

JOHNNIE PERRY STEPHENS, Jr

FSU football 1963-1966

Killed in action-22 April 1969-Vietnam

HE DIED LEADING MEN INTO BATTLE*



JOHN STEPHENS

FLORIDA STATE

"LIVED FREE WHERE NO WALLS DIVIDE"

(Inscription of his gravestone)

HIS LIFE IS A ROLE MODEL FOR ALL SEMINOLES

By: David Wilson, FSU-1971
(04 April 2026)

*Johnnie Stephens is the only FSU football player that I am aware of that died in combat in any war.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1960's, Florida State University was in its youth, having recently added men and with a new name. Men and women like Johnnie were the foundation of a university that was developing into a national university that is recognized world-wide. As FSU was growing and developing, Johnnie Stephens was living the ideals that FSU aspires her students to live and become. Johnnie's life demonstrates those ideals by action rather than by word.

HE WAS THE ULTIMATE SEMINOLE AND A TRUE AMERICAN HERO!

POTENTIAL DENIED

Retired USMC Lieutenant General Lawrence Snowden, Hero of Iwo Jima and Veteran of WW II, Korea, and Vietnam often spoke of the **loss of potential** that our nation and communities are "**robbed of by war.**" Certainly, the death of Johnnie Stephens confirms that statement. He wanted to attend graduate school and was offered a graduate assistant job by FSU Head Football Coach Bill Peterson upon completion of his military obligation. He was an only son, married with no children and like many of his generation, never got the opportunity to fulfill his dreams and potential.

Tallahassee, FSU, and our Nation were "robbed" of his potential. We can only imagine what he may have accomplished had he survived Vietnam, but we can see in his brief life that he was destined to be very special. Destined to do and achieve big and great things, sadly, his destiny was denied on that April morning in Vietnam.

As Seminoles, Johnnie's life represents the best of who we are and what we aspire to be.

His life was all things that make FSU a great university.

This booklet is presented as evidence of that life, as brief as it was.

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT JOHNNIE

COMMENT	ATTRIBUTED TO	SOURCE
"Johnny wore a smile on his face and always had time for you. He was known as the IRON MAN and his junior year playing center for the 1965 FSU Seminoles he made every offensive snap including the long snaps without a single fumble, an amazing accomplishment. He was Mister Dependable and that was true in everything he did!"	JOHN CROWE FSU teammate	Email March 2026
We dedicate this book in the memory of US ARMY Lieutenant Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr ---A great teammate and leader of men	JOHN CROWE & DALE MCCULLERS FSU teammates	Dedication: "Son's of the Sixties"
Del Williams, wrote to the Stephens family. Williams who had played alongside Stephens for four years wrote that he had "learned to respect him like a brother" and that "God never made a finer person or a better friend".	DEL WILLIAMS FSU teammate	"An American Hero" Jim Joanos
Johnnie was a simple, honest, good guy.	HELGE SWANSON FSU teammate	TLH Democrat 2000, 11-26
"Johnnie Stephens was a true American Hero"	DALE MCCULLERS	TLH Democrat 2019, 03-13
His middle school basketball coach, Dave Raker, regards him as one of the finest people that he has ever known.	DAVE RAKER Mid school coach	"An American Hero"
"He was a leader, a responsible leader, who gave all for his men." (Edward Raymond served under Johnnie in Vietnam)	EDWARD RAYMOND Served w Johnnie	VVMF.ORG 4 Sep 2000
Wheeler also tells of how "tough" Stephens was. He said that in one practice, although Stephens had been "cleated in his eye area" and was bleeding profusely, he continued to practice until the coach directed Wheeler to take Stephens to the hospital to get the severe cut stitched up.	HUGH WHEELER High School Friend	"An American Hero"
Harbison remembers Stephens as "not being real big as you would expect a center to be today". He says that Stephens came to FSU undersized and did not grow much. He further describes him as "a tough kid, intelligent, a handsome young man". The team used different game captains each game. It is significant that Stephens along with Wayne Giardino were designated game captains for the first game of the season and served on other occasions as well.	BOB HARBISON Longtime FSU offensive line Coach	"An American Hero"
Stephens' coach at Leon, Bill Sexton, Sr. (the father of FSU's current running backs coach) described Johnnie as the "best lineman that I've ever coached in fifteen years of coaching"	BILL SEXTON Coach at Leon HS	"An American Hero"
I've never met a finer person than Johnnie.	KELLY CROSSWHITE Served w Johnnie	Letter, 10 May 69
In 1965, Johnnie Stephens became the starter at center and did something that very, very few people have done in the history of FSU football. The undersized center, about 6'1" and 190 pounds played every single down of offense. I checked with long time FSU assistant coach, Bob Harbison. He knows of no other FSU player that has ever done that.	BOB HARBISON Longtime FSU offensive line Coach	"An American Hero"
Thus, came to an end, in a far away land, the life of one of Florida State's most overachieving athletes.	JIM JOANOS	"An American Hero"
Probably the most underrated guy on our football team	BILL PETERSON FSU Head Coach	TLH Democrat 1966, 09-15
He was the team leader that kept all the boys in line. I never dreamed he would die leading soldiers into battle. He was always at our house playing with my 3 brothers. Then he was the center on the Florida State University football team, where he trained to be an officer. He would have made a great father.	PHYLLIS HIGHSMITH KELLY	VVMF.ORG 24 Jan 2007

From a Facebook post of 31 May 2021 by Doug Young:

“MY DAD, TEXAS YOUNG, WAS THE HEAD FOOTBALL COACH AT CARRABELLE WHEN JOHNNIE COACHED THERE. I REMEMBER MY DAD STANDING BETWEEN THE GYM AND SCHOOL, CRYING OPENLY THE DAY JOHNNIE WAS KILLED. I HAD NEVER SEEN THAT BEFORE. JOHNNIE WAS A SPECIAL MAN. HE MADE A LASTING IMPACT ON ME AND MANY OTHERS.”

IMPACT

FROM: An American Hero...Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr. By Jim Joanos, 12/2003

In 1969, Carrabelle HS dedicated it's football season to Johnnie. And established the John Stephens Award to the most Outstanding Player.

David Wilson: I briefly knew Johnnie, but he had a great impact on my life with his simple act of kindness. Today, over 60 years later, I tell my grandsons and others of his kindness as I encourage them to be kind.

2006, 10-15, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT



Phylis Kelly touches the etched name of Johnnie Stephens, who was killed in Vietnam. “He was like a brother to me,” Kelly recalls, “and I wanted to be here to honor him. He was a great friend.” Kelly said Stephens was killed after just a couple of months in Vietnam, and she remembers her mother weeping as if she had lost her own son.

The Vietnam Traveling Wall visited Tallahassee in 2006

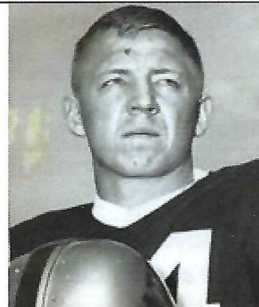


JOHNNY STEPHENS
Senior Center

LEON HS



LEON HS SENIOR PHOTO



FSU



FSU

EARLY ON, THERE WERE INDICATIONS THAT JOHNNIE WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL. SISTER PEGGY SAYS THAT ONE YEAR IN LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL, THE COACH WANTED TO AWARD THE TEAM'S SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD TO JOHNNIE. JOHNNIE REFUSED THE OFFER BECAUSE HE BELIEVED THAT ANOTHER KID, A HANDICAPPED ONE, DESERVED THE AWARD MORE THAN HE DID.

FROM "AN AMERICAN HERO" ~~~ JOHNNIE P STEPHENS Jr." BY JIM JOANOS, DECEMBER 2003

SPORTSMANSHIP

Before there was a Sportsmanship statue at FSU, Johnnie was displaying sportsmanship in Little League baseball, middle school basketball, Babe Ruth baseball, Leon High School and FSU football. (award voted on by teammates)



His middle school basketball coach, Dave Raker, regards him as one of the finest people that he has ever known. Raker tells a story about how Stephens, in the spirit of team unity, was willing to share in the blame for misdeeds that others had done in the damaging of a dressing room at an away game when Stephens had in no way been a part of the incident. He was always a "team player".

FROM "AN AMERICAN HERO" ~~~ JOHNNIE P STEPHENS Jr., BY JIM JOANOS, DECEMBER 2003

Sportsmanship awards were made to a player from each team. The selection was made by vote of teammates. The sportsmanship winners: Chuck Alford, Louis Poag, Johnny Stephens Jr., Laury Youngblood, Andy Dull, Tony Williams.

**1962, 02-20, TLH DEMOCRAT
(BABE RUTH BASEBALL)**

Three To Get QB Awards

Three football players will receive sportsmanship awards tomorrow night at the annual Governor's Cub Jamboree of the Quarterback Club.

Announced today as winners of the awards were Leon High center Johnny Stevens, Florida High fullback Dickie Litwhiler, Florida State end John McConaughay.

The three were chosen for the honor by vote of teammates.

Senior lettermen from each of the three schools will be



McConaughay Johnny Stevens Dickie Litwhiler

**1963, 01-10,
TLH DEMOCRAT
(LEON HS-FOOTBALL)**

Coaches and senior players of FSU, Leon, Rickards and Florida High were special guests of the club. Club sportsmanship awards were presented to FSU's John Stephens, Leon High's Joel Lawson, Florida High's Joel Willis and Rickards High's James Levy. Each was chosen for the honor by teammates.

**1967, 01-17 TLH DEMOCRAT
(TALLAHASSEE QUARTERBACK
CLUB-FSU-FOOTBALL)**

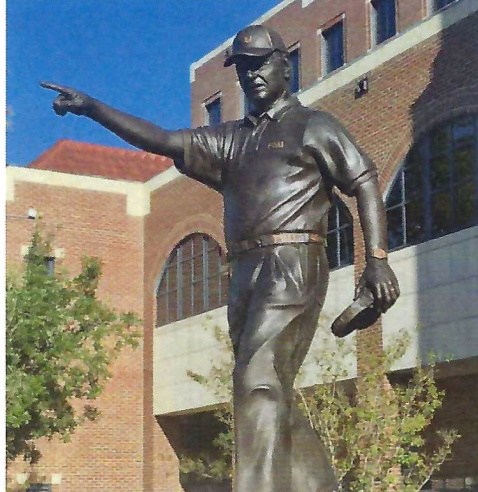
SINCE 1949, JOHNNIE IS THE ONLY KNOWN PLAYER WHO RECEIVED THE SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD FROM THE TALLAHASSEE QUARTERBACK CLUB FOR HIGH SCHOOL (LEON) AND COLLEGE (FSU).

