

# Opinion: Soldier teaches lessons with his death

**Publisher's note:** *The following is what Rep. Tom McClintock read on the House floor Oct. 13.*

**Mr. Speaker:**

Forty years from now, a beloved high school history teacher at [South] Tahoe High School named Garrett Fant should be celebrating his retirement surrounded by generations of his students and by his children and grandchildren. They would have all told affectionate stories of how Mr. Fant inspired them or helped them and wished him a happy and well-deserved retirement.

Sadly, history has willed a different story. Army Specialist Garrett Fant instead returned to South Lake Tahoe last week as a fallen hero at the age of 21. This young man sacrificed all those years, all those memories, all those pleasures – all that life – in the service of his country.

He loved the Army and had a plan for his life – he'd serve his country as a soldier for twenty years, and then he'd come home and serve his community as a high school history teacher.



Tom McClintock

From everything I've learned about Garrett Fant, he would have made a great history teacher. His mother told a reporter that

“His thought was that high school was the last stop for kids, and he wanted to influence people.”

He would have been a great family man. His older brother remembers looking up to Garrett as if Garrett were the older brother. Knowing full well the dangers that surrounded him in Afghanistan, his foremost attention went to reassuring his family that he was safe and secure. His mother said, “He always tried to protect me from the dangers of being over there ... He was just someone that if you were his family or his friends – or his country – he gave you his all and loved you with everything.”

Above all, Garrett Fant wanted to be a soldier. His brother tried to get him to enlist with him in the Navy, but Garrett would have none of that. He was all Army and had known from the time he was a little boy that’s what he most wanted to do.

On Facebook, he listed his occupation as “grunt,” telling friends, “You can’t spell ‘Infantry’ without ‘Fant.’” He was the top marksman in his class of 1,000.

I wish I’d have known him. I wish my grandchildren might one day have been in his high school history class.

Instead, Army Specialist Garrett Fant takes his place in history, among nine generations of American heroes who sacrificed all those precious years to protect those who couldn’t protect themselves, to stand up to the bullies of the world, “to proclaim liberty throughout all the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

In his farewell address at West Point, General Douglas MacArthur turned his attention to fallen heroes like Army Specialist Garrett Fant and with searing insight observed, “Their story is known to all of you. It is the story of the American man at arms. My estimate of him was formed on the battlefields many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then, as I regard him now, as one of the world’s

noblest figures; not only as one of the finest military characters, but also as one of the most stainless.

“His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen. In his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He needs no eulogy from me, or from any other man...

“But when I think of his patience under adversity, of his courage under fire, and of his modesty in victory, I am filled with an emotion of admiration I cannot put into words. He belongs to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism. He belongs to posterity as the instructor of future generations in the principles of liberty and freedom.”

And so Garrett Fant became a teacher after all. As Shakespeare said, “This story shall the good man teach his son.”

Succeeding generations of students at South Tahoe High School, and also at Valley Oak High School in American Canyon, which Garrett also attended, will know his story. Every Memorial Day in his home town, his name will be read with a special pride that his friends and neighbors will share. For centuries to come, strangers will pass by his honored grave, adorned with flags and flowers and note the few years he had and the sacrifice he made, and be humbled by it and perhaps inspired by it to become better citizens. No history teacher can do more than that.

To his grieving family, on behalf of a grateful nation, I can only say that you do not mourn alone. Your pride in Garrett is shared by your community, your country, and by many history teachers who will tell his story to the latest American generation.

*Tom McClintock represents the California side of Lake Tahoe in the U.S. House of Representatives.*