World War II has been burned into the popular memory as the last good war, as a crusade of the forces of right crushing evil on the ancient battleground of Europe.

Vietnam is remembered as the steaming jungle war that flashed back to sear America with wounds that are just beginning to heal.

And Korea, like the middle child, stands neglected, without an identity, unrecognized. It is not included in our collection of easily retrieved images; there is no Korean counterpart to the invasion at Normandy or the retreat from Saigon. Was there a war in Korea? Some call it a police action, and others use semantic sleight of hand to reduce it to a conflict.

Former Army medic Tony Zdanavage was wounded in Korea, won the Purple Heart there, and buried six men in its soil. He remembers them and the rest of the 54,235 Americans who died there, and he believes the rest of the nation should find a place in its memory for the "forgotten warriors."

Zdanavage began a single-handed campaign out of his Salem Township home last summer to convince Congress to erect a memorial to Korean veterans. His letters and bumper stickers have sparked enthusiasm, and his fervor is spreading across the country.

Zdanavage makes a solid argument that a memorial is long past due, but honoring veterans for their valor in the early 1950s is only one reason to build it. The war that evokes memories and emotions in old soldiers can teach lessons to all of us.

Korea was the first American war in which political strategy mattered as much as military maneuvers; it was the first battle in which we had more destructive might than we were willing to use. The tensions of the Cold War had to be factored into the heated fighting, and although the deaths were dealt in tiny Korea, the world was at risk. That has not changed.

The Summer Olympics will be held in South Korea in 1988, and the world will surely take a moment to remember days when the fields of play were battle zones. Zdanavage would like to see a national monument dedicated to Korean veterans by that summer.

Even though it is long overdue, the timing would be very good.