But Captain Dunagan was impressed by him. The Captain put him on as First platoon leader, and as far as things go, the first platoon was always first to do things. That morning, the first platoon was first to move out from our night position.

Tom Martiniano, EMAIL to David Wilson, 11 April 2019 (Tom served with Johnnie in Vietnam, Tom was the RTO and is referring to Captain Kern Dunagan who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in May 1969)

LEADERSHIP

As an athlete, leadership was a strength demonstrated by Johnnie at all levels, as a Distinguished Military Graduate of FSU ARMY ROTC, and as an Officer in the US Army.



Many consider Bobby Bowden to be the greatest college football leader of all time.

CREDIT	LEADERSHIP
PHYLLIS HIGHSMITH KELLY, VVMF.ORG 24 Jan 2007	I went to the traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall and finally felt like I had attended a funeral for Johnnie, (38 years late) holding a candle during the 21-gun salute and Taps. It was very moving. I was in Germany where my husband was stationed when Johnnie died. I knew him when he was the catcher on my father's little league baseball team. He was the team leader that kept all the boys in line. I never dreamed he would die leading soldiers into battle . He was always at our house playing with my 3 brothers. Then he was the center on the Florida State University football team, where he trained to be an officer. He would have made a great father . He was one of a kind and I will never forget him and the sacrifice he made for our country.
From: "An American Hero...Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr." by Jim Joanos December 2003	<p>Johnnie Perry Stephens, Jr., died as he had lived, as a leader of men. Early on the morning of April 22, 1969, U.S. Army Lieutenant Stephens, age twenty-three, was leading his platoon in a search and clear mission near the village of Duc Tan, in northern South Vietnam when he was mortally wounded. Thus, came to an end, in a far away land, the life of one of Florida State's most overachieving athletes. This story is about that special man.</p> <p>Stephens graduated from FSU in 1968 and on the same day, having completed his Reserve Officers Training Program in college, was designated as a "Distinguished Military Graduate" and commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army.</p>
EDWARD RAYMOND, VVMF.ORG., 4 Sept 2000	<p style="text-align: center;">"HE WAS A LEADER, A RESPONSIBLE LEADER, WHO GAVE ALL FOR HIS MEN." (Edward Raymond served under Johnnie in Vietnam)</p>

1966, 09-15, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT, GAME CAPTAIN

Yesterday Coach Bill Peterson announced the team would not elect pre-season captains. Instead the Seminoles will have co-captains appointed by coaches from game to game.	Center John Stephens and linebacker Wayne Giardino will captain the team against Houston. Peterson has called Ste-	phens, a Tallahassee senior, "probably the most underrated guy on our football team."
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"JOHNNIE STEPHENS LIFE CONTINUES TO BE A SYMBOL OF THE BEST IN FSU ATHLETICS"

FROM: "An American Hero...Johnnie P Stephens, Jr." by Jim Joanos, Dec 2003

UNCONQUERED

The Unconquered Statue on the FSU campus celebrates the Unconquered spirit of the Seminole Tribe and FSU students. Before there was an "Unconquered" statue Johnnie was demonstrating this spirit as he played every offensive snap during the entire 1965 season as one of the smallest lineman and then played thru a knee injury during the 1966 season.



1966, 08-31, TLH DEMOCRAT
PLAYED EVERY OFFENSIVE SNAP
IN 1965

John Stephens played every minute at offensive center last year, and can probably do it again if he's not injured.

1966, 11-06, TLH DEMOCRAT
32-10 VICTORY vs SOUTH
CAROLINA

"And John Stephens deserves a lot of credit," said Peterson, "coming through for us with another good game at center despite his knee injury. He played most of the way."

1967, 01-04, TLH DEMOCRAT
HE WAS 1 OF 3 PLAYERS IN HIS CLASS
THAT EARNED 3 LETTERS AT FSU.
(FRESHMAN COULD NOT PLAY VARSITY BACK THEN)

**49 Seminoles
Earn Letters**

Forty-nine members of the Florida State Sun Bowl football team will receive varsity letters this season, headed by three boys who get their third straight monogram.

Leading the way is offensive guard Del Williams, a second team All-America selection, who earned his third letter. Other three-year lettermen are linebacker Wayne Giardino and center John Stephens.

Lettering in 1966 were T. K. Wetherell, Jack Fenwick, Edwin Pope, Stephens, Williams, Larry Kissam, Thurston Taylor, Gary Pajcic, Jim Mankins, Bill Moreman, Ron Sellers, Wayne McDuffie, Charles Pennie, Giardino, Larry Pendleton, Mike Blatt, Joe Kinnan, Bob Menendez, Marty Kolbus, John Crowe, Butch Riser, Walt Sumner, Bill Cox, Bill Rhodes, Ken Hart, Larry Williamson, Chip Glass, Kim Hammond, Bill Burkhardt, John Hurst, Larry Green, Lane Fenner, Jerry Jones, Doug Gurr, Dave Braggins, Chuck Elliott, Joe Benson, Harvey Zion, Dale McCullers, Jay Mac Matthews, H. T. Waller, Chuck Eason, Clint Burton, Bill Campbell, John Hosack, Frank Loner, Howell Montgomery, Pat Conway and Pete Roberts.

From:
An American
Hero---
Johnnie P
Stephens, Jr.,
by Jim Joanos,
December 2003

Wheeler also tells of how "tough" Stephens was. He said that in one practice, although Stephens had been "cleated in his eye area" and was bleeding profusely, he continued to practice until the coach directed Wheeler to take Stephens to the hospital to get the severe cut stitched up.

Iron Man In 1965, Johnnie Stephens became the starter at center and did something that very, very few people have done in the history of FSU football. The undersized center, about 6'1" and 190 pounds played every single down of offense. I checked with long time FSU assistant coach, Bob Harbison. He knows of no other FSU player that has ever done that.

IN NOVEMBER 1968, BEFORE THERE WAS AN INTEGRATION STATUE AT FSU, AND IN THE SAME YEAR THAT AN AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOTBALL PLAYER FIRST INTEGRATED THE FSU FOOTBALL TEAM, JOHNNIE DROVE ROOSEVELT LOWERY, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN PLAYER ON THE CARRABELLE HS FOOTBALL TEAM TO NORTH CAROLINA TO VIEW AN FSU FOOTBALL GAME.

THEY STAYED IN THE HOME OF JOHNNIE'S RELATIVES!

THIS WAS A GREAT ACT OF COURAGE ON JOHNNIE'S PART (SEE BELOW)

NOTE: Johnnie never played with an African American football player in High School or FSU, he played against African Americans while at FSU. (vs Houston, Syracuse, Wake Forest)

([Calvin Patterson · Integration at The Florida State University](#) · [Integration at The Florida State University](#))

INTEGRATION STATUE



In 1967, Johnnie interned and coached football at Carrabelle HS, he was the defensive coach for Head Coach Tex Young. Carrabelle had not won a game in 1966. After three games in 1967, Johnnie's defenses had not given up a point, the team would finish the year with a 5-5 record. On that team was a young African American named Roosevelt Lowery. In 1968, Johnnie drove Roosevelt from Carrabelle to North Carolina. They stayed in the homes of relatives of Johnnie. In the South, Blacks and whites did not "mix" at that time and driving thru small rural towns could have resulted in injury or even death. **This was a courageous act by Johnnie** and the mother of Roosevelt as there was much unrest in the Nation and the South concerning integration and the Vietnam War.

- 1968- In February, 3 students in Orangeburg SC, "Orangeburg Massacre" were killed, 28 wounded.
- 1968-other Political and Racial Unrest in America <>The TET Offensive<> assassinations of MLK (April) and RFK (June)<>The Democratic National Convention in Chicago during the summer<>Tommie Smith and John Carlos protested on the 1968 Olympic Medal Stand by raising their black gloved fist as a "human rights salute"<>Alabama Governor George Wallace ran for President and won 5 Southern states<>Richard Nixon won the Presidency and introduced the "Southern Strategy"<>At a Tallahassee high school, all of the African American players (8) left the team in protest over playing time.
- 1965-four civil rights workers murdered in Selma AL.
- 1964-In St Augustine FL, the manager of the Monson Motel dumps acid in the "whites-only pool" in an attempt to get African Americans out of the pool.
- 1964-three civil rights workers in Mississippi were murdered. (Chaney, Goodman, Schwerner)
- 1960-Greensboro NC lunch counter sit ins.

Photo at right:

14 April 2019, Johnnie's widow Sally hugging Roosevelt Lowery as he became emotional talking about Johnnie and the impact Johnnie had on his life.

Roosevelt currently lives in Crawfordville FL and owns Lowery Masonry CONSTRUCTION, INC. His brother Henry retired from the USMC and served two tours in Vietnam.



HIS TEAMMATE AT FSU, DEL WILLIAMS, WROTE TO THE STEPHENS FAMILY. WILLIAMS WHO HAD PLAYED ALONGSIDE STEPHENS FOR FOUR YEARS WROTE THAT HE HAD **"LEARNED TO RESPECT HIM LIKE A BROTHER"** AND THAT **"GOD NEVER MADE A FINER PERSON OR A BETTER FRIEND"**.

