

South Tahoe remembers a fallen soldier – Garrett Fant

By Linda Fine Conaboy

U.S. Army Spc. Garrett Anthony Fant died Sept. 26 from injuries when he stepped on an improvised explosive device while on duty in the Helmand Province, Afghanistan. He was born May 11, 1990, and was 21. In March 2009 he enlisted in the Army, assigned to the 4th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division out of Fort Riley, Kansas. He was on his first deployment. On Oct. 7 he was buried.

How many times throughout history have words like these been written or spoken of those in the military and how many families like Fant's have had to receive his body, make burial arrangements and finally, lay him to rest?



Garrett Fant

Most of the 85 plus people gathered in the Sierra Community Church on Friday had a close relationship with Fant. There were grandparents, there was his mom Julia Farrell and his dad John Fant. His brother James Keough and sister Shanna Askins were there as well as his uncle and several friends. All speaking eloquently of the young man so recently dead, who they say, would not be deterred from the siren call of the Army.

Outside, a cadre of men, most belonging to various motorcycle groups, stood in a two-row formation as if to guard this young man. All of them standing tall and holding large American flags as his casket was wheeled into the church and again as it was wheeled out and placed carefully into a waiting hearse. The respect they felt for him and his service was palpable as they stood there in the cold morning sun, silently honoring him.

There were police, firefighters and many in uniform representing various branches of the military. All came to say goodbye to U.S Army Spc. Fant.

Judging by the stories told – some humorous, many heartbreaking – Fant was a rough and tumble boy who had no other career goal than to enlist. He had no doubt what his life's calling was – Army all the way. He told his best friend that after about 40 years in the Army he wanted to become a teacher.

Now in death it will be lessons of bravery he will teach.

His sister and brother said he went into the service a young boy and when he came back to celebrate his 21st birthday he had become a man. Now, they said, he's a hero. His sister said of Fant that he had the ability to make people laugh; what she called belly aching laughter. Askins once asked him if he was scared, and he replied simply, "Sis, I've got a job to do."



Garrett Fant was laid to rest Oct. 7 at

Happy
Homestead
Cemetery in
South Lake
Tahoe.
Photos/Linda
Fine Conaboy

Many shared that Fant was a humble man, non-judgmental and proud of what he was doing. According to his brother, he stood tall, literally (he was well over 6 feet) and always looked up to his older brother. In truth, Keough said, "I always looked up to him."

His best friend said he and Fant played army everyday when they were kids growing up together in South Lake Tahoe. "We were a couple of hellions," he said.

Brig. Gen. Randy Dragon presented many medals and commendations to Fant's parents. Among them were a purple heart, the good conduct medal, the Afghanistan campaign medal with one campaign star, the Global War on Terrorism service medal, NATO medal and several others. As the brigadier general draped special dog tags around each parent's neck, his eloquent thanks were deep sobs and grieving hugs.

Dragon said Fant was the best marksman in his unit of more than 1,000.

"He lived with duty as his watchword," he said.

He too alluded to Fant's sense of humor as he told of his recent Facebook post: "You can't spell infantry without Fant."

It's hard to believe that this young man was so recently a dynamic force in the armed forces, doing what he needed to do in Afghanistan. Now he's come home to South Lake Tahoe, as his siblings said, a hero.

A burial service followed at Happy Homestead Cemetery.

Donations may be sent to the Fisher House Foundation.