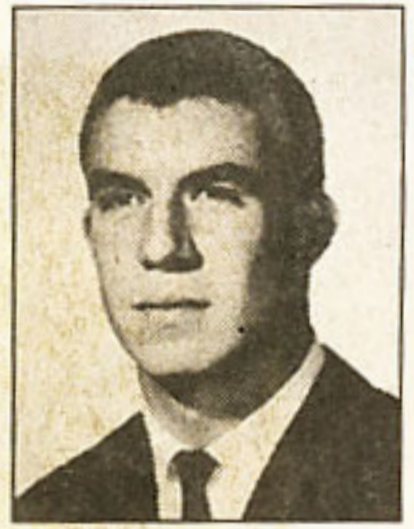


'These guys aren't going to be forgotten.'

— David Gonzales, Chairman and chief executive officer of San Dieguito High School Veterans

Veterans honor latest addition to memorial at San Dieguito Academy



BEN FRUMIN
STAFF WRITER

ENCINITAS — David Gonzales knows he will think about David Dawson Peppin Jr. today — 35 years after Peppin was killed during a tour of duty in Vietnam.

Peppin was 21 when he was killed on July 10, 1969, in Quang Nam, South Vietnam.

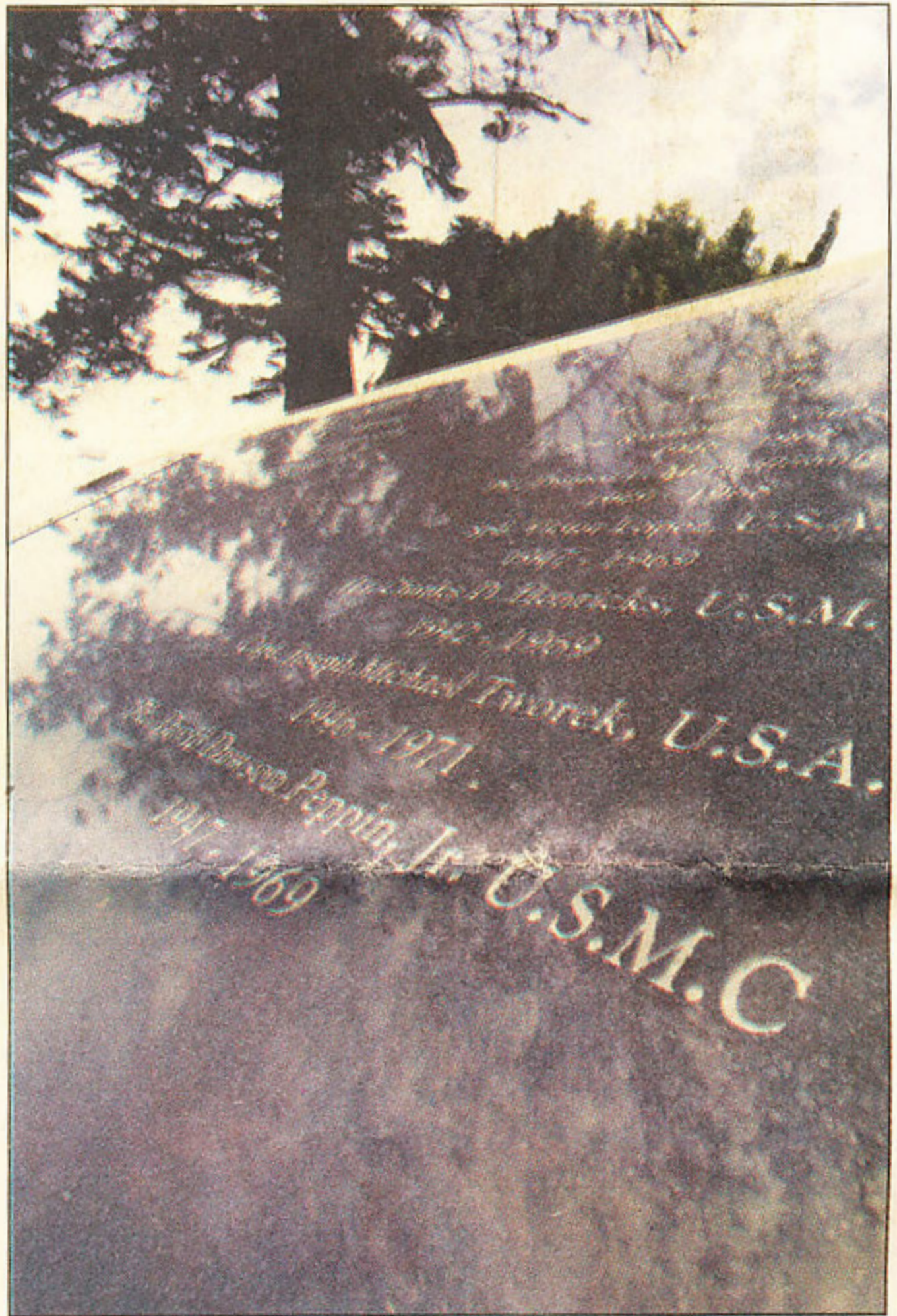
Gonzales, chairman and chief executive officer of San Dieguito High School Veterans, is the driving force behind a campus memorial that honors 19 San Dieguito students who died or remain missing in wars from World War II to the present. Peppin's name was added to the memorial in May.

