

D.C. war memorial fixed

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The efforts of one veteran will light the way toward respect for those who fought and died in the Korean War. Township resident Louis McAfee, a 77-year-old U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War, has traveled to Washington, D.C., three times with his wife, Diana, to view the Korean War Veterans Memorial. During his last trip a year ago, a World War II veteran recommended McAfee view the Korean War Memorial at night. "I got there, and 70 to 80 percent of the lights were burnt out," said the former staff sergeant. "I was totally disappointed, to say the least." To further his frustration, when McAfee inquired about the lack of lighting, a National Parks Department employee told him the Korean War Memorial was "not a priority at this time." McAfee, who witnessed untold brutality and bravery during his 14-month stint in Korea from 1950 to 1951, began calling state and federal lawmakers upon his return home. He contacted about six elected officials, but only Congressman Jason Altmire responded and took action to have the lights repaired. "Based on his contact with me, he must be very veteran oriented," McAfee said. "The fact that these other big wheels didn't call me about this says a lot." McAfee said Altmire contacted the U.S. Department of the Interior regarding the lack of lighting at the memorial. A letter to Altmire from the department's regional director, Joseph M. Lawler, explained the underground infrastructure responsible for the fiber optic lights "experiences water-intrusion problems."

In his Oct. 27, 2007, letter, Lawler also said one light source at the memorial serves many outlets, "so one problem can cause many dark features." He said staff members were working on the lights and an engineering study on the subject was under way. "We hope that your constituent's next visit to the Korean War Veterans Memorial will be more enjoyable," Lawler said. Meanwhile, McAfee engaged in his own mission to get action on the lighting issue by contacting the regional and national Korean War Veterans Associations. The national association replied it was aware of the problem and had been trying for two years to have the situation rectified, but to no avail. The association said the Interior Department said the association would have to raise the roughly \$1.1 million to repair the lighting problem. McAfee said both the national and Western Pennsylvania Korean War veterans associations asked for a copy of Lawler's letter to Altmire, which both groups published in their respective newsletters. "So it got to the members that the lights were out down there," McAfee said. He took the poor lighting personally because of the carnage he witnessed during his younger days as a machine gun operator with the 68th Gun Battalion in Korea. "I don't want anyone to forget the Korean War," McAfee said, "especially the fallen. The mutilation, the brutality I saw over there; it's always stayed with me." Then last month, McAfee got a letter from Altmire that restored his faith in democracy and his belief that government officials appreciate the sacrifices of soldiers of the Korean War. "All the lights at the Korean War Veterans Memorial are working now," Altmire wrote in his letter. "I want you to know how pleased I am that this situation has been resolved and that the monument is being given the deference it deserves." Enclosed in Altmire's correspondence was a copy of a letter from the National Park Service stating the problems with the fiber optic lighting were repaired. "As Mr. McAfee pointed out," said the park service letter, "lighting is an especially important part of the design of this memorial, so when any lights are out of order, the absence is really felt."

Altmire said Monday he immediately took up McAfee's cause when he heard about it last year. "This memorial pays tribute to the nearly 7 million veterans who bravely fought to protect freedom in South Korea, and we have a responsibility to ensure it remains fully functional," Altmire said. "I am glad to report that all lighting issues have been addressed, and I am appreciative of Mr. McAfee for bringing this to my attention." McAfee said he will probably visit Washington, D.C., again in the spring, and he looks forward to enjoying the Korean War Veterans Memorial in its fully illuminated splendor. He is proud and slightly amazed at the success he and Altmire had in bringing the lights back. "Just think, one representative and one Korean War veteran took on the government and got the job done," said McAfee, who is retired from the retail management business. He sent copies of the letters from Altmire and the parks department to

the regional and national Korean War veterans associations, both of which were thrilled and amazed a single small-town veteran could accomplish so much. McAfee speaks simply of his motivation for taking on the government on behalf of his fellow veterans. "I strive to keep the memory alive for those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Korean War."