Relatives of Waianae war hero sought

By Bob Krauss

Adviser Columnist

The son of a Marine Corp major who won the Silver Star on Heartbreak Ridge during the Korean War in 1951 is looking for relatives of a Waianae dealer who won the Medal of Honor there.

Hai Barker of Dallas, Texas, just arrived from a trip to Korea where, he said, he was the first foreigner to visit the famous battle site in the demilitarized zone.

He said he has tried without success to find the relatives of PFC Herbert K. Piliau, whose heroism on Sept. 17, 1951, during the month-long battle of Heartbreak Ridge is well known among the folklore in Hawaii.

Piliau remained behind and single-handedly covered the withdrawal of his unit, which was under savage attack by North Korean troops. He fought with his trench knife and bare fists until overcome by sheer weight of numbers.

When Heartbreak Ridge was taken by U.S. forces, Piliau's comrades counted 40 enemy dead in the area where he fought.

Barker said he became interested in Heartbreak Ridge because his father had always told him how he won the Silver Star there.

"In August of 1979 I finally wrote to the Marine commandant to find out more about my dad," said Barker, a carpenter. "The Marines sent back the commemoration for Dad's Silver Star.

"He made three attempts by helicopter under heavy fire to rescue a Marine pilot shot down in enemy territory." Barker said he kept writing letters until he got in contact with the 23rd Infantry Assn., Korean Branch, made up of veterans who fought on Heartbreak Ridge.

He was invited to attend their annual meeting in 1982. There he met about 60 men who had attended his father's funeral in 1981 and repeatedly over the ridge while enemy artillery and sniper fire raked the area. The rescue attempt failed but the elder Barker returned unharmed.

His son became so interested in the battle, one of the fiercest of the Korean War, that he has been planning a Korean War Memorial in his town of Macedon, N.Y., as a memorial to heroes like his father and PFC Piliau.

"We tried to bury it but we couldn't dig into the rock," said Barker. "So I threw the Purple Heart over the ridge where it drops about 600 feet. The South Korean soldiers clapped. They said it was an honorable thing to do."

Barker said he has to go back to Dallas tomorrow and would like to make contact with Piliau's relatives if possible. He can be reached at the Airport, Holiday Inn Hotel, 8360961.