None of the 19 men immortalized on the memorial was older than 25 when they died, Gonzales said.

The memorial, situated among a grove of pines at the school's entrance, is comprised of polished black granite slabs on an angled concrete wall.

Emblazoned on one slab is a simple tribute:

► HONOR, B-6



MICHAEL HENNIG / FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

The veterans memorial on the campus of San Dieguito Academy bears the names of students who were killed or missing in conflicts including World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. The most recent name to be added is that of Marine Pfc. David Dawson Peppin Jr., pictured above.

➤ HONOR

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“All gave some, some gave all.”

Below are the names of former students lost to war — nine during World War II, two during the Korean War and eight in Vietnam.

Gonzales never came across Peppin's casualty record during his years of researching San Dieguito students-turned-soldiers because Peppin enlisted in the Marines in Virginia, where he moved shortly after graduation.

It wasn't until a San Dieguito reunion May 5 that Del Mar resident Tensia Moriel Trejo, a San Dieguito graduate and former neighbor of Peppin's, alerted Gonzales to Peppin's fate.

“Knowing that his name is on the memorial is so great for me,” Trejo said.

Trejo fondly recalled watching Peppin grow up on Cuchara Drive in Del Mar during the 1960s.

“He was a very soft-hearted, lovable person,” Trejo said, adding that her two sons idolized Peppin during childhood.

“It was really like losing a family member, a big brother,” Trejo said.

Gonzales, who served as an air force sergeant in Danang, said he made a silent vow to honor the memory of his fallen classmates when, at his 30th reunion in 1989, he learned that his

friend Michael Zerbe had been killed fighting in Vietnam in 1965.

“These guys aren't going to be forgotten,” Gonzales said.

Gonzales later started twice-a-year golf tournaments, through which San Dieguito High School Veterans raised \$15,000 to erect the memorial, dedicated on Veterans Day last year.

It is gratifying, Gonzales said, to have provided a tangible reminder of the sacrifices made by some to preserve the freedom of many.

“There's nothing I can do to match what these guys gave up,” Gonzales said.

The veterans group continues to hold golf tournaments, with revenue used toward a scholarship program for district students.

The group also continues to work on tracking down more San Dieguito veterans, Gonzales said, and hopes to develop extensive biographies of those killed in action, with the intention that the text be used to teach students in district classrooms.

Gonzales conceded that the addition of Peppin's name is unlikely to be the last time an engraver will be called to the memorial, explaining why a considerable portion of granite was left blank.

“We did that for future wars,” Gonzales said. “It's inevitable.”

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