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Protests Against Halloran Dispersion Pouring In

By DON SHEARD

A great volley of protests went out today to Albany and Washington in a last-ditch fight to save 87 paralyzed veterans from being dispossessed from Halloran Hospital or, failing that, from being transferred to hospitals far from their homes and loved ones.

Touched by the pathetic appeals of the 87 paraplegics, heads of veterans organizations and civic leaders, as well as just plain citizens urged the sending of a steady flow of protest wires and letters to President Truman, Gov. Dewey, Gen. Carlyle Gray, chief of the Veterans Administration, and Senators and Congressmen.

It is not much that the paralyzed veterans want. But they emphasize that speed is mandatory, since the Veterans Administration is vacating Halloran Hospital by Feb. 15 and has already begun dispersing the paraplegics.

All that the paralyzed men ask is that they receive treatment under one roof, if not at Halloran, then somewhere nearby, so that they can be close to their families and friends and can keep up the interests which mean so much to morale.

The Veterans Administration asserts military necessity

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Public Rallies Behind Paraplegics in Fight

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dictated the decision to turn Halloran Hospital on Staten Island back to the State, although the VA held a lease on the hospital until Dec. 31, 1952. As part of the deal, the State is surrendering the Sampson Naval Air Base to the Air Forces. The 1,500 elderly mental patients, housed by the State at Sampson, are being moved to Halloran.

The paralyzed veterans have no intention of interfering in a transaction made necessary by military urgency. But they feel they are being "sold down the river" by the Veterans Administration in the orders transferring them to overcrowded Kingsbridge Hospital, Bronx; Cushing Hospital, Far-

mingham, Mass., and McGuire Hospital, Richmond, Va.

The veterans feel, as do officials of the American Legion and other service organizations, that the Veterans Administration was lax in failing to work out a program whereby the paraplegics could be kept under one roof in New York State.

WANT FORT HAMILTON.

Instead of being sent out-of-State or to crowded Kingsbridge Hospital, the crippled veterans have suggested that all of Halloran's paraplegics be transferred to the modern, 22-story Brooklyn Veterans Hospital at Fort Hamilton. They point out that facilities for care of paraplegics could be quickly installed in Brooklyn.

But to this the Veterans Administration has turned thumbs down, asserting Brooklyn Hospital was geared for a fast turn-over of general medical cases.

Typical of the reaction from veterans' groups to the closing of Halloran was this statement from Maurice Stember, New York State Adjutant of the Legion:

"This misfortune to our paralyzed veterans can be traced to the same stumbling and lack of planning which has characterized the Veterans Administration under Gen. Carl R. Gray."

CATHOLIC VETS IN FIGHT.

Terence Rempel, commander of the New York County Chapter of the Catholic War Veterans, said his organization has not only sent wires and letters to Washington but has lodged a formal protest with Gov. Dewey. Rempel added:

"The paraplegics are using only two wings of Halloran and it seems to me that there is ample space for them there until an adequate paraplegic center can be established in New York.

"With the fighting in Korea and the prospect of another war, it was foolish of the Veterans Administration to release Halloran until its lease ran out at the end of 1952.

"The treatment of these paraplegics is directly contrary to the State's policy of giving preferential aid to disabled veterans. Perhaps Gov. Dewey can work out a plan whereby these men can remain at Halloran."

Sidney A. Levy, Brooklyn commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, branded the removal of the paraplegics from Halloran as "a callous thing and definitely unwarranted." He said:

"The closing of Halloran will work a great hardship on those men who have wives and families established in homes in the area of the hospital. It is

not going to help the morale of men now going into service to see crippled veterans getting such a kicking around after they have fought their fight."

Max H. Hershkowitz, New York State Commander of the Jewish War Veterans, said protest telegrams have gone out to both Dewey and Veterans Administrator Gray. He said:

"We feel that the State should give the Veterans Administration an extension of time so that it will not be necessary to move the paraplegics until the new Manhattan Veterans Hospital is completed at the end of 1952."

PROTESTS UNANSWERED.

William O'Neil, first vice-commander, New York State Department of Catholic War Veterans, revealed he had sent protests to both Dewey and Administrator Gray as far back as Jan. 5, but had received no replies.

Just how crushing a blow the closing of Halloran will inflict on the crippled veterans is told by Salvatore "Sam" Panepinto, 24, who, despite his disability, is married, has a young son and has furnished a four-room apartment at 1718 Richmond st., New Dorp, S. I., so he could be near the hospital to receive daily treatment.

Paralyzed when his Army jeep turned over in Germany during the war, Panepinto said:

"The whole thing is unjust. Our morale is shot because the Government is not taking care of us as promised.

"We have wonderful companionships at Halloran and the facilities are the best. It is the only life most of us have known. We were kids when we went off to war. Now we're like this and we have to stick together.

"Then somebody writes out an

order and our lives are smashed.

"How can I be expected to break up all of this and start in all over again without kicking?"

SEES HOME CRUMBLING.

"They're asking me to transfer to Kingsbridge Hospital in the Bronx. How can I travel there every day? It's a long trip and will be very hard on me. I can't break up my home because it is specially fitted because of my disability. I don't know where I could get a home like it in the Bronx."

The Kingsbridge Hospital doesn't pretend to compare to Halloran. All the VA officials promise is that the 55 cases that will be transferred from Halloran to the Bronx will get "adequate medical care." They freely admit that Kingsbridge doesn't have the space, comforts and many of the facilities the men enjoy at Halloran.