

# ‘The Forgotten War’

## New Gainesville Monument Gives Remembrance to Korean War Veterans

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL STONE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICKA WINTERROWD

**W**hen Betty Ann Means’ husband, Korean War veteran Samuel Means, got sick a few years ago, she began to take him to Alachua County’s military monuments.

Using the Veterans Memorials in Alachua County catalog, they drove around to the 50 memorials in the county, but something was missing.

“We kept looking for Korean War monuments,” the city of Alachua resident said, “and there just weren’t any.”

Indeed, at Kanapaha Park, renamed Veterans Memorial Park in July, brick stacks of varying heights show the losses of major wars from the American Revolution to today.

And along Archer Road, between the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center and 34th Street, a flag memorial was erected in the early 2000s, with plaques at the base listing the 136 names of University of Florida students and Alachua County residents lost in Korea and Vietnam. (Each of the 136 trees around the monument represents one of the fallen soldiers.)

But, the Meanses wondered, what about a memorial that stands alone for Korean War veterans, that recognizes those lost as well as those who survived, in Korea and stateside, for them and their families?

Samuel Means — who was stationed at the 38th parallel, the dividing line between North and South Korea, during the war — passed away in May 2013 at age 79. Afterward, his wife pursued the Korean War monument that she and her husband couldn’t find.

“He’s the one who sort of stimulated this, and then after his

death, I followed up on it,” she said.

About two years later, after much planning and permission from Gainesville’s city government, the monument was erected in July of this year at the base of the Archer Road flag memorial — specifically, at 2672 Old Archer Road.

Means was backed by the organization she and her husband had been part of since its 2002 formation, the Gainesville-based General James A. Van Fleet chapter of the Korean War Veterans Association, and she served as chairperson of the organization’s committee that saw the monument through.

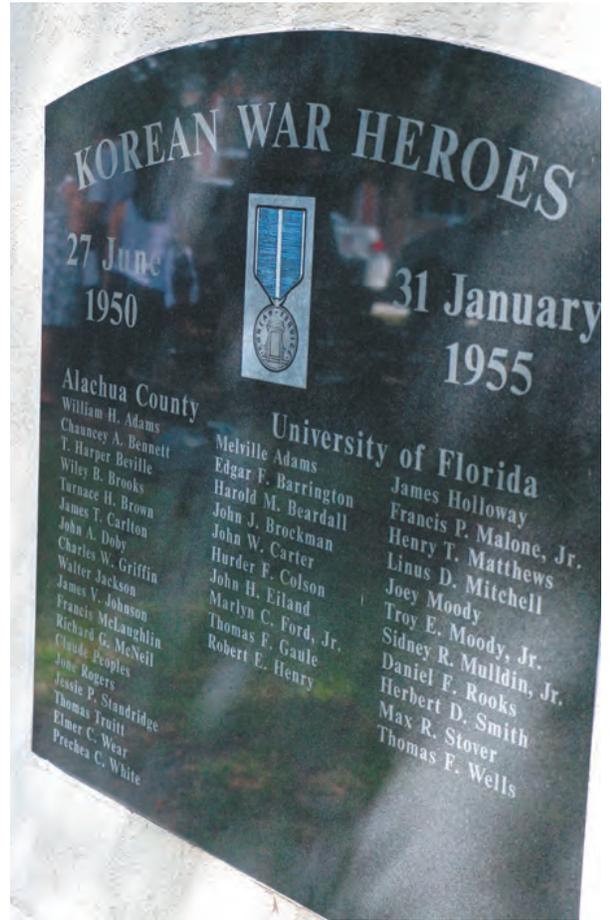
“She did all the heavy lifting,” said Don Sherry, the chapter’s adjutant and a former commander. “She did all the work.”

The polished blue granite monument is vertically rectangular in shape except at the top, which is cut in jagged lines to represent both the mountainous terrain that played a major role in battle strategy, and the staircase separating line at the 38th parallel.

The first inscriptions are “Korea” and the dates of the war: “June 25, 1950 — July 27, 1953.” Next, over an outline of the two Korean countries, the U.S. and South Korean flags cross to show their unity in the conflict.

The logos of the five military branches — Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard — span the monument left to right and are followed by a quote derived from the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.:

“In honor and remembrance of those who served and sacrificed to promote freedom for all. They went to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met. Freedom is not free.”



The back of the monument is unique, as most people will approach it first, because of its location. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the 38th Parallel are noted toward the top, markers specific to the Korean War that are still important to this day.





The monument was made and erected at basically cost by O.T. Davis of O.T. Davis Monument Co. in Gainesville, Sherry said, adding Davis is a Korean War veteran himself and, through the monument's construction, ended up joining the Van Fleet chapter.

Davis said his favorite projects are veteran memorials and that he's worked on several in the area. Once Davis received the final plans from the chapter, he said the Korean monument specifically took about a week to ready and roughly three hours to install.

"It's a lot of pride that goes into it. ... It's a real good feeling knowing that there is a monument in Alachua [County] dedicated to the veterans of Korea," Davis said.

The monument's dedication ceremony took place on July 27 and included a wreath laying, a 21-gun salute, the singing of the National Anthem and "God Bless America" from Brittany Roughton and words from the guest of honor, Eddie Ko.

Ko was just 14 years old when he and other locals told Lt.

