Vet backs memorial for Korean War dead

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EAST FALMOUTH — The memory of friends who died in battle has never left John Politano, a veteran of the Korean War who now makes his home in East Falmouth.

"I was one of the lucky ones," says this former Chelsea resident. "I made it home."

Remembering those who died in Korea should be more than a personal experience, says Politano. "It should be a national experience."

Efforts to this effect are now underway in Congress, where three bills were recently filed calling for the creation of a national Korean War monument modeled after the Vietnam War memorial in Washington D.C.

Rep. James J. Florio, D-N.J., and Rep. Stan Parris, R-Virginia, have filed separate bills calling for the creation of a Korean War memorial. Thursday night, Sen. William Armstrong, R-Colo., introduced a bill, identical to the Parris bill, in the U.S. Senate. Florio is a Vietnam era vet. Parris was awarded the Purple Heart for his service as an Air Force jet pilot in the Korean War. Armstrong, a former member of the Army National Guard is not a veteran of either war.

Try these bills differ with respect to which government agency should manage the project.

Florio's bill calls for the Department of Interior to build the monument on federal land, with funding to come from the department of interior.

Parris' bill calls for the American Battle Monuments Commission, a federal agency created in 1923, to arrange for erection of the memorial in Washington or its environs, with funding to come from any future federal budget.

According to Parris aide Mark Robert- son, this bill calls for federal funding of the project, rather than tax deductible donations.

"This is not by any means a criticism of how the Vietnam memorial was handled."

See WAR, Page 11
...War memorial

But in that case the committee raised $11 million and the monument cost $3.5 million, the rest of the money went to overhead. The idea with our bill is that the tax deductions caused a net revenue loss of more than $3 million in the long run. We believe it (a Korean War memorial) can be done more cheaply through federal funds and agencies," Robertson said. "We owe it to the men who died, to their families," says Politano. "As a nation we seem to have forgotten Korea and the men who fought there. That makes me very angry.

Korean veterans were a "different generation," says Thomas Dehne, assistant national adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans in Cincinnati. "I can't really say why Korea has become a forgotten war. We veterans never talked about it much. We seemed to get caught between the glory of World War II and the controversy of Vietnam," Dehne says.

Edward Borcherdt, a Korean War veteran from Washington, also credits Vietnam veterans with the burgeoning effort to create a Korean War memorial. "There is a feeling among Korean veterans that this (the Korean War) is the forgotten war," says Borcherdt, chairman of Korean War Memorial Inc.

"People forget that although the Korean War lasted only three years, almost as many in Korea as were lost in Vietnam," he says. U.S. forces — 5.7 million U.S. servicemen — made up the majority of United Nations forces who fought in Korea. More than 54,000 American servicemen died in Korea. Another 103,284 were wounded during that war.

Representatives of the Disabled American Veterans and American Veterans currently serve on the Korean War Memorial committee, according to Borcherdt. "One of the strengths of the Vietnam Memorial was the participation of veterans and other Americans in the whole process," says Borcherdt. "The land for the Vietnam memorial was donated by the government. The money for this memorial was raised by Americans who wanted to honor those who served in Vietnam. We would like to see the same thing happen for Korean War veterans."

Although no specific plans for a Korean War memorial have been drawn yet, Borcherdt says, the committee would like to see the names of servicemen listed on the monument in a manner similar to that of the Vietnam memorial. "The Vietnam memorial is very moving, a very beautiful thing," he says. "It has become one of the most visited monuments in this city."