Baptist Church Cemetery.

The headline for the Courant on the 16th of May 1968 read that "Conecuh has lost her 3rd son in Vietnam" and this one was hard, as he was one of our neighbors on Liberty Hill Drive. Marine Cpl. James Robert 'Bobby' Hammonds, a 1964 graduate of EHS, only days away from completion of his Vietnam tour, was killed in action May 1st. Bobby was buried May 18th at Magnolia Cemetery, a young man of 21, buried during a time when young men and women were graduating from high school, eager to begin a life where so many had just lost theirs.

We walk among the stones, remembering the cost of each war, and celebrate our freedoms today because of them. Thank a soldier and pray for their safety every evening, for they give up their lives for us.