"AN AMERICAN HERO--- JOHNNIE P STEPHENS" by Jim Joanos, December 2003

HERITAGE STATUE



VIRES-ARTES-MORES

STRENGTH----SKILL----CHARACTER

(ALL TRAITS POSSESSED BY JOHNNIE STEPHENS)

MISC

<p>TOMAHAWK AWARD "BEST BLOCKING PERFORMANCE"</p>	<p>1966, 12-17, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT</p>	<p>1969, 04-25, TLH DEMOCRAT</p>
<p>TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT</p>	<p>Most Popular</p>	<p>Boys Ranch Donations Preferred</p>
<p>1965, 11-08 v Wake Forest Stephens got the Tomahawk Award for the best blocking performance. "He had two extraordinary blocks — ones that we call 'Tomahawks.'" said Peterson, "and, along with Pennie, he graded out very highly."</p>	<p>Seminole center John Stephens was voted "most popular" by Biff Burger customers, it was announced Friday. He will receive the first Biff Burger trophy today at 2:45 p.m., in the field house at Doak Campbell Stadium. The contest is expected to become an annual affair.</p>	<p>Mrs. Sally Stephens, wife of Johnny Stephens of Tallahassee who was killed in Vietnam Tuesday, has requested in lieu of sending flowers friends and relatives make donations to the Florida Boys Ranch in Live Oak.</p>
<p>1966, 09-27 v Miami The Tomhawk Award, for top blocking, went to center John Stephens. He had two particularly effective blocks — ones that coaches place in the Tomahawk class.</p>	<p>Traits of kindness, friendliness, cheerfulness and others likely contributed to his winning this award.</p>	<p>Mrs. Stephens said her husband had a real personal interest in the Boys Ranch.</p>
<p>BEST GAMES AT CENTER 1965, 11-01 v Virginia Tech John Stephens had one of his best games at center, too." quote by Coach Bill Peterson</p>	<p>1965, 05-05, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT "B" or higher average</p> <p>CLASSROOM STAR</p> <p>Ehler Shows The Way</p> <p>Defensive back Howard Ehler, a junior from Taveres, had the highest grades among Florida State Football players for the second trimester. Ehler, a business major and defensive starter for the Seminoles, had a straight "A" or 4.0 average. Next highest average was that of Max Wetstein, Junior and from Leesburg, who had a 3.75. In all, 13 Seminoles made 2.0 or better. Other returning varsity players with "B" or better averages are end Buddy Blankenship, Atlanta, Ga.; tackle David Braggie, Lake Wales; end George D'Alessandro, Fort Myers; fullback Wayne Gladino, West Palm Beach; end Donovan Jones, Lakeland; halfback Alan LaMarche, Hollywood; center John Stephens, Tallahassee; and fullback Tom Deloyce, Miami. Members of last year's freshman team with "B" or better marks are halfback Jim Bailey, Wilmington, O.; linebacker Mike Slat, Key West; and halfback Kenneth Hart, Groveland. Average grade for 88 Florida State football players was 2.32.</p>	<p>Stephens was a former football star at Florida State University and Leon High School. He was killed while serving as a second lieutenant in charge of an infantry platoon in South Vietnam. Funeral services will probably be late next week.</p> <p>PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE FLORIDA BOYS RANCH</p>

OTHER

JOHNNIE PARTICIPATED IN SEVEN "SOD CEMETERY" VICTORIES WHILE AT FSU (1964-4, 1965-0, 1966-3)

<p>Jim Joanos article, December 2003</p>	<p>"He played in every game and made every long snap without a single mishap. No one that I have talked to can remember Stephens ever making an error in centering ball, regular or long snapping, during the three years that he performed those functions for FSU's varsity." Stephens' coach at Leon, Bill Sexton, Sr. (the father of FSU's current running backs coach) described Johnnie as the "best lineman that I've ever coached in fifteen years of coaching"</p>
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STEPHENS' MOTHER RECALLS JOHNNIE'S MILITARY COMMITMENT BY SAYING THAT "BEING IN THE ARMY WAS JUST SOMETHING THAT HE HAD TO DO."

FROM: "An American Hero----Johnnie P Stephens, Jr" by Jim Joanos Dec 2003

COMMITMENT TO OBLIGATION



AT LEFT-JUL 67, JOHNNIE IN PANAMA FOR JUNGLE TRAINING

AT RIGHT-MARCH 68 WIFE SALLY PINNING HIS 2nd Lt BARS

(Photos supplied by Sally)
(SALLY SAID JOHNNIE WAS COMMITTED TO HIS OBLIGATION TO SERVE EVEN THO HE KNEW THE DANGERS)



Johnnie (standing) in the jungles of Vietnam. The date of the photo is unknown but it can be assumed that it was shortly before his death as he arrived in Vietnam on 1 February 1969.

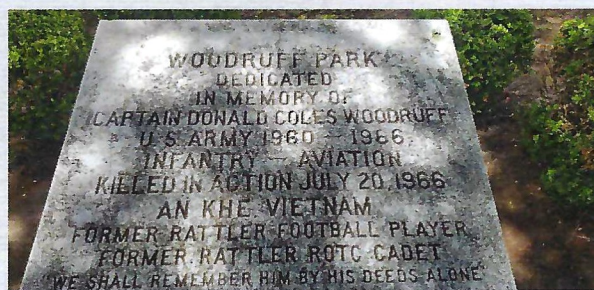
(Sally said he has lost weight in this photo)

According to Tom Martiniano, RTO for Company Commander Kern Dunagan, the two sitting men facing the camera were KIA during heavy fighting of 12-14 May.

Company Commander Captain Kern W Dunagan was awarded the MEDAL OF HONOR for his actions during the fighting of 12-14 May.

Kern Dunagan died in 1991 of melanoma, possibly related to agent orange exposure.

In my research, I have found only two men who played college football in Florida and died in Vietnam. **Johnnie was one, the other was Donald Coles Woodruff**, he played at FAMU and was on the 1959 National Championship team. Woodruff, from Bartow, was killed in a helicopter crash. Woodruff was inducted into the FAMU Hall of Fame in 1993.



Donald Woodruff (football, 1956-60 posthumous)

Woodruff starred as a defensive lineman while at FAMU, and was a co-captain in 1959. He played on two black-college championship teams (1957-59). He also was featured in Ebony magazine in 1960.

Woodruff was a Distinguished Military graduate and was commissioned into the Army. He was killed in action in the Vietnam War while attempting to evacuate wounded soldiers.

WOODRUFF PARK on the FAMU campus, dedicated in memory of **CAPTAIN DONALD COLES WOODRUFF**

TLH Democrat, 1993, 09-18
FAMU HALL of FAME

“I’VE NEVER MET A FINER PERSON THAN JOHNNIE.”

KELLY CROSSWHITE LETTER. 10 MAY 1969

(FROM SALLY, JOHNNIE’S WIDOW)

KELLY CROSSWHITE WAS JOHNNIE’S PLATOON SERGEANT IN VIETNAM. HUEL WHEELER WROTE HIM AT MY REQUEST, FOR ANY DETAILS HE COULD SHARE ABOUT APRIL 22, 1969. THIS IS HIS RESPONSE. (JOHNNIE’S BEST FRIEND FROM HS)
SALLY (Note)

10 May 1969

Sat.

Dear Hugh,

I’m sorry I haven’t written before. I have been so busy the past few weeks that I just haven’t had time.

I will try to answer some of the questions you asked.

On the morning of the 22 of April, we were moving out of the place where we spent the night. It was about 08:00. We hadn’t went more than 200 yds when we were ambushed from the front and the left side. The point man (Dallas McKinney) was the first to get hit. He took twenty to thirty rounds in the body and was killed instantly. The next man in line was Sgt Cook, the squad leader. He got down to the left side and wasn’t hit. The next man was Lt Stephens, Johnnie didn’t know what hit him. He was dead before I got to him. The next man was Johnnie’s R.T.O. (Radio Man) His name is Kenneth Eyer. He took one round in the neck, one in the right arm and one in the stomach. He was in real bad shape for about a week but is doing fine now. My machine gunner was next. When he saw what was going on, he left his place and moved up. He layed down a base of fire and kept a lot more of us from getting hit. After he fired about a hundred rounds he was hit in the head and died before we could get him out. His name was Richard McNeal. I put him in for the Silver Star and he got it.

If you have a map that has Chu Lai South Vietnam on it, I can tell you where it took place. It was 10 miles North and five miles West of Chu Lai. That is as close as I can tell you unless you have a military map.

I was going to write Sally and tell her what happened but I guess you can tell her.

I’ve never met a finer person than Johnnie. The whole platoon took it hard. We got together and sent flowers to Sally and the other boy’s Mothers. I couldn’t think of anything else to do.

Over here, you get so close to the people you work with. We were together all day every day and then would sleep together at night. When you lose someone that close to you it sure hurts.

We had Memorial services for the three this morning. I will send you a copy of the shots I made. I hope they turn out good.

To tell you a little bit about myself. I am married and have one child. Her name is Kelly Lyn. I live here in Kingsport Tennessee.

I have been in Vietnam for ten months and in the Army for twenty two months. I am not a “lifer.” I will get out of the Army and Vietnam in two more months. I plan to visit Sally then.

Thanks for the newspaper clipping, I will let all the boys read it. Thanks also for the nice letter. I’m sure Johnnie is thanking you for what you are doing for his wife. I wish I had a good friend like you.

I will close for now, write me again soon and tell me how Sally is.

May God Bless you and yours for now and ever.

