

# **New Bedford's Fort Taber Flag to honor CPL Robert R. Gonneville KIA While Serving in Vietnam War**

During the month of November, the 39th Lights for Peace flag to fly at the Fort Taber – Fort Rodman Military Museum honors the memory of CPL Robert Roland Gonneville, who served with the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. Gonneville paid the ultimate sacrifice when he was killed in action on November 9, 1967, at the age of nineteen, while fighting in the Quang Tri Province of South Vietnam. It is fitting that CPL Gonneville be honored this Veteran's Day, which marks 55 years since his death.

Robert was born on January 29, 1948, in Acushnet, the son of Gerard L. Gonneville and Doris B. Gonneville. While living in New Bedford, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corp on June 30, 1966, in Boston, MA. He was assigned to the H&S Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d MRVID (Rein) FMF and began his tour in Vietnam on July 13, 1967. His military specialty was Rifleman.

Nearly four months after arriving in Vietnam, CPL Gonneville was killed in action, at the age of 19, in South Vietnam, Quang Tri Province on November 9, 1967. "The Marines defensive position on Hill 158 at Nui Con Tien in the Gio Linh District of Quang Tri Province came under one of many attacks by the NVA firing artillery and mortars at the defenders. CPL Gonneville was killed in a defensive position by multiple fragmentation wounds from hostile artillery fire," according to [findagrave.com/memorial](http://findagrave.com/memorial). During the Vietnam War, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines sustained the highest casualty rate in Marine Corps history.

Prior to his death, Gonneville had been wounded previously, receiving a Purple Heart, and returned to the intense fighting around Quang Tri , Khe Sanh and the DMZ. His unit earned the name "The Walking Dead" for its high casualty rate, and some claim that N. Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh had given them this label "Di bo Chet"; a threat that the unit adopted as a badge of honor, according to a New Bedford Guide article published March 19, 2014 while honoring Gonneville on Vietnam Veteran's Day.

During his seventeen months of service, he participated in many combat and non-combat unit operations including: Operation Beacon Star, Operation Buffalo, Operation Kingfisher, Operation Lancaster and Operation Kentucky.

CPL Gonneville was awarded the following commendations for his service: The Purple Heart, The Combat Action Ribbon, The National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, The Vietnam Service Medal, the Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation, The Vietnam Gallantry Cross, The Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, the Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal and Marksman Badge.

He is honored on the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C. with his name inscribed on Panel 29e, Line 58. According to his brother, Richard, a plaque and flagpole were dedicated in Robert Gonneville's name at Brooklawn Park's Whaling City Little League field. This dedication was presented by the city of New Bedford, the Whaling City Little League and the local Poirier Post.

Survivors include his six siblings: Jeannette Demanche and her husband Robert of Fairhaven;

Rita Pothier and her husband Gerard of Fairhaven; Alfred Gonneville and his partner Lucille Post of New Bedford; William Gonneville and his wife Rosemary (deceased) of Plymouth; Richard Gonneville and his wife Patricia of Acushnet; and Gerard Gonneville and his wife Elaine of

Acushnet.

Linda Ferreira, of **Empire Ford of New Bedford** researches the life histories of area residents. American flags are provided by Empire Ford of New Bedford. Flags are raised by the staff at Fort Taber – Fort Rodman Military Museum. Those who would like to honor a local veteran in the future can contact Ferreira at [lferreira@buyempireautogroup.com](mailto:lferreira@buyempireautogroup.com).