By Tim Weiner
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The architects who designed a new Korean War veterans memorial say federal bureaucrats "brutally changed" their design and intend to build a "radically different" memorial which "glorifies war."

The fight over the design of the memorial, which is to be built near the heart of the Washington Mall, is becoming a battle over the way in which the Korean War will be remembered.

The architects' design won a national competition, with a 10-member jury of Korean War veterans selecting the work over 540 competitors.

It depicted, with heroic statuary and subtle symbols, a unit of 38 soldiers on patrol upon a mountain ridge, struggling to survive and come home alive. Home is represented by an American flag beyond the highest point of the ridge.

But it has been subjected to "total changes" by a half-dozen federal agencies and retired military officers, said John Paul Lucas, a principal of Burns Lucas, Leon, Lucas, an architectural firm in State College, Pa.

The revised memorial "has taken on a radically different character...one that has to do with a moment in combat," Lucas said. "It has become a battle."

The winning architects have protested the changes in their design, to no avail.

In a statement delivered to the White House last month, they said the altered plan "glorifies war," and is out of joint with its surroundings: the Vietnam Veterans memorial, the Lincoln memorial and the Washington Monument.

A model of the winning design was unveiled last year by President Bush in a solemn White House ceremony. Bush said the memorial would represent an "American victory."

About 54,000 Americans died in the undeclared war between 1950 and 1953. The war ended with Korea divided, as it is today. Most historians depict it as a bloody stalemate.

Pictures of the model taken at the unveiling have been sent to thousands of veterans in a private fund-raising effort for the memorial. But the picture of the model bears no resemblance to the memorial the federal bureaucracy is building.

"It is not what will be built," said Col. William E. Ryan Jr., director of operations and finance at the American Battle Monuments Commission. Lucas said he and his partners have been "put into isolation, told not to say anything" and "muzzled" by federal officials.

"Our mission was to honor American servicemen and women," Lucas said. "If prior to entering the competition we had thought that our design, should it win, would be changed without our consent and then used to raise millions of dollars for some other design, we never would have entered."

William Lecky, president of Cooper-Lecky Architects, the Washington firm which is carrying out the changes in the memorial, called the dispute over the design "a political quagmire."
Cooper-Lecky also executed politically controversial design changes in the Vietnam monument, adding larger-than-life statues of soldiers to the stark black stone memorial with the names of the war dead.

"That was a can of worms too, but of a very different nature," Lecky said. The Vietnam memorial was opposed by some veterans groups as insufficiently heroic, but has become one of Washington's most revered monuments.

Maya Lin, the artist who designed the Vietnam memorial, said in a telephone interview from New York that she sympathized with the original designers. "I would question the whole notion that someone wins a design competition and then has no choice" over how the design is realized, she said.

Lecky said changes in the Korean War memorial design were ordered by the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial Advisory Board, headed by retired Army Gen. Richard Stilwell, a former commander of U.S. forces in Korea and a former CIA operative in Southeast Asia.

Stilwell, a key player in the dispute, was attending a conference and did not return telephone messages.

The Army Corps of Engineers wanted and will receive one completely new element in the revised memorial: a large mural that will "define and elaborate on the history of the war," Lecky said.

The Battle Monuments Commission wanted "a stronger recognition of the commitment of those who died," he said.

Col. Ryan of the Battle Monuments Commission said other changes were suggested by members of the National Capitol Planning Commission, the National Commission on Fine Arts, and the U.S. Interior Department.

He said the Cooper-Lecky firm is "responsible for converting the design concept.... It's their job to take into consideration the thoughts of these commissions and translate them into changes."

Col. Ryan said that the Booth Lucas architects they lost any say over the design after they won the competition received their $20,000 prize. The design "became the property of the American Battle Monument Commission," he said. "Ten, 15 years from now, everyone will be delighted with this memorial the way it is," the colonel said.

It may be more than a few years before the memorial is built. Col. Ryan said more than $11 million will be needed to complete the memorial, and groundbreaking will not begin until "we have an approved design."

He said $6.5 million has been raised in private contributions from 10,000 donors, with another $1 million appropriated by Congress. The colonel said the commission hopes to raise $4 million more through the sale of a commemorative in.