Your friend





Kelly

Sally has the original hand written letter which she shared. It was transcribed by David Wilson,

**THUS, CAME TO AN END, IN A FAR AWAY LAND, THE LIFE OF ONE OF
FLORIDA STATE'S MOST OVERACHIEVING ATHLETES.**

"AN AMERICAN HERO-JOHNIE P STEPHENS, Jr" by Jim Joanos

4-22-69 THE PATROL ON WHICH JOHNNIE STEPHENS WAS KIA

<p>*1-POINT MAN (Crosswhite says McKinney was point man)</p>	<p>DALLAS ERVIN MCKINNEY Magnolia, NC KIA, 4-22-69</p>		<p><u>FROM VVMF.ORG</u> Remembering Dallas Posted on 6/17/03 - by Alan Kirby Milton I remember playing cards with Dallas on LZ Baldy. LZ Baldy was a piece of cake compared to LZ Professional. On that day he died, we had just left on a patrol. Dallas was second in line after the point man. There was a fury of fire from AK-47's. Three of the first five men died right there. A fourth died later on May 10, 1969.</p>
<p>*2-SQ LDR</p>	<p>SGT COOK</p>	<p>PHOTO NOT AVAILABLE</p>	<p>He survived, got down on the left side of the trail. K Crosswhite</p>
<p>3- PLATOON LEADER</p>	<p>JOHNNIE PERRY STEPHENS Tallahassee, FL KIA, 4-22-69</p>	 Johnny Stephens	<p><u>TOM MARTINIANO EMAIL to David Wilson of 11 April 2019</u> Johnny had checked in to the Command Post, by radio, said he was ready to move out. Captain Dunagan nodded to me and I told Johnny to move out. The Captain and I weren't even saddled up when three minutes later we heard five or six AK 47's on full auto down the trail. My heart sank because I knew it was going to be bad. There were no M-16's returning fire. Johnnies RTO called to me screaming that "0-1 is, down, repeat, 0-1 is KIA". My first thought was "how did the RTO know he was KIA already." I called back and told him I didn't hear any M-16's and get some fire-power going. I got nothing because by this time the RTO was KIA as well. I sent the 2nd platoon in there to put down fire on the ambushers, and they did and they got chased away. The Captain and I made it up to the scene and Johnny was lying there dead with a bullet hole in his heart. He died pretty much instantly. His RTO was dead and three others wounded pretty bad.</p>
<p>4-RTO (Radio- Telephone- Operator)</p>	<p>KENNETH JONES EYER, JR Elizabeth City NC Died of wounds 10 May</p>		<p><u>FROM VVMF Alan Kirby Milton</u> I was a SSG in his Platoon. Kenny was a great guy. We use to talk about eating food back home. Like having a slice of pizza. Our Platoon was moving up a hilly trail when we got ambushed. Four out of the first five men were hit. Kenny was the RTO for our Platoon leader. All died except Kenny who was wounded seriously. I thought he made it and was OK until the morning of May 11. I was notified that he passed away.</p>
<p>5- MACHINE GUNNER</p>	<p>RICHARD MCNEAL Arlington, TN KIA, 4-22-69</p>	 Pfc. Richard McNeal	<p><u>FROM VVMF, Posted on 10/29/02 - by Alan Kirby Milton</u> I remember McNeal was built like a bull. He was a strong guy who wanted to carry the pig (M-60 machine gun). On that he was fifth in line behind the RTO. Three out of the first five men were killed, including our Lt Stephens, from an unknown number of VC or NVA. We were ambushed on a winding and hilly trail. A fourth died on May 11 from his wounds.</p>

- 1 ALAN KIRBY MILTON SAYS DALLAS MCKINNEY WAS 2ND IN LINE BEHIND THE POINTMAN
- 2 KELLY CROSSWHITE IN LETTER DATED 10 MAY 1969 SAYS THAT DALLAS MCKINNEY WAS POINTMAN AND PLATOON SGT COOK WAS 2ND IN LINE

FROM TOM MARTINIANO (EMAIL TO DAVID WILSON OF 11 APRIL 2019)

I'll never forget that morning because the NVA had sneaked into position at the bottom of the hill we were staying on overnight. They patiently waited until we lit down the trail. I was the Captain's radioman, in charge of the company net (each platoon had an RTO and carried the radio for the platoon leader). Johnny had checked in to the Command Post, by radio, said he was ready to move out. Captain Dunagan nodded to me and I told Johnny to move out. The Captain and I weren't even saddled up when three minutes later we heard five or six AK 47's on full auto down the trail. My heart sank because I knew it was going to be bad. There were no M-16's returning fire. Johnnie's RTO called to me screaming that "0-1 is, down, repeat, 0-1 is KIA". My first thought was "how did the RTO know he was KIA already." I called back and told him I didn't hear any M-16's and get some fire-power going. I got nothing because by this time the RTO was KIA as well. I sent the 2nd platoon in there to put down fire on the ambushers and they did and they got chased away. The Captain and I made it up to the scene and Johnny was lying there dead with a bullet hole in his heart. He died pretty much instantly. His RTO was dead and three others wounded pretty bad. We got choppers in twenty minutes later and the victims were hauled away.

10 MAY 1969 LETTER FROM KELLY CROSSWHITE PLATOON MEMBER TO HUGH WHEELER

On the morning of the 22 of April, we were moving out of the place where we spent the night. It was about 08:00. We hadn't went more than 200 yds when we were ambushed from the front and the left side. The point man (**Dallas McKinney**) was the first to get hit. He took twenty to thirty rounds in the body and was killed instantly. The next man in line was **Sgt Cook**, the squad leader. He got down to the left side and wasn't hit. The next man was **Lt Stephens, Johnnie** didn't know what hit him. He was dead before I got to him. The next man was Johnnie's R.T.O. (Radio Man) His name is **Kenneth Eyer**. He took one round in the neck, one in the right arm and one in the stomach. He was in real bad shape for about a week but is doing fine now. My **machine gunner** was next. When he saw what was going on, he left his place and moved up. He layed down a base of fire and kept a lot more of us from getting hit. After he fired about a hundred rounds he was hit in the head and died before we could get him out. His name was Richard McNeal. I put him in for the Silver Star and he got it.

DAILY STAFF JOURNAL-AMERICAL DIVISION

22 April 1969

LOG ENTRY #19 0925 hours

19	0925	Passed to 11th Bde, SFC Winkler. Notified FSE CPT Crawford. (C) 196th Bde, SGT Neroes, A/1/46, BT199121 at 0805H, made contact w/UNSEF, res: 3 US KIA, 1 US WIA (E), D/O comp at 0826H to LZ Professional. 0820H, CC/1/46, rec'd 10-15 rds AWF while going into A Co loc. NCD. 0845H, G/S on station. 0815H, enemy broke contact. Notified C/S SP Johnson, G-3 SGT Marqan, G-2 MAJ Hayes.
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Interpretation of above

- BT199121 is the geographic land location of the ambush. Location can be found at: [Military Grid Reference System](#) Enter **49PBT199121**.
- At 0805 hour, made contact with unspecified enemy force, result 3 US KIA, 1 US WIA (enlisted)
- Dust-off complete at 0826 hour to LZ Professional (Dust-off is casualty evacuation by helicopter)
- At 0820 hour Company Commander received 10-15 rounds of automatic weapons fire while going into A Company location
- 0815 hour, enemy broke contact
- notifications

JOHNNIE SERVED IN: A CO, 1ST BN, 46TH INFANTRY, 198TH INFANTRY BDE, AMERICAL DIV

Garnet and Old

An American Hero...Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr. By Jim Joanos, 12/2003

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.---John 15:13

John Stephens

Johnnie Perry Stephens, Jr., died as he had lived, as a leader of men. Early on the morning of April 22, 1969, U.S. Army Lieutenant Stephens, age twenty-three, was leading his platoon in a search and clear mission near the village of Duc Tan, in northern South Vietnam when he was mortally wounded. **Thus, came to an end, in a far away land, the life of one of Florida State's most overachieving athletes. This story is about that special man.**

Johnnie Stephens was born on November 6, 1945, in Starkville, Mississippi. Because of his father's work as a civil service radio communicator, the family moved to Tallahassee within a year of Johnnie's birth. About two years later, also for employment reasons, the family moved again to Pensacola where they would live for five years before returning back to Tallahassee when Johnnie was in the second grade. The family lived in Tallahassee thereafter throughout Johnnie's life. The family, including the parents, Johnnie, and his three sisters was always a loving, tight knit one and fit well into the Tallahassee community which was much less populated during Stephens' youth than is the case today. Johnnie's sister Peggy Stephens Workman says that they had "one of the old time families with Mother at home and Daddy working". Johnnie's lifetime friend, **Huel Wheeler, has described Johnnie's father, Johnnie Perry Stephens, Sr., who died a few years ago as a "role model of strength who believed in the good old hard work ethic"**. Wheeler says that Johnnie's mother, Dorothy Stephens, continues to be "a great inspiration" to him. He said that when they were kids, Mrs. Stephens was a "mama" to him as well as to Johnnie. In gathering information for this column, I had the privilege of visiting with Mrs. Stephens in her home on Lake Talquin. She lives modestly in a small house surrounded by photographs and mementoes of the very happy life that she has enjoyed. She is very, very proud of not only the son who died for his country, but of his three sisters and their families and accomplishments. She is gray haired now but sparkles in a youthful way as she speaks of the days when her only son was a star athlete. It is very easy to see why Johnnie's friends and teammates would be so willing to adopt her as a second mother. In the very short time that I visited with her, I came away enriched and refreshed. Just a few minutes around that wonderful lady made me feel real good about the world.

A "team player" from the beginning

Stephens grew up, like most Tallahassee boys of his time, being very fond of sports, dogs, and outdoor life. By his middle school years, Stephens was competing in three sports, baseball, basketball, and football. **Early on, there were indications that Johnnie was something special. Sister Peggy says that one year in little league baseball, the coach wanted to award the team's sportsmanship award to Johnnie. Johnnie refused the offer because he believed that another kid, a handicapped one, deserved the award more than he did. His middle school basketball coach, Dave Raker, regards him as one of the finest people that he has ever known. Raker tells a story about how Stephens, in the spirit of team unity, was willing to share in the blame for misdeeds that others had done in the damaging of a dressing room at an away game when Stephens had in no way been a part of the incident. He was always a "team player"**.

