Korean War memorial: questions continue, congressional probe is needed

WASHINGTON

Attorney General Hinojosa is a colonel in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He served in the Army during the Korean War. Like millions of other Americans, he feels the pain and loss of the war he can hardly believe they are his own.

He was ready to help when he saw an appeal from a veteran's association newsletter asking for contributions to a Korean War memorial fund. It said that if he sent as much as $25, he would get not only the satisfaction of helping, but also a cassette recording of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's famous farewell speech.

So Colonel Hinojosa sent in his $25, and eventually got back his cancelled check. That was more than three months ago. He has not received any other acknowledgment.

"When you give a dollar to the Heart Fund, or the Red Cross, or something," he says, "you get a MacArthur tape, or thanks, or something.

The colonel is one of thousands who have sent money to a fundraising group that continued to use the name of the National Committee for a Korean War Memorial, although that committee lost its corporate status last September in the District of Columbia.

Over a year ago, I got a soliciting letter from the committee. I assumed that it was because I had written an earlier column supporting the idea of a Korean War memorial. I was wrong. My name had merely come up on one of many lists used by the committee's mass-mail fund-raising agency.

The letter was a classic example of commercial fund-raising literature. It used the name of a retired major general. Its computerized prose made it seem the general himself had typed out the appeal. It, too, promised a MacArthur cassette for a $25 donation. It was styled to make the non-donor feel like an unpatrician cheapskate.

I piqued my interest. I looked into the committee and wrote another column, suggesting that "Not everyone who would like to see Korean veterans honored is a MacArthur worshipper. Douglas MacArthur, and not everyone who might contribute is receptive to the high-pressure tactics that pay off so big in political fund-raising."

That in turn provoked response from many directions. I heard from contributors, from would-be contributors, from those who had done business with the officers of the committee. I felt compelled to investigate further, and every answer I found opened more questions.

Eventually I had a stack of information that filled two briefcases. Much of it was bearable. But much of it was solid data from government records.

Several federal agencies were interested in the committee. None had taken any action, except the District of Columbia, which revoked the committee's corporate status last year because it failed to file the required financial reports. That in turn raised questions about a "reincorporation." It is operating under a tax-exempt donations, a matter subject to Internal Revenue Service ruling.

The committee had solicited funds in Maryland, and for a time in Virginia without legal registration. Whether it properly registered in many other states where it is required is uncertain.

It used a mail-drop address in downtown Washington, but donations never got to that address. They were picked up at the post office, sorted and turned over to an escrow agent, purportedly as a security measure. But the committee also solicited funds that did not move through this protective route.

When I looked into this last spring, the committee's director, Mr. LaFaro, also has been called its president and chairman, was running in a Minnesota congressional primary. In the same week he was defeated there, the committee was holding a splashy public relations and fund-raising rally near Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

It sent to previous contributors invitations saying "Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, former President Gerald R. Ford, Senator Paul Laxalt, Mr. Edwin Meese, Senator Jeremiah Denton and the Board of Directors... cordially invite you."

"Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, former President Gerald R. Ford, Senator Paul Laxalt, Mr. Edwin Meese, Senator Jeremiah Denton and the Board of Directors... cordially invite you...

"It was a simple clerical error. And I apologize for it." But in the very next sentence, he asked for recipients to pressure Congress for backing — and, inevitably, be appealed for another contribution.

Since last spring's splash of publicity, the committee has acquired a new president and reincorporated under another name, as a Korean War Memorial, Inc. It is operating out of its fifth mail address since its founding three years ago.

It has continued to send out mail under the original name, as if nothing had ever happened. Under the new president's name, a new solicitation went to previous donors saying, "When the chips were down, Korean veterans did not quit. Neither can we. Help us, and lead the way."

Some of the political and military figures whose names have been used by the committee for fund-raising are upset over what they have learned. The Veterans Administration, which has no direct jurisdiction over the matter, tells a reporter that it is "monitoring" the situation, and is "concerned that alleged improprieties of the committee may hamper the fulfillment" of the goal of building a memorial. Postal, IRS and other government authorities that do have jurisdiction will say nothing publicly about their investigations.

