Bush breaks ground for Korean memorial

Two Philadelphia men assisted the President. They remembered 1.5 million who went to war.

By Christopher Connell
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WASHINGTON — President Bush broke ground yesterday on what he called a long overdue memorial to America's Korean War veterans, including thousands who died "so that the enslaved might be free."

"When tyranny threatened, you were quick to answer your country's call. Sadly, your country wasn't quite as quick to answer your call for recognition of that sacrifice," Bush said at a Flag Day ceremony on the site near the Lincoln Memorial.

Congress authorized the memorial in 1986, but it took organizers nearly twice as long to win approval for a reflecting pool and a grove of 100 trees. A low granite wall along one edge of the triangular field will be etched with images of those who supported the troops in combat.

The 2.2-acre site is on the opposite side of the Reflecting Pool from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The crowd of 5,000 that gathered to sheltering heat for the groundbreaking included hundreds of Korean War veterans.

Bush called two veterans out of the crowd — Robert Young, 60, of Philadelphia, who served with the First Marine Division, and Bob Fuller, of the 24th Army Division, also of Philadelphia — to help turn the first shovelfuls of dirt.

Bush paid tribute to all 5.7 million Americans who served in the military during the Korean War. Of this number, 1.5 million actually served in the war zone.

"They fought so that the enslaved might be free. They fought at the Pusan perimeter and at Inchon and at Heartbreak Ridge and Porkchop Hill," he said.

The Korean ambassador, Hon Choo Hyun, read a letter from Korean President Roh Tae Woo, thanking Americans for coming to his country's defense after the June 25, 1950, invasion by North Korean troops.

The United States and other allies fought under the United Nations flag against the North Koreans and Chinese Communist troops in a war that lasted until July 27, 1953. Some 33,618 Americans were killed in combat; thousands more died from non-combat causes.

The United States has reduced the size of its forces still stationed in South Korea, and the two Koreas have made some efforts to thaw the own cold war.

But Bush vowed: "The United States is going to fulfill our obligations to peace on the Korean peninsula. The United States does not quit, and we will stay with the job."