Texan applauds belated drive for Korean war shrine

By Dan Shomon Jr.
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WASHINGTON — Hal Barker of Dallas wanted to honor his father for his service in the Korean war, so he made the first donation to a fund to build a Korean veterans memorial.

On Oct. 28, when President Reagan signed the bill approving a Korean War Memorial, Barker saw at least the beginning of his four-year dream realized.

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"I'm studying Korea as a historian," Barker said. "Everytime I interview a veteran, they ask why they are never mentioned.

The Korean war is the only major U.S. conflict not memorialized in Washington, even though more than 54,000 Americans died in three years of fighting, almost as many as in 10 years of fighting in Vietnam.

House Resolution 2205, approved by a 405-0 vote, has given the American Battle Monuments Commission five years to raise the necessary $5 million to build a memorial in Washington.

No design has been planned, but the memorial would not list the names of the dead like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, because no accurate list exists, said Col. William Ryan of the monuments commission.

Ryan said much of the credit for the effort goes to Barker. "He's been trying for years to get something done about a memorial," Ryan said.

"He did a lot toward passage of the resolution.

"Hal was very instrumental" in the decision to build the monument, said Bill Temple, a disabled Korean war veteran from Pennsylvania who along with Barker and a few others started the memorial fund.

Temple also credited Barker with uncovering the fact that an earlier group that was trying to raise money for the memorial, the National Committee for a Korean War Memorial, was "dead in the water.'

This group raised over $700,000, but none of the money ever went toward the memorial, Ryan and Temple said.

Temple said Barker then found a provision in the charter of the American Battle Monuments Commission that allowed the commission to receive money to build memorials, and it was then that

Barker and Temple started their fund.

The monuments commission already has received $1 million from the Hyundai Corp. of South Korea and additional money from other private donors. In December, a 12-member commission of veterans will be appointed by the president to oversee fund raising for the memorial.

Temple said he was happy at Congress' decision, even though he thought it was long overdue. "I'm sure it will be a belated but nevertheless a catharsis for a lot of Korean war veterans who still really hurt psychologically because they believe their government has forgotten them and their friends who have not come back.

"A nation that can literally let a war slip through its cracks is really in trouble," Barker said. Korea has been considered an insignificant war. "If we didn't do something, it (the building of a memorial) was never going to happen," he said.

"I decided I was going to say thank you in my own way."