By his high school years, Stephens had become an outstanding football and baseball player. In football, at Leon High School in Tallahassee, he was a center on offense and a linebacker on defense. He was also the team's long snapper. He worked very hard. Wheeler tells stories about how Stephens practiced centering the ball for punts and place kicks. Each day after practice, Wheeler was required to stick around with Stephens while he practiced long snapping. Stephens would center the "ball" about fifty times each day. However, instead of using a regular football, Stephens would use one of those "heavy" medicine balls. Wheeler said that Stephens could "hum that medicine ball". **Wheeler also tells of how "tough" Stephens was. He said that in one practice, although Stephens had been "cleated in his eye area" and was bleeding profusely, he continued to practice until the coach directed Wheeler to take Stephens to the hospital to get the severe cut stitched up.** As a result of his hard work, at the end of his senior year, Stephens was named the Florida Big Bend region's "lineman of the year" as well as its first team center. When the award was presented, Stephens' coach at Leon, **Bill Sexton, Sr. (the father of FSU's current running backs coach) described Johnnie as the "best lineman that I've ever coached in fifteen years of coaching"**. Incidentally, also on that same All Big Bend team was a guy named Del Williams from Live Oak's Suwanee County High School who would be a close friend and teammate of Stephens at FSU where they would be valuable members of an outstanding line. **Stephens' high school teammates also selected him to receive the honored Tallahassee Quarterback Club's Sportsmanship Award which was awarded to one player from each high school team in the Tallahassee area each year. Stephens also had an outstanding high school baseball career. A catcher, he was an all star in American Legion baseball. In his senior year, he was selected as his high school baseball team's most valuable player.**

When Stephens graduated from high school, he had choices to make. In addition to Florida State, he was recruited by the University of Mississippi as well as the University of Alabama. **Sister Peggy tells of how honored the family was to have the coaches from the University of Alabama have dinner at their home on a trip to Tallahassee. She said that when Johnnie visited Alabama, he roomed with Joe Namath over the weekend. Sister Peggy said that during the trip to Alabama Johnnie became convinced that he really wanted to stay in Tallahassee and play for the Seminoles for that was where his "heart was".**

Freshman football

Stephens entered FSU in the fall of 1963 and played freshman ball the first year as freshmen were not allowed to play on the varsity team then. While they played a few games against other freshmen teams, the main purpose of the freshman team was to scrimmage against the varsity. The 1963 FSU freshman team, in addition to Stephens, included a number of others who would in time contribute heavily to FSU football. Some of them were Wayne Giordino, Larry Green, Kim Hammond, John Hosack, Wayne McDuffie, Bill Moremen, Lee Narramore, Charles Pennie, and T.K. Wetherell, as well as Del Williams. Stephens never red shirted. From the beginning, in his first varsity year, the 1964 season, he was a valuable member of the team. He backed up Jack Edwards at center and was the team's long snapper. **He played in every game and made every long snap without a single mishap. No one that I have talked to can remember Stephens ever making an error in centering ball, regular or long snapping, during the three years that he performed those functions for FSU's varsity. Sister Peggy recalls that once a sportswriter blamed Johnnie for a fumble that occurred in a game. However, head coach Bill Peterson, after reviewing film, was fast to correct the assertion and pointed out that the fumble that had occurred was not caused by the center snap.**

The first "great" FSU season

In 1964, under head coach Bill Peterson, FSU turned the corner and first took its place among the more outstanding college football programs in the country. It was a season of big happenings for FSU. The football rules had changed just before the season, and once again, two platoon football, which had been prohibited for about ten years, was allowed. Coach Peterson took full advantage of the new rules and implemented a pro-style passing offense. The offense featured quarterback Steve Tensi and flanker, Fred Biletnikoff. Both would later become outstanding NFL players. On defense, the 1964 team featured the famous "Seven Magnificents" and the "Forgotten Four". The season began with a 14-0 victory over the University of Miami in the Orange Bowl Stadium. In the fourth game of that year, FSU put the college football world on notice when it defeated the fifth ranked team in the country, Kentucky, 48-6 in a homecoming game at Doak Campbell Stadium which was filled to capacity, which at the time, was 40,000 fans. Other victories that year included a 17-14 victory at the University of Georgia, and, of course, the first ever victory over Florida, 17-6, in the first ever game played against Florida in Tallahassee. The only blemishes on the record that year was an upset loss at Virginia Tech, 11-20, and a 13-13 tie at Houston. The 1964 season ended on a real upbeat. FSU was invited for the first time to play in the annual Gator Bowl game, considered at the time as one of the more important bowl games. In the Gator Bowl, FSU totally dominated the University of Oklahoma, 36-19. The victory climaxed what was easily FSU's most outstanding season up to then.

Iron Man

In 1965, Johnnie Stephens became the starter at center and did something that very, very few people have done in the history of FSU football. The undersized center, about 6'1" and 190 pounds played every single down of offense. I checked with long time FSU assistant coach, Bob Harbison. He knows of no other FSU player that has ever done that. Partially responsible for this was that the backup at center, Wayne McDuffie, broke his hand in preseason practice and was unavailable for many of the games. **Incidentally, the third string center on that team was a player named, Bob Urich, who would later become a famous movie and television actor. Stephens and Urich were close friends and roomed together for a period of time at FSU. Stephens was something of a mentor to the younger Urich.**

The 1965 team went 4-5-1, which was something of a disappointment following the outstanding 1964 season. However, there were some outstanding wins. For the second year in a row, the FSU team won a game against the team ranked number five in the country when the game was played. This time, it was the University of Georgia, which FSU beat in Tallahassee, 10-3. FSU also beat Baylor, Virginia Tech, and Wake Forest, and tied Houston. Losses were to Texas Christian, Kentucky, Alabama, North Carolina State, and Florida. The Florida game in Gainesville provided a great deal of excitement at the end of the season as FSU led 17-10 with less than two minutes left in the game. But then, some heroics by Florida's passing combination of quarterback Steve Spurrier and receiver Charley Casey as well as a pass interception return for a touchdown, enabled the Gators to win, 30-17.

A leader in 1966

For the 1966 season, Stephens was one of the team leaders. Harbison remembers Stephens as "not being real big as you would expect a center to be today". He says that Stephens came to FSU undersized and did not grow much. He further

describes him as "a tough kid, intelligent, a handsome young man". The team used different game captains each game. It is significant that Stephens along with Wayne Giardino were designated game captains for the first game of the season and served on other occasions as well. The team lost the first game to Houston, 13-21, but went on to a pretty good season with a 6-4 regular season record, despite a most controversial loss to Florida in Tallahassee. In the final moments of the Florida game, FSU quarterback Gary Pajcic threw what appeared to be the winning touchdown pass to Lane Fenner in the right corner of the north end zone. However, one of the Southeastern Conference officials who were officiating ruled that Fenner did not have possession when he rolled out of bounds. Photographs and films of the play that were released the next day convinced a lot of people that the official had erred in making the call. There were some special victories in 1966. They included a 23-20 win at Miami, a 42-33 victory at Texas Tech, a 10-0 victory over Mississippi State, a 32-10 win at South Carolina, a 28-0 win over Wake Forest, and a 45-21 victory over Maryland. FSU historian, James P. Jones, has described the 1966 season as "a big step back toward the successes of 1964" and that it was "a year of exciting games and offensive fireworks". After the 1966 regular season, FSU was invited to play Wyoming in the Sun Bowl game. Despite playing well in the first half, FSU fell behind in the second half and lost to Wyoming 20-28. Wyoming was led by future NFL star running back, Jim Kiick. The Sun Bowl game ended Johnnie Stephens' football playing career at FSU.

In 1967, Stephens married his high school sweetheart, Sally, who he had dated since about the eleventh grade. Sally graduated before Johnnie and got a job teaching at Carrabelle High School. Johnnie went to Carrabelle, too, to do his internship as an industrial arts teacher and assistant football coach.

Lieutenant Stephens

Stephens graduated from FSU in 1968 and on the same day, having completed his Reserve Officers Training Program in college, was designated as a "Distinguished Military Graduate" and commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Coach Peterson had offered Stephens a job as a graduate assistant at FSU. Stephens put the job on hold so that he could fulfill his military obligation to serve on active duty. Peterson promised Stephens that when his military tour ended, that the job would be waiting for him. Stephens' mother recalls Johnnie's military commitment by saying that "being in the Army was just something that he had to do." After a short training program in Panama, Stephens was sent to Vietnam as a platoon leader. Just a little over two months later, he was killed. Edward Raymond, one of the soldiers in Johnnie's platoon has described the event on a Vietnam war veterans' web site. "We knew something was up that morning when our platoon saddled up for patrol. There was a seriousness to our duty and Lt. Stephens took a position among the first four guys in the point element. It didn't take long. We were walking uphill...on a rocky path where you watched where you were stepping more than what was up ahead. The five guys at the point rounded a bend and the maelstrom started. Lt. Stephens was killed instantly. Three others were mortally wounded and died enroute or at the hospital." Raymond writes further that while he "didn't know Lt. Stephens that well" because Stephens had only recently arrived, the two had "shared bunker guard duty one night" when they had talked "about college football". **He further described Stephens as "a leader, a responsible leader, who gave all for his men".**

Posthumously, Stephens was awarded several medals in addition to the Purple Heart. They included the Bronze Star, the Gallantry Cross with palm, as well as the national defense and Vietnam service medals. When learning of Stephens' death, his teammate at FSU, **Del Williams, wrote to the Stephens family. Williams who had played alongside Stephens for four years wrote that he had "learned to respect him like a brother" and that "God never made a finer person or a better friend".**

The effect that this outstanding young man had upon people continues to this day. **In 1969, Carrabelle High School, where Stephens had coached while an intern, dedicated its football season to Stephens. That same year the school established the John Stephens Award which is given at the end of each season to the most outstanding Carrabelle football player.** In 1989, Stephens was posthumously inducted into the **Leon High School Football Hall of Fame.** A large group of family members and friends as well as a number of his former coaches attended the event. In November of 2000, Helge Swanson wrote a nice story about Tallahassee's old, abandoned baseball park, Centennial Field. Swanson had played against Stephens in high school sports and then roomed with him when they were both on the freshman football team at FSU. In the article, Swanson made a pitch to have the old ballpark restored. He also suggested that the field be renamed for Johnnie Perry Stephens, Jr., who had played in so many baseball and football games on that field when he was growing up. A number of other people in Tallahassee have signed on to Swanson's idea. It would be great way to honor the Tallahassee boy who grew up on that wonderful field, became a leader of men and went on to give his life for his country.

Johnnie Stephens' life continues to be a symbol of the best in FSU athletics.

This was originally printed in the December, 2003 Seminole Boosters Report To Boosters newspaper. The author and the Seminole Boosters have given their permission to reprint this article.

2000, 11-26, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Centennial Field of dreams

The abandoned ballpark resurrects memories of a young player with a good-natured grin



HELGE SWANSON

MY VIEW

It was not my first trip to Tallahassee. As a high school football prospect, I had visited the Florida State Seminoles here. Another time, while going to visit the Florida Gators in Gainesville, I had stayed the night.

But on this hot June day in 1963, a group of kids from the small northwest Florida town of Milton had made the four-hour trip to Tallahassee to play American Legion baseball. The game was played at Centennial Field, later to become Cascade Park.

The weathered wooden bleachers were behind a chicken-wire backstop dented by a thousand foul balls. That image is frozen in my mind because of one play.

I was on third. Adrenaline surged as our coach signaled for a squeeze play. Executing a squeeze play, or suicide bunt, is simple in theory: When the pitcher begins his wind-up, the runner breaks for home. The batter then bunts the ball, and, with the lead gained by the base runner's early departure from third, scoring the run is virtually assured — in theory. It is a classic baseball play.

