

Veterans talk about experiences 20 years after fall of Saigon

By Dave Nordstrand

The Californian

King City's Stephen Hinds served two and a half years in Vietnam as a sniper with the 101st Airborne Division.

"I grew up where my uncle was in the military and I joined for what I thought were patriotic reasons," Hinds says.

"God and country. I was proud to be an American. I thought I was doing the right thing."

Half way through his second tour, he began questioning the effort.

"It didn't seem like there was an end in sight," he says. "With all this death around me, I thought, 'Why are we really here?'"

By day, his unit would fight its way up a mountain. In the evening, helicopters would take those same troops off the mountain.

"So there was a lot of unnecessary killing," he says.

When he saw pictures of the helicopter lifting people off the U.S. Embassy rooftop in Saigon on April 30, 1975, he felt "a betrayal by our own government."

"Being American, you don't run from anything," he says.

"Then, all of a sudden, here we are, tail between our legs, jumping on an aircraft and fleeing."

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Salinas' Louis Montano, now 49, served in the Army's quartermaster corps. He was in Vietnam from October 1969 to December of 1971.

"When units needed certain supplies, we'd immediately supply them," he says. "High priority."

"We'd coordinate the helicopters coming in and the convoys going out"

Montano opposed the war from the first.

"However, I'm a U.S. citizen and I do have an obligation to



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serve my community and country and also my fellow human being," he says.

"This outweighed my trying to run to another country, like Canada or Mexico, or become a drifter," to avoid military service.

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