The fund raisers continue to press for congressional approval of a memorial, which they think would give a stamp of official backing to their solicitations. What is called for, in the absence of action by other agencies, is a thorough congressional investigation — of charity fund-raising in general, and the Korean war memorial effort in particular.

"Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, former President Gerald R. Ford, Senator Paul Laxalt, Mr. Edwin Meese, Senator Jeremiah Denton and the Board of Directors... cordially invite you."

"It was a simple clerical error. And I apologize for it."

"But in the very next sentence, he asked for recipients to pressure Congress for backing — and, inevitably, be appealed for another contribution."

Since last spring's splash of publicity, the committee has acquired a new president and reincorporated under another name, as a Korean War Memorial, Inc. It is operating out of its fifth mail address since its founding three years ago.

It has continued to send out mail under the original name, as if nothing had ever happened. Under the new president's name, a new solicitation went to previous donors saying, "When the chips were down, Korean veterans did not quit. Neither can we. Help us, and lead the way."

Some of the political and military figures whose names have been used by the committee for fund-raising are upset over what they have learned. The Veterans Administration, which has no direct jurisdiction over the matter, tells a reporter that it is "monitoring" the situation, and is "concerned that alleged improprieties of the committee may hamper the fulfillment" of the goal of building a memorial. Postal, IRS and other government authorities that do have jurisdiction will say nothing publicly about their investigations.

The fund raisers continue to press for congressional approval of a memorial, which they think would give a stamp of official backing to their solicitations. What is called for, in the absence of action by other agencies, is a thorough congressional investigation — of charity fund-raising in general, and the Korean war memorial effort in particular.

"Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, former President Gerald R. Ford, Senator Paul Laxalt, Mr. Edwin Meese, Senator Jeremiah Denton and the Board of Directors... cordially invite you."

"It was a simple clerical error. And I apologize for it."

"But in the very next sentence, he asked for recipients to pressure Congress for backing — and, inevitably, be appealed for another contribution."

Since last spring's splash of publicity, the committee has acquired a new president and reincorporated under another name, as a Korean War Memorial, Inc. It is operating out of its fifth mail address since its founding three years ago.

It has continued to send out mail under the original name, as if nothing had ever happened. Under the new president's name, a new solicitation went to previous donors saying, "When the chips were down, Korean veterans did not quit. Neither can we. Help us, and lead the way."

Some of the political and military figures whose names have been used by the committee for fund-raising are upset over what they have learned. The Veterans Administration, which has no direct jurisdiction over the matter, tells a reporter that it is "monitoring" the situation, and is "concerned that alleged improprieties of the committee may hamper the fulfillment" of the goal of building a memorial. Postal, IRS and other government authorities that do have jurisdiction will say nothing publicly about their investigations.

The fund raisers continue to press for congressional approval of a memorial, which they think would give a stamp of official backing to their solicitations. What is called for, in the absence of action by other agencies, is a thorough congressional investigation — of charity fund-raising in general, and the Korean war memorial effort in particular.

"Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, former President Gerald R. Ford, Senator Paul Laxalt, Mr. Edwin Meese, Senator Jeremiah Denton and the Board of Directors... cordially invite you."

"It was a simple clerical error. And I apologize for it."

"But in the very next sentence, he asked for recipients to pressure Congress for backing — and, inevitably, be appealed for another contribution."

Since last spring's splash of publicity, the committee has acquired a new president and reincorporated under another name, as a Korean War Memorial, Inc. It is operating out of its fifth mail address since its founding three years ago.

It has continued to send out mail under the original name, as if nothing had ever happened. Under the new president's name, a new solicitation went to previous donors saying, "When the chips were down, Korean veterans did not quit. Neither can we. Help us, and lead the way."

Some of the political and military figures whose names have been used by the committee for fund-raising are upset over what they have learned. The Veterans Administration, which has no direct jurisdiction over the matter, tells a reporter that it is "monitoring" the situation, and is "concerned that alleged improprieties of the committee may hamper the fulfillment" of the goal of building a memorial. Postal, IRS and other government authorities that do have jurisdiction will say nothing publicly about their investigations.

The fund raisers continue to press for congressional approval of a memorial, which they think would give a stamp of official backing to their solicitations. What is called for, in the absence of action by other agencies, is a thorough congressional investigation — of charity fund-raising in general, and the Korean war memorial effort in particular.