As the pitcher began his high-kicking wind-up, I took off for home. A full-bore, 17-year-old, prime-of-life sprint was achieved in seconds, and my 6-foot-4, 225-pound frame was hurtling toward home in a dead run.

My Milton teammate made a valiant but unsuccessful attempt at the bunt. The large, cat-like Tallahassee catcher emerged from behind the plate, and squared off, looming like a brick wall. But there was no turning back.

The crash reverberated through the pine planking and lime rock walls of that old, red clay field of dreams. Both boys,

dazed but undaunted, sprang up, faced off, and for a second, waited for the fight that was sure to follow such a violent beginning.

But it was not to be. In the next moment, the big catcher who tagged me out flashed a wide, warm, disarming grin, and I could only smile in response. We shook hands, and that was it. Well, not really.

Three months later, I walked

into my assigned dorm room at FSU. It was late August and the newly signed freshmen were joining the returning veterans in football's grueling rite-of-passage, two-a-day summer practices. Entering the room, I was greeted by a wide, warm, disarming grin. My new roommate was Tallahassee's Johnnie Stephens. We had met before at home plate on Centennial Field. We instantly



became friends, roommates, teammates.

Johnnie was a simple, honest, good guy. An excellent athlete, he played baseball and football at Leon High, where he was later inducted into its hall of fame. While rooming with me, he would carry huge piles of laundry home to his mother, Dorothy, who was always pleasant and never seemed to mind.

The Stephens family — Mom, Dad, Johnnie and three sisters — lived way out on Tharpe Street when it was still the country. Johnnie played football four years for Bill Peterson, married his high school sweetheart, Sally, graduated from FSU, and was commissioned in the Army

Please see **FIELD, 5E**

FIELD

From page 1E

through the ROTC program. On April 22, 1969, 1st Lt. Johnnie Perry Stephens Jr. was killed in an ambush on a hot Vietnam day. He was 23 years old. Like Johnnie, Centennial Field, two blocks from the Capitol off South Monroe, is just a memory today. From 1935 to 1950 it was home to the Tallahassee Capitals, a Class D minor league baseball team. Its original bleachers held 6,000 fans. Lights were added after World War II, and an FSU-Florida baseball game was played there under those lights in the early 1960s. Tallahassee's small-town atmosphere made the park a centerpiece of community activity. Everything from ball games to the circus happened there.

But Centennial Field had a dark secret, not of its making. The contaminated wastes from an adjacent coal gasification plant lay buried beneath. The coal plant had operated from 1905 to 1950. In 1989, tests revealed the old contamination, and Cascade Park, along with the ghost of Centennial Field, was fenced off and posted with EPA hazardous warning signs.

Thirty-one years after Johnnie's death, Tallahassee is still my home. Every time I pass by the ghost of Centennial Field, I remember that image of those weathered wooden bleachers, chicken-wire backstop dented by foul balls, and Johnnie's good-natured grin. And I see all those young ball players, frozen in time, for a magic instant that was our youth.

Nothing would be more fitting then someday to rebuild that old ballpark and name it J.P. Stephens Jr. Centennial Field. Then it could be reborn as a community center and be filled with young ball players whose youth is now our future.

■ Helge Swanson is an environmental consultant in Tallahassee. Contact him at Hsaconsult@aol.com .



Johnny Stephens
... killed in Viet

Stephens Is Killed

Former Seminole starting center and Leon High School football star Johnny Stephens was killed in action in South Vietnam yesterday, according to the Florida State University ROTC office. Stephens, who played with the Seminoles in 1966 for his last season, was a second lieutenant in the Army and an infantry platoon leader.

County OKs \$2,250 For Engineering

The Leon County Commission today authorized \$2,250 to pay for the engineering study done by Barrett, Daffin, Coloney and Figg to renovate the old courtroom into new quarters for the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department.

In other action, the board approved hiring Marcia Baker as county law librarian and part-time legal secretary to Circuit Judge Hugh Taylor. Her salary was set at \$330 per month.

The county also adopted resolutions commending the heroism of U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Johnnie P. Stephens Jr., who was killed in action April 22, and commending heroism of Marine Lance Cpl. Willie Brown, who was killed April 24 in Vietnam.

The board adopted a memorandum of agreement to maintain a State Road Department flashing beacon at U.S. 90 and Dempsey Mayo Road after the SRD installs it.

1966, 10-07, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT



Whoever's At Quarterback Gets John Stephens' Protection
... center defends Gary Pajcic (L), Kim Hammond

"JOHNNY WORE A SMILE ON HIS FACE AND ALWAYS HAD TIME FOR YOU. HE WAS KNOWN AS THE IRON MAN AND HIS JUNIOR YEAR PLAYING CENTER FOR THE 1965 FSU SEMINOLES, HE MADE EVERY OFFENSIVE SNAP INCLUDING THE LONG SNAPS WITHOUT A SINGLE FUMBLE, AN AMAZING ACCOMPLISHMENT. HE WAS MISTER DEPENDABLE AND THAT WAS TRUE IN EVERYTHING HE DID!"

JOHN CROWE, FSU TEAMMATE

"FSU's SONS OF THE SIXTIES-A CASE FOR THE DEFENSE"

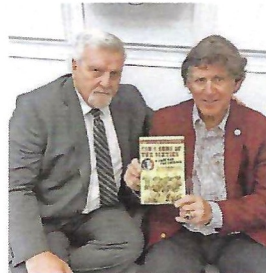
By John Crowe and Dale McCullers

2019, 03-13, Tallahassee Democrat

Book highlights FSU's defense during the 1960s



Jim Henry
Sports Editor
Tallahassee Democrat
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLA.



Former FSU football players Dale McCullers, left, and John Crowe hold the book they co-wrote called 'FSU's Sons of The Sixties. A Case For The Defense.' JIM HENRY/DEMOCRAT

Everyone wants to talk offense. John Crowe and Dale McCullers want to talk defense.

And nobody connected with Florida State football should ever forget Johnnie Stephens, Jr.

In an entertaining and nostalgic journey down memory lane, former FSU teammates John Crowe and Dale McCullers have released their book titled "FSU's Sons of the Sixties: A case for the Defense."

The 192-page book looks back at some of the Seminoles' greatest defensive stars of the era, one that was often volatile but also represented significant growth across the country.

The book also emphasizes core values, lessons learned and team take-aways gleaned from the sport.

There are 12 individual stories about FSU Hall of Fame players under head coach Bill Peterson - including Crowe

and McCullers, teammates from 1966-68 - who helped set the foundation for future teams.

There's also a chapter dedicated to the parents of "the sons of the sixties,"

See HENRY, Page 2C

Henry

Continued from Page 1C

explaining the players at FSU in the 1960s were the children of the Greatest Generation - a term used to describe those who grew up and endured the Great Depression and World War II.

All proceeds from the book will go toward the Johnnie Stephens Scholarship Fund.

Stephens was a Leon High product who started at center at FSU and never missed a snap over his three seasons (1966-69), according to the co-authors. Stephens, a Second Lieutenant and platoon leader, was killed in action in Vietnam in April of 1969 at the age of 23.

"Johnnie Stephens was a true American hero," McCullers said.

Legendary FSU coach Bobby Bowden wrote the introduction for the book.

Bowden was the Seminoles' receivers coach from 1963-65 under Peterson and, of course, later returned to Tallahassee in 1976 as FSU's head coach.

While Bowden was known for his offense, leading the Seminoles to a pair of national championships (1993 and 1999), he said he always tried to put the team's best athletes on defense.

Bowden fondly recalled FSU's 1964

defensive unit that was popularly called the "Seven Magnificents" and the "Forgotten Four." That team went 9-1-1 and recorded the Seminoles' first win over Florida. The defense limited opponents to 6.6 points per game that season and helped FSU beat Oklahoma 36-19 in the Gator Bowl.

Tensi to Biletnikoff received the headlines that afternoon, but the defense returned an interception for a touchdown and held the Sooners to 283 yards.

"You have to have defense to win, you have to get the ball from the other team," said Bowden, whose oft-repeated phrase of "if the opponent can't score, and our offense can, they can't win," was a favorite of the media. "I don't know of many teams that have had great years didn't have a great defense."

The book features players longtime fans will certainly remember, like Bud Whitehead, described in the book as FSU's early version of Deion Sanders.

Whitehead, of Marianna, was a two-way starter at defensive back and receiver and led the team in interceptions and receptions and was voted the team's Most Valuable Player his senior season in 1960.

The first player featured is "Sunshine Scooter," the nickname of defensive back Lee Corso. Even though Corso

starred at FSU in the late 1950s at cornerback and receiver, his chapter is titled "An Emerging Minister of Defense."

Other chapters feature defensive end Tony Romeo; linebacker Gene McDowell; linebacker Dick Hermann; nose tackle Jack Shinholser; defensive back Winfred Bailey; defensive back Walt Sumner; defensive back and former FSU President T.K. Wetherell, who died last December; and defensive back J.T. Thomas, who also was the first African American to play varsity football at FSU. There also are chapters on the co-authors - defensive back Crowe and linebacker McCullers.

The book also features a chapter on FSU's "Seven Magnificents" and the "Forgotten Four." The Seminoles' front seven that shaved their heads and their name was played off the popular 1960 movie "The Magnificent Seven." The shave-headed unit allowed one touchdown - it was a result of FSU fumbled punt reception near its goal - in the season's first four games.

Crowe and McCullers said they enjoyed researching and writing the book, a process that started in January 2018. Crowe, who lives in Tallahassee, had overlapping careers with 26 years of military service and 33 years in the forest products industry. McCullers, who lives in Waycross, Georgia, earned a Su-

per Bowl ring with the Baltimore Colts (Super Bowl V) and pursued a career in law enforcement as a special agent of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS).

The pair also met last week with Sally (Stephens) Sperling, who lives in Tallahassee with husband of 46 years, Ralph Sperling. Johnnie Stephens married Sally, his high school sweetheart from Leon, in 1967. Sally remarried four years after Stephens' death on April 22, 1969, near the village of Duc Tan, in northern South Vietnam, only a few months into his deployment.

