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A place to remember veterans

Once a week, David Keith stands motionless on that high hill off East Laurel Drive.

He hears the hush of the wind and more. Something rides in on the silence, something that touches the soul and then moves on.

"It's peaceful, and I can talk to the guys who are gone," Keith said. "I think they moved in some time ago."

In 1987, Keith had an idea for a Vietnam War memorial in Salinas. He and others have prodded the project forward.

Today the memorial sits, still a work in progress, just past Constitution Boulevard at 855 E. Laurel Drive Extension.

When first I met Keith, he was 44, a Vietnam veteran himself. Now 59, his once blond Fu Manchu moustache has gone gray. Still, the same nervous energy powers his lean frame.

A 1961 Salinas High School graduate, he joined the Navy in 1962. His job was to make sure F-4 warplanes aboard the USS Ranger were fueled and armed for takeoff.

In 1991, the county and city gave the Monterey County Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee the eight acres off East Laurel Drive for \$1 for 99 years provided the committee create a memorial.

Below the hill where Keith

VALLEY VIEWS



Dave Nordstrand

To help

For more, or to help with the effort, call David Keith at 758-1005.

stands, crews install picnic tables, barbecue pits and other parts of the All-Vets Park. The city has committed \$500,000 to that effort, Keith said.

"A memorial would be a quiet reminder," he said. "So people don't forget."

It would be a place for children to go to learn history, he said. It would prove that the Salinas area is neither too complacent nor too busy to remember the battlefield sacrifices of its sons and daughters.

Sixty-nine county residents, after all, died fighting in Vietnam, Keith said. He lost a brother, Danny Joe, to the battle of Khe Sanh. He lost a



PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER YOUNG

The Monterey County Vietnam Veterans Memorial off East Laurel Drive.

cousin, Miguel Keith, to a fire-fight in 1972.

In all, 13 members of the Keith family, some distant relatives in Texas, died in Vietnam. Cheri Keith, David's wife, is also active with the project.

The Marine Corps League of Monterey County supplies the flags for the memorial. When completed, they'll fly at night, too, bathed in light.

Plans call for a \$70,000 bronze 8-by-20 flag statue made to look like it's flowing. Names of the fallen would be inscribed along its stripes.

Keith hopes money can be raised and the flag in place

within a year.

"It will be beautiful when completed," he said. "Then maybe I'll lay down and relax a bit."

Take a trip to the memorial, too. Stand on that hilltop. The grass needs mowing, but never mind.

Feel the breeze, gentle and cool.

Listen to the silence.

DAVE NORDSTRAND is a staff writer for The Californian. His column appears Wednesdays and Saturdays. If you have a comment or an idea for a column, call him at 424-2221, Ext. 364. Write to him at The Californian, P.O. Box 81091, Salinas 93912.