Eugene Clark and the U.S. Navy the location of North Korean troop emplacements as the Americans landed on the western coast for the invasion at Inchon in September 1950. With the intelligence, the U.S. was able to encircle the North Koreans and avoid fighting them before recapturing Seoul — the South Korean capital, which had fallen in June — shortly thereafter.

"When the Marines finally landed in Inchon," Sherry said, "these kids met them and explained to them where to go and where not to go. They were a tremendous help."

Ko now helps the U.S. government find the bodies of soldiers missing in action (as of April, 7,846 soldiers were still unaccounted for in Korea, according to the Department of Defense).

Also at the dedication, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Albritton — who Sherry said organized the dedication and installation and is a member of the Van Fleet chapter — led the Pledge of Allegiance.

On the day of the dedication, the first touches of local appreciation were shown. One attendee, for instance, ap-



proached Means to tell her that his uncle had been killed in the Korean War.

“He was very excited,” Means said of the nephew seeing the new monument, “because his uncle was one of the names (of those killed in the war) on the back of the flag monument.”

Means said she has also seen two flower bouquets laid at the base and has received calls from veterans saying they’ll have another place to take their grandchildren.

“Another veteran said that he goes out and volunteers at the VA,” she said, “and he said he salutes the monument every single day that he goes.”

### ‘THE FORGOTTEN WAR’

The Korean War, often nicknamed “the forgotten war,” was called a “police action,” not a war, by President Harry Truman.

“The Korean War veterans are the unknown veterans,” said Davis, who served in the Mediterranean Sea aboard the aircraft carrier USS Lake Champlain during the war. “Nobody has ever paid any attention to them. They are a forgotten group. They’re almost like the Vietnam [veterans].”

Sherry agreed: “Any Korean War veteran will tell you that it really was the forgotten war.”

The fighting started when North Korea, supplied with arms from the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea with the intention of creating a single communist Korea.

The U.S. and other United Nations countries came to South Korea’s defense, with 41 sending equipment and aid and 16 sending troops, according to CNN. But 90 percent of the troop total came from the U.S.

“We had just disarmed our armies and sent millions of men home to their families and mothballed the fleets and put everything away, saying, ‘Now, we’ve got peace in our time,’” Sherry said. “And guess what: Here comes another.”

When Sherry was still in high school in Massachusetts, the reality of the conflict rang close to home. Sherry attended the funeral for a young man who had graduated

shortly before him. Other recent graduates, who were home on leave from Korea, also attended and spoke to classes at the high school about their experiences.

China joining North Korean forces in October 1950 moved the conflict toward an overall stalemate. Eventually, after the election of President Dwight Eisenhower, who had campaigned on ending the war, and after two years of ceasefire negotiations, the two Korean countries agreed to a truce on July 27, 1953.

The truce, though, was not a permanent treaty for peace, and the two Koreas, which do sometimes test the other side with small military actions, are still divided today by a demilitarized zone between them.

Though the Korean War was only three years, the estimated death toll climbed to almost 5 million, with more than half that figure being civilians, according to the History Channel.

Of the dead, nearly 37,000 were Americans, with another 100,000-plus wounded.

The National Archive and Records Administration lists Florida's dead at 577, many whose remains were never found. Two of those still missing are Alachua County residents Sgt. Jone Rogers, who was killed in action in 1950, and Sgt. Elmer Clyde Wear, who died in 1951 after almost two months of imprisonment by the North Koreans.

Of the 5.7 million Americans who served in Korea and elsewhere during the war, 1.74 million are estimated to be living, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Most are in their 80s and 90s.

"I'm 80 years old, and when [the Van Fleet chapter is] having a meeting and something comes up, they all say, 'Hey, get the kid,'" said Sherry, who joined the Air Force in January 1954 but is still considered a Korean War-era veteran. "They call me

the kid, and I'm 80. So these guys are up there [in age]."

Nevertheless, the chapter's 80 members (Korean veterans) and 20 associate members (spouses and supporters) are still active, always accepting the invitation to broaden the sense of patriotism at events around the county: performing honor-guard duties at business openings and local veterans' funeral services; participating in every veteran holiday; and hosting an annual dedication for World War II veterans, which didn't take place this year because of the era's dwindling numbers.

The Van Fleet chapter "very well might be the most active veteran organization in the area and have helped thousands of fellow veterans throughout the years," Jim Lynch, a retired director of Alachua County Veteran Services, wrote in the Gainesville Sun in 2013.

"Any patriotic thing people ask them to do, they do it," Means added.

But they also recognize that it will be the 7.1 million living Vietnam-era veterans who will be stepping up to the plate next.

"We're on the way out," Sherry said, "so the Vietnam War veterans are going to come more into being now because they're at the age we were 10 to 20 years ago."

Local Vietnam veterans are planning to install a similar monument next to the new one for the Korean War, and there's also talk about putting a sidewalk around the monuments and flagpole and possibly some benches, he said.

"It means a lot to all of the veterans because ... it was called the forgotten war," Sherry said of the monument, noting that after his four years in the Air Force, people back home in Massachusetts didn't notice he had been gone.

"I said, 'Yeah, I was serving during the Korean War,' and they said, 'Oh yeah, that's right. We did have a war over there, didn't we?'" ■

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