

Thank you all for your time and for the opportunity to speak in front of you today. My name is Brandon McCray from Uhrichsville in Tuscarawas County. I am a 21 year veteran of my local police department.

In May of 2018 I was invited to participate in a cross-country motorcycle ride -Run For the Wall: traveling from LA California to the Vietnam Veteran's Wall in DC- to support, honor, and remember our veterans. In preparations for that trip I wanted to ride to honor a veteran from my community.

I was aware of a private from the United States Marine Corps, Dale McCauley, who was killed in action in Vietnam as a prominent intersection in town is named after him. Most of the people in our community is aware of how that intersection got its name.

A local friend and historian, Robert Michels, mentioned that Uhrichsville had another service member killed in Vietnam, and a street in town was named after him. I'd travelled that road multiple times during the course of my routine patrols in the City of Uhrichsville, but never knew the origins of its naming.

Ronald Gene Johnson was born at Twin City Hospital in Dennison, OH on March 24th, 1944 at 11:00am to Glenn & Ruth Johnson of Uhrichsville.

Johnson graduated from Uhrichsville High School in 1962. He was the punter for the football team in high school.

Ronald Johnson married Judy Lehman on April 13, 1963 at the First Christian Church in Uhrichsville, and later worked as a typesetter for the local newspaper, the Evening Chronicle.

Johnson entered the United States Army November 28, 1966.

He arrived in Vietnam on May 10, 1967 and was to serve one year.

He was part of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion of the 35th Infantry Regiment- the "Cacti"- 4th Infantry Division.

Johnson attained the rank of "Specialist 4" and later was a squad leader. His fellow soldiers knew him as "John-John."

In February of '68 the 35th Infantry Regiment is deployed in and around the Quang Nam province.

The unit had been engaged by the enemy the day prior, so on February 7th, his unit pushed forward in search of them.

According to a written account of events, Johnson and 4 others from his unit were killed that day assaulting a village that contained enemy units. His cause of death was listed as sniper fire, and he was killed instantly.

A "dust-off" med-evac helicopter that was called in to assist with the dead & wounded was also shot down.

Johnson had been on leave in Hawaii in January and was able to enjoy time with his wife Judy. She sent a postcard home to Johnson's parents telling them how beautiful and happy their son was at the time.

Some 20 days later, Johnson was dead.

Johnson received several decorations during his service including the purple heart & bronze star with "V" device.

His bronze star citation reads:

"For heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam. Specialist Four Johnson distinguished himself while serving as a squad leader with Company B, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division."

"On 7 February 1968, Company B was assaulting a fortified village, occupied by an estimated platoon of the North Vietnamese Army, south of the city of Da Nang. As Specialist Johnson was leading his squad in the assault against the entrenched enemy positions, it came under intense automatic weapons fire."

"With complete disregard for his own safety, Specialist Johnson remained exposed to the hostile fire and directed the fire of his squad against the enemy. He continued forward, encouraging his men as they advanced. As he neared the enemy bunkers, he was mortally wounded by a burst of sniper fire. Through his leadership, his squad was positioned to continue the assault and overrun the enemy."

"Specialist Johnson's personal courage, professionalism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army."

Ronald Gene Johnson was just 23 years old when he died in the service of his country on February 7th, 1968 -54 years ago this month- in Quang Nam, Vietnam.

He was killed roughly 40 days before he was due to be discharged from the Army and return home.

Johnson is listed as the 17th casualty from Tuscarawas County during the Vietnam War.

He is 1 of 2,997 Ohioans who were killed in action.

He is 1 of 58,220 casualties in the Vietnam War.

Ronald G. Johnson can be located on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in D.C., Panel 38E, Line 3.

Sometime in 1968 after Johnson's death, the City Of Uhrichsville -acting on a plea from a newspaper article, renamed Township Rd. 286 in the northern extension of the city to "Johnson Drive" in honor of SP4 Johnson.

It was an incredible journey learning the back story of Johnson - a man who died 10 years before I was born- and an honor to then carrying his bronze star and purple heart across the country with other veterans.

I was able to track down and communicate with some of the soldiers from Johnson's unit, and had dinner with John Harar, a fellow "Cacti" and one of Johnson's best friends at the time.

When we say "Never forget" we need to follow those words with actions to see that they are not forgotten, and their sacrifice does not fade into obscurity. We need to be sure that it's more than a slogan on a shirt, or a patch on a vest or hat.

Sometime in the summer of 2021 the overpass over US 250 just North of McCauley Drive in Uhrichsville was demolished in preparation for a complete replacement.

That overpass is part of Johnson Drive.

During demolition and subsequent construction of that bridge, I learned from ODOT that the old bridge itself had never been formerly named or dedicated to Johnson, just the road on either side had been by the city.

I approached our local Department of Transportation district office, my city council, and Representative Hillyer about formally naming or dedicating the new bridge to Johnson.

That work has culminated with being here today and asking for your help. I would greatly appreciate any assistance and support you can provide with H.B. 521 naming the new bridge the "Specialist Ronald Gene Johnson Memorial Overpass" in honor of Specialist Johnson.

Thank you for your time here today, and thank you for all of your work for the great state of Ohio.