By FRANK ROSSI

Picking up the pieces of war

Bill Temple, 50, reaches for his wallet and draws out a scratched plastic sleeve like the kind you might keep your baby’s picture in. In the sleeve is a segment of a $1 bill. The name “Stone Miller” is written on it. Thirty-eight years ago on a boat to hell, Bill Temple and four boot camp buddies talked quietly because what they had done — volunteered to fight in Korea — was starting to set in and they had fear.

Temple was pulled off the front and sent to a hospital. Besides the frostbitten, still he fought. After four months in battle, Bill Temple doesn’t look so, but I’m going to do whatever I have to do because...because...I want a memorial. I want a memorial because...because...I want a memorial. I want a memorial in my life — Chinese troops.

He was shot in the left leg in a battle in South Korea. In North Korea he was wounded again, took shell fragments in both legs and was sent back into action, where his feet got frostbitten. Still he fought.

“Look,” he says, “when we were cut off and we were getting hit on a hill. The whole valley in front of us was covered with — I never saw so many troops in my life — Chinese troops.

“We beat them off and they came on and we beat them off and they came on. We threw air strikes on them. Our tanks held out as long as they could in the valley, then they left.” The Chinese and North Korean soldiers played eerie tunes on bugles and shepherd pipes to drive the men on the hill away.

After four months in battle, Bill Temple was pulled off the front and sent to a hospital. Besides the frostbite, he hadn’t slept for six days and everyone he had known in Korea had been killed. There had been the bugles and pipes.

No outrunning war

Temple had had a disassociated reaction, the Army said. He finished the war as a quartermaster. But for Temple the war never finished. He tried to outrun it; he wasn’t just wounded, part of him was killed.

He crisscrossed the country, he says, the way other people go out for a pack of cigarettes. For work, he picked lettuce in California and apples in Washington; and when the war came on him, he went somewhere else.

In the end he came back to Bryn Mawr and the war came with him. A couple of months ago he was reading about how the 30th anniversary of the end of the Korean War was July 27 and how some people were trying to get money and land in Washington for a monument.

Fifty-four thousand Americans were killed in Korea in 37 months. And now, after 30 years, somebody finally realized that the veterans from World War II and Vietnam had their monuments in Washington but that Korean veterans had nothing.

Bill Temple doesn’t look 50. More like 40. He’s thin with long hair and a mustache. His eyes, though, are old. “Look,” he says, slightly embarrassed because his voice is breaking, “we’ve lost a war through the cracks. We’ve lost a war through the cracks.

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“Look, I want a memorial. I’m going to see it through. I’m no leader, but I’m going to do whatever I have to because.

The tears flow

He’s ashamed now because his mouth opens and no words come out and the tears have started. It’s the piece of a dollar bill he carries. “…because of those guys in my wallet, man,” he says.

He tells of the dream he had weeks ago. ”I went to Washington. It was on a very early train. There was a Korean War memorial and I knew from what I had read in the paper that the memorial was exactly like the Vietnam Memorial.

I got down there just at dawn and I sat down by the Washington memorial and I could see vague outlines of our memorial but I didn’t want to approach it. It was like, I don’t know, I didn’t want to approach it. And when I did I had some names I wanted to look for. All the names were upside down.

“They were on little swivels, and I went through 54,000 names. It’s a dream now, remember. I turned them over and up and down. There’s Miller, there’s Miller, you know, Riley, Hunky, a lot of guys — some guys I didn’t even know had been killed. And I got to the end, which was laborious, and I was sweating and I turned to look back.

“The names were all upside down again. They had swiveled upside down.

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