

Staten Island Advance

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Halloran's Closedown

After all the efforts to retain it, Halloran VA Hospital is about to close down, a victim of a chain of circumstances.

This time we can see no way of keeping Halloran here, even in part.

While the suddenness of the latest move will shock veterans and persons employed at the institution, there seems to be no way out.

The reason for the action is simple. The expanding Air Force took over the former Sampson naval base, where the state had hospital facilities for nearly a thousand mental defectives. Already short of beds for these patients, the state has been forced to demand the full area at the Willowbrook institution for the use for which it was originally intended.

In a few weeks the federal veterans agency will have moved out and the state will be rushing necessary adjustments for the full-scale care of mental defectives.

No one had expected Halloran to last indefinitely as a veterans facility, but few had expected the closedown so quickly.

But there is no time to bemoan the passing of Halloran, for all its brilliant record during the war and the years that followed.

One of the basic problems to be met is for the adequate care of Staten Island veterans in need of it.

The Veterans Administration now has only a contact office here. It provides only the first step in procedure veterans must wade through.

With Halloran soon to be gone from the scene, there is a definite need for the establishment of a medical service for veterans in this borough, if only on a part-time basis.

The matter of traveling time enters into this problem. Veterans in need of medical service will have to spend many hours, if not days, in going to other boroughs and areas to arrange and qualify for assistance. The outpatient problem is a particularly pressing one.

A regional service setup may work well in other cases, but Staten Island because of its transportation problem needs special attention for adequate care of veterans.

Steps should be taken to keep the situation from becoming impossible for Staten Island veterans.

HALLORAN Halloran Set
MOVES TO To Evacuate
EVACUATE Its Patients
PATIENTS

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Feb. 15 Deadline Set;
Little Chance Seen
To Rescind Decision

By ALLEN H. PEARSALL

Another retain-Halloran VA Hospital move started today as the facility prepared to meet a six-week evacuation deadline.

There appeared little likelihood that an appeal to keep the hospital would be fruitful, since the decision to return the property to the state's Willowbrook School came yesterday in a joint statement from Gov. Thomas E. Dewey and Veterans Administrator Carl M. Gray Jr.

Plans call for the discharge of 470 patients and reassignment of 940 employees by Feb. 15, so that the facility can return to state control April 1. The second six-week period is needed to convert the VA return to the care of mental patients.

Lease to Dec. 31, 1952. The announcement that the Veterans Administration would relinquish its 20 per cent of the Willowbrook area was unexpected since the VA lease runs until Dec. 31, 1952.

Granting of the lease now being surrendered was won last April after a month-long fight by Island civic and veteran leaders. And another fight loomed today.

In Washington, Congressman James J. Murphy declared "No deal should be made... because of the present world situation," and prepared to reintroduce his bill calling for federal purchase of Halloran property for \$25,000,000.

The original bill, drawn in 1949, died in committee because the VA was not interested in buying the site from the state.

To Confer With Dewey

In the state capital, the Island's three representatives were scheduled to confer with Dewey today on the reasons for the step.

Assemblyman Edward V. Curry, in a statement in behalf of State Senator John M. Braisted Jr. and Assemblyman William N. Reidy, as well as himself, declared before the party that they did not know what had prompted the decision.

"We like many others who worked for the retention of Halloran Hospital only last year, hoped that the matter had been settled, at least until the present lease expired in 1952," the assemblyman said. "We were shocked to learn of this latest decision, which may seriously retard the recovery of 450 patients and bring hardship to over 900 employees, the majority of whom is living on Staten Island."

Prepare for Transfers

Meanwhile, Halloran officials readied for the transfer of patients as the first step. Just when the actual transfers will begin depends upon the availability of space in other hospitals, but the move will start "as soon as possible."

Willowbrook State School officials also are standing by for further orders concerning the changeover, scheduled to add 960 patients, most-

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by adults, to its present 2,047 patient census.

Need for additional facilities was created because the hospital at the former Sampson Naval Base has been taken from the state by the Air Force.

The VA expects that the transfer of Halloran patients will involve only slightly more than 200 men. All of paraplegic veterans will be sent to other hospitals, as yet not named, and the 76 tuberculosis patients will have a choice of transfer to VA institutions in Batavia or Summit, N. Y., or Farmingham, Mass. Of the 315 general, medical and surgical patients now at Halloran, most will have completed treatment by the Feb. 15 deadline; those who have not will be transferred.

Halloran staff personnel will be reassigned to nearby VA hospitals and reassembled at a new hospital, probably in East Orange, N. J. Civilian employees may have an opportunity to transfer, but their status has not yet been clarified.

The next six weeks will be devoted to transfers of patients and personnel, followed by the redistribution of VA supplies and equipment to other installations.

Renovation Planned

The period between Feb. 15 and April 1 also will be spent readying the Halloran buildings for use by the Willowbrook School, including redecorating, equipping and furnishing.

Willowbrook now has a staff of 581, including 337 ward workers. While the increase in the number of patients will not tax the facilities, built to handle 3,100, an increase of perhaps 200 employees will be needed after April 1.

Willowbrook has operated as a state mental school since Jan. 1, 1947, when it took over 40 per cent of the property used during World War II as Halloran General Hospital. Additional land and buildings were added under the agreement reached last April.

The fight to prevent the establishment of the Willowbrook School nipped the attempt to retain Halloran as a VA facility.

But in 1938, Island opposition to the school was overruled by Mayor La Guardia and the Board of Estimate, and three years later the \$12,000,000 project was constructed.

Retention Committee Formed

Arguments to make Halloran a permanent fixture began in 1949, two years after the Willowbrook was set up, and resulted in the formation of the United Veterans Committee of Richmond for the Retention of Halloran VA Hospital.

Chief points were Halloran's central location in the New York City area and its \$6,800,000 annual payroll.

When the Veterans Administration announced last March that it would cease operation of Halloran three months later, the storm of protest streamed from the Island to Washington and Albany. In April, Gov. Dewey told an Island delegation that the VA had been granted a lease until Dec. 31, 1952.

Both VA and state mental hygiene department officials feel that further argument to retain Halloran would be to no avail. They point out that the need for the entire Willowbrook institution by the state was created by a military emergency, caused by the Air Force taking over the Sampson hospital facilities.