Korean vets seeking war memorial

By BRAD BUMSTED
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When Bill Temple was 18, he was wounded twice in three months while serving in Korea with the Army.

Today, Temple, of Montgomery County, Pa., is a 53-year-old disabled veteran who says the government should build a memorial for the "forgotten warrior" who served in Korea.

"There is hurt out there. There is anger out there and it should be rectified," said Temple, who belongs to Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7679 in Mantua.

Otto Gollon, 53, a printer from Deptford who served on an aircraft carrier during the Korean War, has also been behind the memorial movement.

"We feel the government sent 'Our boys to Korea. We feel it's the government's obligation to see those 54,000 did not die in vain," said Gollon, who will become commander of the New Jersey VFW in July.

Tomorrow, the House is to vote on a bill establishing a national memorial in the Washington, D.C., area for Korean War veterans. According to the Army and the Veterans Administration, 6.8 million U.S. military personnel served during the Korean conflict. Fifty-five thousand died — 33,629 in combat; 103,284 were wounded and 8,177 are listed as missing in action.

Rep. James J. Florio, D-N.J., the bill's sponsor, said during floor debate yesterday it has taken too long to establish a memorial for the service men "who went to a far-off place to defend our liberty."

The legislation appears to have solid support in the House and Senate, but controversy continues about whether the federal government should pay up to $5 million for the monument.

As it stands now, the House bill with 145 co-sponsors would not provide federal money. It was stripped away recently in committee. Florio, a Korean War-era Navy veteran, has proposed spending up to $5 million in federal funds that would be replaced in the treasury as private contributions are received.

A Senate version by Sen. William Armstrong, R-Colo., leaves the door open for federal funding.

Florio expressed optimism that negotiations eventually will restore funding in his bill. He said there's an "unofficial understanding" to provide the $5 million and have it replaced by private donations.

Temple said he prefers to see the funds provided for the memorial, but has "no objections either way."

"We're rebuilding the Statue of Liberty. I'm sure we can get together $5 million for Americans who fought one hell of a war," Temple said. At a minimum, Temple believes the government should provide start-up costs for designing the memorial.

Rep. Charles B. Rangel, D-N.Y., who was awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star in Korea, agrees the government should provide the money.

"Most people would like to believe there was no Korean War — that there was just a police action. We have just been ignored," Rangel said in an interview.

Rep. Stan Parris, R-Va., an Air Force pilot during the Korean War, noted tax deductions for private donations to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wound up costing the government as much as the price tag for the memorial itself.

Another Korean War pilot serving in Congress, Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, who flew 90 combat missions, testified recently in support of the memorial:

"I remember a squadron commander getting shot down when I was flying next to him . . . I remember the ones who didn't show up at a rendezvous point after a mission, and that was tough. I remember the letters to next of kin — and that's some of the hardest writing I've ever done . . . For me the memorial of remembering is enough, but I think for others it is not."