Another war monument is needed ‘to rectify an old injustice’

WASHINGTON—In our nation’s capital, we now have memorials to George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, John F. Kennedy, J. Edgar Hoover and every Union general you ever heard of.

We also honor, in stone or bronze, Susan B. Anthony, Thaddeus Kosciusko, the Marquis de Lafayette and the Comte de Rochambeau, plus assorted causes and heroes significant enough to eternalize but too obscure to mention.

There are monuments commemorating individual Army divisions, and that famous Marine Corps statue looking out, across the city from Arlington.

Anyone who has paid attention in recent months knows that we now have a black Armenian slab of stone recording the names of the dead in our most recent war. With that, it may seem monumental Washington is complete.

In fact, it is not.

Perhaps it is too soon after the emotional controversy about the Vietnam Memorial to risk another one by setting that a different war, in which more than 60,000 Americans lost their lives, remains officially ignored.

But in strict chronology, that recognition is past due.

That war was not a footnote to history books. It is fresh in the memories of millions of us. From June 30, 1950, through July, 1953, more than 5.7 million were in uniform.

The Korean War was not a particularly popular war, either. Although television coverage had not developed adequately to bring it into America’s living rooms every evening, the combat there had more sustained intensity than that in Vietnam. Almost as many Americans were killed, in less than half the time.

There is a generation to which place names like Panmunjom, Chosin, Wanju and Pyongyang became as familiar as Guadalcanal and Kowajalein. Bastogne and Remagen were in World War II. They are just as deeply engrained in the men who marched through them as on.

U.S.A.

HOLD THE CONTROVERSY

Nang and Kae Sank, Bong Son and Dak To are in younger American soldiers.

The contrasts between the Korean and Vietnam wars are many. This country and its young people were in a different mood in the early Fifties. The biggest war was just past, and the example of brothers and friends going off to do their duty was vivid. There was some political argument about it, of course, the Republicans in the 1952 election campaign tried to make it "Truman’s war," and Dwight D. Eisenhower’s promise that if elected, "I shall go to Korea" helped him win.

But objectively, it, like Vietnam, was a war in which this country attempted to prevent the Communist northern half of a divided nation from overthrowing the non-Communist southern half. In Korea, it succeeded. That resemblance and that success encouraged us to believe it was worth trying again in Vietnam.

There, it eventually failed. To the men in them, both wars were equally honorable.

Yet because of the very controversy of Vietnam, the men who died there are now remembered on a plot of ground beside the Lincoln Memorial, and those who loved them have a place to stick their little flags and drop their flowers.

Yet those who served in another more memorable, faraway place are forgotten.

It is possible that that will be changed in the weeks ahead, by the time the 50th anniversary of the truce in Korea comes this July 27.

In the Senate, David Pryor of Arkansas introduced a resolution on that day last year. He spoke of "an opportunity to rectify an old injustice."

"We all remember the Korean war and remember the tears and horrors which accompanied it," he said. (Although he was only 18 when it ended, that was a valid comment; people at home did pay attention, especially in places like Camden, Arkansas.)

"This was a critical period in world history, for the free world was being tested as to how it would react when the freedom of another nation was being threatened. We and other peace-loving nations reacted strongly, bravely and admirably. But in our victory, we suffered great losses. It is these Americans who suffered and died who unquestionably deserve to be memorialized by those of us who continue to reap the benefits of the freedom for which they fought," the senator said.

It is not necessary to extend all this to the Australians who fought in Korea and the Vietnamese who fought against the Americans. It is not necessary to extend this to Japan.

A committee already exists to oversee fundraising, design and construction for a Korean war monument. The pattern of organization is like that for the Vietnam memorial, although the design is likely to be different. No public funds would be spent to construct the memorial. The government would provide a site and maintain it.

When Congress quit before Christmas, Mr. Pryor’s resolution was lost in the confusion. But he had 43 Senate cosponsors, and he intends to reintroduce the measure soon.

His goal is to give such a monument official sanction by the July anniversary of the Korean armistice. "Now that the sons and daughters of those who fought in Korea have grown into adulthood, it is fair and time to honor these defenders of freedom," he told his colleagues.

It should be one of the dominant votes any legislator has to cast this year.