Proposal Touches Off Battle Over Korean War Monument

WASHINGTON, May 5 (AP) — More than 50 years after the Korean War ended, a Federal commission has suggested that the government, instead of a private group, build a monument here to honor veterans of the war.

The American Battle Monuments Commission's recommendation to Congress has angered a private organization that was formed in 1961 and has already raised more than $400,000 for the project.

Michael Panayotopoulos, who said he was a paid consultant to the private group, the National Committee for the Korean War Memorial, said recently he considered the Federal panel's plans "an affront, to say the least."

"It's a sort of interference," he said. "They know of our existence and our plans to build it by public subscription."

2 Bills in Congress

Mr. Panayotopoulos noted that two bills now pending in Congress called for the Federal Government to donate land for a privately built Korean War memorial. One bill, proposed by Senator Rudy Boschwitz, Republican of Minnesota, has 56 sponsors; the other, offered by Representative Charlie Rose, Democrat of North Carolina, has 164 sponsors.

But Col. Frederick Badger, the commission's engineer, said the panel's staff believed it would be best if the Government built the memorial to keep it from becoming mired in any conflicts between competing parties.

"Larry Wright, a commission member, agreed. "This is for people who gave their lives and it should not be the subject of controversy," Mr. Wright said, adding that the commission's staff had done an excellent job building and maintaining other monuments, particularly at cemeteries abroad.

$2.5 Million Request Exceeded

The commission, which notified Congress of its intention earlier this year, will probably ask for about $2.5 million to design funds for the fiscal year 1988, Col. Badger said.

The battle monuments commission, with about 260 employees, is charged with overseeing memorials commemorating Americans who have served their country since the American Revolution.

American veterans of the Korean War, who number as many as five million, are the only veterans of a major war this century without a memorial to commemorate their service, the commission said.

More than 50,000 Americans died in the war, which ended in July 1953 in an armistice between the United Nations command and North Korea.

The most recent to propose veterans' monument in Washington was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a V-shaped slab of black granite near the Lincoln Memorial that was built with $7 million in private funds on Government-owned land.

Goal of Private Group

The private National Committee for the Korean War Memorial has a goal of raising $8.5 million and building the memorial three years after passage of enabling legislation in Congress, Mr. Panayotopoulos said.

Mr. Panayotopoulos acknowledged that there had been a dispute within the private committee and that one of the co-founders had been voted off the board. But he said the situation had been cleared up.

U.S. and Mexico Cooperating

To Restrict Radioactive Stealth

EL PASO, May 5 (UPI) — American officials are installing Geiger counters at every border crossing between this country and Mexico to detect traces of radioactive steel from entering the United States, the authorities say.

Dr. Juan Rauda Esquivel, head of the Juarez branch of the Mexican federal health agency, said plans were nearly complete to establish a low-level nuclear waste dump near the border city where the metal, tainted with cobalt 60, would be buried.

Col. David Larder, chief of the Texas Department of Health, said there would be no United States effort to verify that the site was safe, even though both Juarez and El Paso draw their water from the same underground aquifer.

The Cobalt 60 spill took place in Juarez in December. An electrician reparing a 120-ton industrial machine filled with cobalt 60 in a hospital and sold the cylinder to a Juarez junk yard for $15.