Memorial sought for Korean War

By PAMELA KRUGER
Denver Post Correspondent

BOULDER — His father never would talk much about his experience in the Korean War. He is reticent about all matters — that is just the way he is — but his son wanted to know what the war involved and what his father did as a pilot.

A year later, after Hal Barker began his research, he discovered that two national organizations had formed to erect a memorial to the thousands that served in the Korean War.

Barker, a 36-year-old Boulder carpenter, decided to join their effort and head a Colorado chapter.

Although Barker said the Colorado chapter membership consists largely of retired and active military officers who are not allowed to be political activists, he believes his work has furthered the effort to have a memorial constructed in Washington, D.C.

"I correspond with about 250 Korean War veterans and a number of senators and congressmen," he said, adding he believes eventually Congress will set aside land for the construction of a memorial.

Barker never has been in military service and admits he can only hope to "begin to understand" what war entails, but has "a great deal of respect" for his father and other Korean veterans.

"They’re heroes," he said. "Anyone who goes to war is a hero."

A memorial stands for the veterans of every American war, Barker related, except the Korean War. And Barker said all he wants Congress to do is set aside land for a memorial. The veterans will pay for its construction, and, in fact, already have raised $400,000 for the purpose.

But Barker said the kind of memorial he envisions would symbolize the costs of war, not romanticize it.

"I’m not a veteran, but all the individuals I’ve talked to who are don’t see ‘umph’ in it," he said. "Only a deadening feeling."

"War is bad," he added. "I don’t think you’ll find any veteran who says war is good."

About 55,000 men were killed in the Korean War, while some 100,000 were maimed, Barker said. He has been researching the war in the hopes of writing a book about it.

Barker, who moved to Boulder in 1977, traveled around the country as the son of a U.S. Marine officer. Despite Barker’s research on the war and efforts to have a memorial constructed, his father, 64, still does not speak about his experiences. "That’s just not the way he is," Barker said, adding he is reticent on all matters, even with his wife.

Barker noted the Korean War is similar to the Vietnam War in that both "are somewhat darkened. It is not a clear-cut triumph of good over evil" as was World War II.

The U.S. fought China and North Korea in part to prevent what some said was China’s attempt to make all of Korea a communist country. Korea currently is divided into two areas, communist North Korea and South Korea.

Barker believes holding reunions among Korean War veterans is not enough to commemorate their actions. A memorial should stand to honor the men who served in the war, which started in 1950.