Sally was honored the book was dedicated to Stephens with intentions of endowing a \$50,000 athletic scholarship in his name as part of the school's Unconquered Campaign.

"I think it's fabulous," Sally said.

"Johnnie was a gentleman, salt of the earth. Those boys really loved Coach Peterson. Johnnie had talked to Coach Pete and asked if there might be a coaching position when he returned. He thought he wanted to go to graduate school. Coach had told him absolutely. That was the plan."

Note: The book was released last week by Amazon.Com through Atlantic Publishing Group.

Reach Jim Henry at ijhenry@tallahassee.com

"JOHNNIE STEPHENS WAS A TRUE AMERICAN HERO"

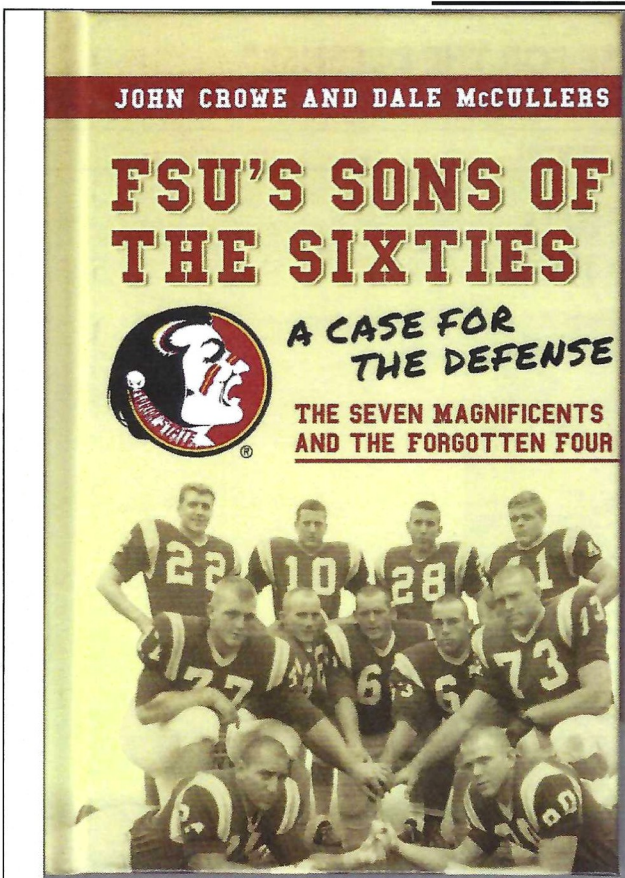
DALE McCULLERS, FSU TEAMMATE

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT 2019, 03-13

**WE DEDICATE THIS BOOK IN THE MEMORY OF US ARMY LIEUTENANT
JOHNNIE P STEPHENS, Jr---"A GREAT TEAMMATE AND LEADER OF MEN"**

**JOHN CROWE AND DALE McCOLLERS
BOOK DEDICATION FSU'S SONS OF THE SIXTIES**

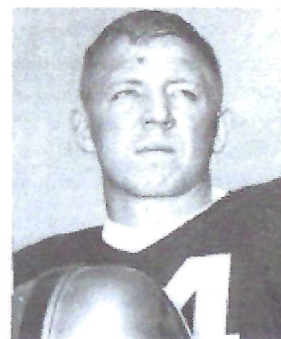
FSU'S SONS OF THE SIXTIES



**EXCERPT FROM "AN AMERICAN HERO...
JOHNNIE P. STEPHENS, JR." AS IT APPEARED IN
GARNET AND OLD 12/2003**

Jim Joanos

Johnnie Perry Stephens, Jr. died as he had lived — a leader of men. Early on the morning of April 22, 1970, U.S. Army Lieutenant Stephens, age 23, was leading his platoon in a search and clear mission near the village of Duc Tan, in northern South Vietnam when he was mortally wounded. Thus came to an end, in a far away land, the life of one of Florida State's most overachieving athletes.



Center 1963-1966

We dedicate this book in the memory of U.S. Army Lieutenant Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr. — a great teammate and leader of men. Johnnie was killed in action in South Vietnam on April 22, 1969.

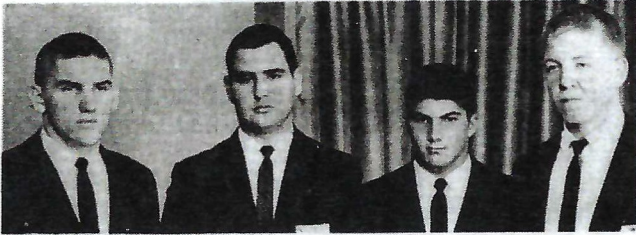
The authors intend to have the proceeds and donations from this book go to the Florida State University Unconquered Campaign in the name of Johnnie P. Stephens Jr. for athletic scholarships.

*"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down
one's life for one's friends."*

John 15:13

MORE

1962, 12-02, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
(BIG BEND LINEMAN OF THE YEAR)



LINE STALWARTS—Among linemen selected to fill positions on the All-Big Bend first teams were, left to right: Melvin Heffner, Marianna end; Chuck Peters, Monticello tackle; Charley Walker, Monticello guard; and John Stephens, Leon center. Stephens was also named "lineman of the year."

1963, 05-25, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
(OUTSTANDING ATHLETE AT LEON HS)



RECOGNITION FOR WORK IN SPECIAL AREAS was given Leon seniors. (Row 1) David Kerns, Joe White, science; Barbara Shuler, French; Pat Moore, Danforth award; Kathy Herbert, Quill and Scroll Best Writer; Kay Laing, outstanding cheerleader; (Row 2) Andy Moezer, science; John Pace, mathematics; Fred Strickland, French; Paul Wagner, Spanish; Bill Glenn, Danforth; Vickie Whitaker, Miss Secretary of 1963; Richard Malloy who presented the Phi Delta Theta fraternity award for outstanding athlete; and Johany Stephens recipient of the award.



ABOVE-2019, 04-14, VISITING JOHNNIE TO LEAVE THE "HERO" ROCK (HOLDING HANDS-WIDOW SALLY IS ON THE LEFT, SISTER PEGGY IS ON THE RIGHT) (PEGGY passed in December 2024)

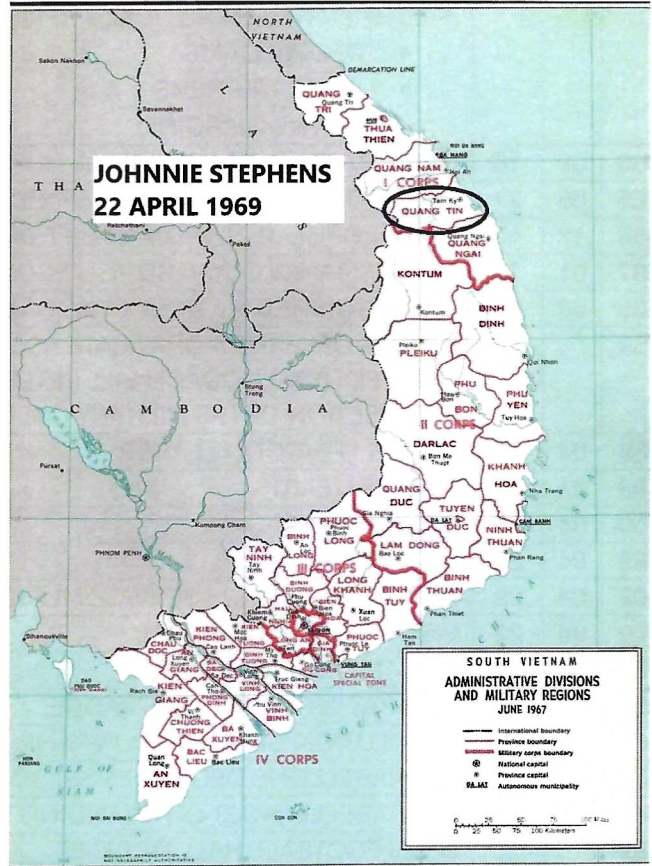


ABOVE-2024, 04-28, VETERANS, FRIENDS, and OTHER VISIT JOHNNIE TO LEAVE THE "HERO ROCK"



2025, 04-27, VISITING JOHNNIE, FSU TEAMMATE JOHN CROWE IS IN THE MIDDLE

JOHNNIE WAS KIA IN THE PROVINCE OF QUANG TIN, 8 KM E-SE OF TIEN PHUOC. (from Coffelt Database)



- Quang Tin was the 6th most deadly province for Americans during the Vietnam War
- Johnnie was one of 2,897 Americans that died in Quang Tin during the Vietnam War
- Da Nang was in Quang Tin, a large military supply base was there along with Da Nang airbase, the 6th busiest air base in the world during the Vietnam War.

