

Memorial Lionizes 'Forgotten' Freedom Fighters

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 8, 1997 -- Four combat veterans stared at four powerful words etched into the shiny black granite wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

"Freedom Is Not Free," one of the men read aloud.

"You've got that right," another responded.

They stood for a few moments, looking at a list of the number of those killed, wounded, missing in action and held prisoner of war cut into stone near the Pool of Remembrance. Finding the numbers startling, the men shook their heads in disbelief, muttered a few soft-spoken words, then slowly ambled down the hill. Their reflections intermingled with thousands of support troops' faces etched into the granite wall.

The men's reflections also intermingled with those of the 19 larger-than-life, stainless steel statues of poncho-clad soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen -- the centerpiece of the memorial. Doctors, nurses, medics, truck drivers, supply specialists, cooks and all the other support troops are represented on the wall.

"Millions of people from all over the world have visited this memorial since it opened on July 27, 1995, the 42nd anniversary of the cease fire," said National Park Service ranger John Lockwood.

Lockwood said the Korean War (1950-1953) is often referred to as "the forgotten war." He noted South Koreans suffered more casualties than all the other 17 U.N. countries fighting in the combined force.

According to DoD statistics, 33,652 Americans died in combat with 3,262 dying from accidents and illnesses, a total of 36,914. A total of 103,284 service members were wounded. There were 7,140 Americans held prisoner; 4,418 returned, 2,701 died in captivity and 21 refused repatriation. More than 8,000 American service members are still missing. More than 1.5 million American men and women served in the first U.N. combat operation.

"Korean War veterans love the monument," Lockwood said. "Occasionally American veterans bump into South Korean visitors and the visitors say, 'Thank you. Thank you for saving my country.' They take photographs with the American veterans and ask for autographs. Sometimes American veterans speak Korean, which makes for a merry meeting -- talking, shaking hands, photographing.

"Once some Americans were talking to Chinese visitors and said, 'You people sent over a human wave ...'
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"The Chinese said, 'Yes, we remember that part,' and they started comparing old notes.

"That's rather touching," Lockwood said.

As Lockwood sees it, "The reflections of the statues in the black granite wall makes a total of 38, as in 38th parallel north or 38-month war.

"We have two Marines. One's carrying an ammunition case about the size of a lunch box and a tripod on his shoulder," Lockwood noted. "You wouldn't think there was enough ammunition in there, but I'm told by veterans that there was. His buddy has a machine gun barrel slung over his shoulder so the two Marines could set up a machine gun emplacement if they needed to."

A statue of an airman wearing a fur hat is the only one not wearing a helmet. "That leads to lots of Army jokes about hard heads," Lockwood said. "He's carrying an antenna to guide in bombing runs. We also have a Navy man and an African-American Army medic. There's also a statue of a South Korean soldier fighting with the American unit. The rest are Army, or the 'poor bloody infantry,' as the British would say."

The soldiers grimly tramp through a field of juniper bushes and marble barriers, which indicate the rough terrain in Korea, Lockwood noted.

The polished black granite wall in which their images reflect has 25,000 images of support troops. They were sand blasted into the wall line-by-line by computer.

"Of course, some of the support staff came under fire, too," Lockwood noted.

There are panels devoted to the medical units, clergy, Navy people dropping off supplies, guys working portable electric generators, K-9 Corps represented by a German shepherd dog, nurses and more.

"Photographs of the faces etched into the wall came from the National Archives and the National Air and Space Museum, he said.

"Some of the people are still alive," Lockwood noted. "Every now and again, someone will say, 'Hey, that's me on the wall.' "

	The statue of a fur-hatted Air Force forward air controller is the only troop not wearing a helmet. Rudi Williams
	A message honoring the 1.5 million Americans who defended "a country they never knew and people they never met" is at the tip of the triangular-shaped field with the 19 stainless steel statues. Rudi Williams
	A statue depicts an infantryman encouraging troops forward at the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Rudi Williams
	The statue of a Marine appears to slog forward at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington. Rudi Williams
	Visitors view the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Rudi Williams
	Millions of people from around the world have visited the Korean War Veterans Memorial since its dedication in 1995. The statues represent soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and a South Korean soldier who fought with the U.S. military. Rudi Williams
	National Park ranger John Lockwood gives a visitor a few details about the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Rudi Williams
	The Korean War Veterans Memorial includes the faces of about 2,500 American troops



who served in the war. Their faces are etched into the black granite wall on the south side of the memorial. The etched mural is based on actual photographs of American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. Rudi Williams