AWARDS/HONORS OF JOHNNIE STEPHENS

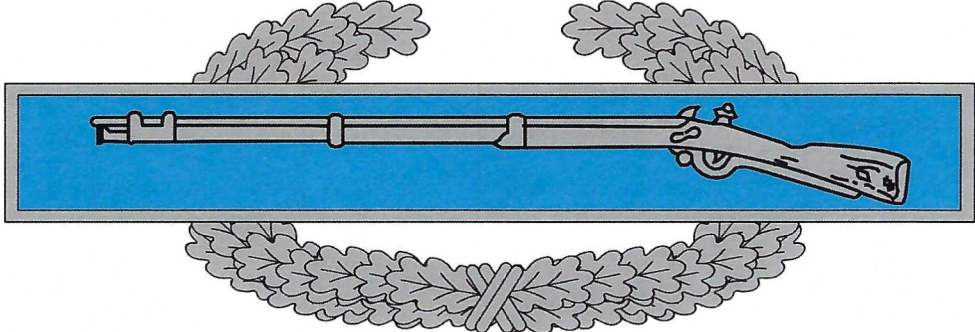
YR	M	D	AWARD/HONOR	SOURCE
			LEON BASEBALL HALL OF FAME	
			AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL ALL STAR TEAM	
1962	02	20	SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD-BABE RUTH BASEBALL	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1962	02	20	TLH BABE RUTH BASEBALL-HALL OF FAME	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1962	12	02	TLH DEMOCRAT-BIG BEND LINEMAN OF THE YEAR	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1962	12	02	TLH DEMOCRAT-ALL BIG BEND FIRST TEAM	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1963	01	10	SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD-LEON FOOTBALL	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1963	01	00	FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP AWARD OFFER-MISSISSIPPI	SISTER-PEGGY WORKMAN
1963	01	00	FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP AWARD OFFER-ALABAMA	SISTER-PEGGY WORKMAN
1963	01	00	FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP AWARD OFFER-FSU	SISTER-PEGGY WORKMAN
1963	05	00	LEON BASEBALL-MVP AWARD	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1963	05	25	LEON SENIOR CLASS-MOST OUTSTANDING ATHLETE	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1965	11	08	FSU FOOTBALL-TOMAHAWK AWARD-vs WAKE FOREST	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1966	01	04	FSU FOOTBALL-3 YEAR LETTERMAN-ONE OF ONLY 3 IN 1966 (FRESHMEN WERE NOT ELIGIBLE TO PLAY VARSITY) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEL WILLIAMS • JOHN STEPHENS • WAYNE GIARDINO 	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1966	09	15	GAME CAPTAIN-FSU FOOTBALL vs HOUSTON	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1966	09	27	FSU FOOTBALL-TOMAHAWK AWARD-vs MIAMI	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1966	12	17	MOST POPULAR CUSTOMAR-BIFF BURGER	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1967	01	17	SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD-FSU FOOTBALL	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1968	03	00	DISTINGUISHED MILITARY GRADUATE-FSU ARMY ROTC	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969			HE WAS OFFERED A GRADUATE ASSISTANT POSITION BY HEAD FOOTBALL COACH BILL PETERSON, FSU UPON COMPLETION OF HIS MILITARY OBLIGATION	WIDOW-SALLY SISTER-PEGGY
1969	04	22	ARMY-1 st PLATOON LEADER	TOM MARTINIANO-US ARMY
1969	04	22	PURPLE HEART	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	BRONZE STAR	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	GALLANTRY CROSS	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	VITNAM CAMPAIGN MEDAL	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	04	22	COMBAT INFANTRYMANS BADGE	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	06	10	RESOLUTION BY LEON COUNTY-HEROISM	TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT
1969	09	00	CARRABELLE HS DEDICATES SEASON TO JOHNNIE	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1969	09	00	CARRABELLE-MOST OUTSTANDING PLAYER AWARD	JIM JOANOS ARTICLE
1989			LEON FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME	LEON FB HALL OF FAME
2019			BOOK-SONS OF SIXTIES DEDICATED IN HIS MEMORY	BOOK-SONS OF THE SIXTIES
2019			FSU FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWED IN HIS NAME	BOOK-SONS OF THE SIXTIES

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDED

Medals awarded to Johnnie P Stephens

		
<p><u>BRONZE STAR MEDAL</u> awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone.</p>	<p><u>GALLANTRY CROSS w PALM</u> Gallantry Cross is a military decoration awarded by the former Government of South Vietnam to recognize acts of valor and heroic conduct in combat.</p>	<p><u>PURPLE HEART</u> awarded in the name of the president to those wounded or killed while serving</p>
		
<p><u>NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL</u> awarded to every member of the U.S. Armed Forces who served during any one of four specified periods of armed conflict or national emergency from June 27, 1950 through December 31, 2022.</p>	<p><u>VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL</u> awarded to recognize in-theater service during the Vietnam War</p>	<p><u>VIETNAM CAMPAIGN MEDAL</u> Wartime service and support of military operations in Vietnam by the South Vietnamese military.</p>

COMBAT INFANTRYMAN'S BADGE



The badge is awarded to infantrymen who fought in active ground combat

Additional information

- Johnnie Stephens is the only FSU football player to die in battle.
- He and former FAMU player Donald Coles Woodruff are the only college football players that played in Florida to die in battle. (There is a monument on the FAMU campus dedicated to Donald Coles Woodruff and he is in the FAMU Hall of Fame. See page 10)

Tom Martiniano was the RTO (radio-telephone operator) for Company Commander Captain Kern Dunagan (Medal of Honor). In emails to David Wilson, he indicates that during the fighting of 10-12 May 1969, most of the officers were KIA so even if Johnnie had survived the April ambush that he may not have survived the fighting of May.

I have often wondered if Johnnie was alive in May 1969, that he would have been with Captain Dunagan and Johnnie may have received the MOH also.

Tully gym was named for Robert Henry Tully. At 24, he was the first FSU varsity athlete to pass away. Bobby was a World War II veteran who played football, was an [Alpha Tau Omega](#) brother and member of [Omicron Delta Kappa](#) and Gold Key societies. He graduated in 1952 and died in 1954 after a lingering illness. His brother Jim was a real estate agent who helped found [Capital Regional Medical Center](#); older brother Jack was the 1947 captain of FSU's first football team. His mother Winnie was the first juvenile officer in Leon County from 1942-1971.

**FSU ATHLETIC LETTERMAN THAT DIED DURING WAR
(ALPHA)**

DATE OF DEATH	LAST and RANK	FIRST	MIDDLE	LOCATION	SPORT	HOMETOWN	HIGH SCHOOL	BURIAL
2002, 03-04	ANDERSON SPECIALIST	MARC US ARMY	ANTHONY	AFGHAN-ISTAN (HOSTILE)	TRACK	ALLIANCE OHIO	ALLIANCE HS	FL NAT CEM BUSHNELL FL
1971, 04-10	FRANKS PRIVATE FIRST CLASS	JOHN US ARMY	HOWDEN	VIETNAM (NON-HOSTILE)	BASEBALL	JAX BEACH FL	FLETCHER HS	WARREN SMITH CEM JAX BEACH FL
1965, 02-09	LEWIS CAPTAIN	DON USAF	ROBERT	VIETNAM (HOSTILE)	SWIMMING	HOLLY HILL FL	DAYTONA MAINLAND HS	DAYTONA MEM PARK DAYTONA BEACH, FL
1967, 03-24	NELSON PRIVATE FIRST CLASS	WILLIAM US ARMY	IRVIN	VIETNAM (NON-HOSTILE)	TRACK	CLEARWATER FL	LARGO HS	CLEARWATER CEMETERY CLEARWATER FL
1969, 04-22	STEPHENS 1 st LIEUTENANT	JOHNNIE US ARMY	PERRY, Jr	VIETNAM (HOSTILE)	FOOTBALL	TALLAHASSEE FL	LEON HS	ROSELAWN CEMETERY TALLAHASSEE FL
1951, 10-16	THOMPSON PRIVATE FIRST CLASS	OLLIN US ARMY	YOUNG	KOREA (NON-HOSTILE)	SWIMMING	BAKER FL	WALTON HS	CLEAR SPRINGS CEMETERY CLEAR SPRINGS FL

SOURCE-NOLEFAN.ORG

Here are the FSU athletes that have been killed in wars according to NOLEFAN.ORG:

- MARK ANTHONY ANDERSON, **TRACK and FIELD**, ALLIANCE HS OHIO, AFGHANISTAN, 04 MARCH 2002

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a07238.html>

- WILLIAM I NELSON, **TRACK, CROSS COUNTRY**, LARGO HS, VIETNAM, 24 MARCH 1967

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a05127.html>

- JOHN STEPHENS, **FOOTBALL**, TALLAHASSEE LEON HS, VIETNAM, 22 APRIL 1969

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a01779.html>

- OLIN YOUNG THOMPSON, **SWIMMING and DIVING**, DEFUNIAK SPRINGS WALTON, KOREA, 06 OCTOBER 1951

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a03540.html>

- DON LEWIS, **SWIMMING and DIVING**, DAYTONA MAINLAND HS, VIETNAM, 08 FEBRUARY 1965

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a05929.html>

- JOHN FRANKS, **BASEBALL**, JAX FLETCHER HS, VIETNAM, 10 APRIL 1971

<https://www.nolefan.org/ath/a03228.html>

“THE IRONMAN”

IN 1965, HIS JUNIOR SEASON, JOHN STEPHENS PLAYED EVERY OFFENSIVE SNAP AND PERFORMED LONG SNAP DUTIES. HE PLAYED A TOTAL OF 728 PLAYS, NEVER LEAVING THE FIELD FOR PLAYS ON OFFENSE, PUNTING, XP or FIELD GOALS.

I THINK VERY FEW COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN THE MODERN ERA HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THIS.

In 1965, Johnnie Stephens became the starter at center and did something that very, very few people have done in the history of FSU football. The undersized center, about 6'1" and 190 pounds played every single down of offense. I checked with long time FSU assistant coach, Bob Harbison. He knows of no other FSU player that has ever done that.

FROM: An American Hero...Johnnie P. Stephens, Jr. By Jim Joanos 12/2003

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.---John 15:13

<p>1966, 08-31, TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT</p> <p>John Stephens played every minute at offensive center last year, and can probably do it again if he's not injured. However, Wayne McDuffie, on the shelf with injuries last year, is expected to give this position more depth.</p>	<p>IMAGINE IF A PLAYER DID THAT TODAY IN OUR WORLD OF 24/7 SPORTS COVERAGE. HE LIKELY WOULD RECEIVE ALL STAR RECOGNITION, IT WOULD CERTAINLY MAKE A BIGGER “SPLASH” TODAY THAN IT DID IN JOHNNIE’S ERA.</p>
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1965 SEASON

DATE	OPPONENT	SCORE	W-L	OFFENSE PLAYS	PUNTS	FG ATTEMPTS	XP ATTEMPTS	JOHNNIE-GAME	JOHNNIE-CUM
09-25-65	TCU	3-7	L	65	5	1	0	71	71
10-02-65	BAYLOR	9-7	W	64	11	1	1	77	148
10-09-65	KENTUCKY	24-26	L	64	5	1	3	73	221
10-16-65	GEORGIA	10-3	W	68	8	1	1	78	299
10-23-65	ALABAMA	0-21	L	54	6	0	0	60	359
10-30-65	VA TECH	7-6	W	56	4	0	1	61	420
11-06-65	WAKE FOREST	35-0	W	69	6	3	4	82	502
11-13-65	NC State	0-3	L	69	8	1	0	78	580
11-20-65	HOUSTON	16-16	T	71	3	4	2	80	660
11-27-65	FLORIDA	17-30	L	60	5	1	2	68	728
TOTALS						61	13	14	728

SOURCE FOR ABOVE STATISTICS: NOLEFAN.ORG