

A New Ray of Hope: Vets Speed Fight For Paraplegics

By DON SHEARD

A ray of hope—admittedly slender—came today for the 87 paralyzed veterans who are being shunted from Halloran Hospital on Staten Island and dispersed to three widely-separated institutions far from home and loved ones.

The hope came in the form of a campaign launched by veterans' organizations to establish new quarters on Staten Island where the 87 paraplegics may be treated until the new Manhattan Veterans Hospital is ready to receive them at the end of next year.

The New York County Chapters of the Army and Navy Union, the oldest veterans' organization in the U. S., and the Marine Corps League initiated the move.

Appeal for Public Support

The two groups appealed to other veterans' organizations and the general public to support their plan.

Lawrence Fariello, County Commander of the Army and Navy Union, said:

"The paraplegics at Halloran are one big family that is being destroyed. All veterans' organizations must unite in this fight to preserve the happiness of these paralyzed men."

He pointed out the "lack of vision" in Veterans Administration officials, who abruptly notified the crippled vets, most of whom are doomed to spend their lives in wheel chairs because of shattered spines, that they will all be dispersed by Feb. 15.

The men are being sent to VA hospitals in the Bronx, Framingham, Mass., and Richmond, Va., despite VA pledges that they could stay at spacious Halloran on Staten Island.

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until Dec. 31, 1952, when a new center is scheduled to be opened in Manhattan.

"Many of the men established homes near Halloran so they could have daily treatment. Their health depends on their happiness and their happiness is contingent on their maintaining their friendships," said Fariello, an attorney at 11 Park pl.

"Apparently nobody gave any thought what affect moving the men from Halloran would have on them or their families. They must not be booted around like that."

The support of the Marine Corps League was voiced by John Cole, County Commander who is also the Dep't. of N. Y. Service Officer and Marine Corps League Representative to the Veterans Administration.

"This is a community must and the time has come for all veterans' organizations to get together and take care of the boys," said Cole. "It is a challenge to us. The public and the veterans must organize and show their affection for these suffering men by setting them up under one roof on Staten Island.

"We should not and will not let them down. The time has come when all should unite and step in. If we let them down we will let down the men in Korea."

File Protest with Truman

As other leading veteran organizations filed protests to President Truman, and Gen. Carl R. Gray, Veterans Administrator, six Congressmen, including John J. Rooney of Brooklyn and Frederic R. Coudert of Manhattan, asked the Veterans Administration in Washington for a full explanation of the transferral.

Gov. Dewey and Leo V. Lanning, N. Y. State Director of Veterans Affairs today concluded their own inquiry and found it was "strictly a Veteran Administration problem."

Both were "extremely sympathetic" but because the State had an immediate problem of housing the young and elderly patients who had to give up the facilities requisitioned by the Air Corps at Sampson, N. Y., the State "had no alternative" but to negotiate for the return of Halloran as a mental hospital.

Lanning pointed out that the State has institutions equipped, such as the VA Kingsbridge Hospital, and staffed for the specialized care that the paraplegics require.

The bitterness of the veterans was focused on the lack of long-range planning by the Veterans Administration in Washington, who, they feel, should keep them together at the Ft. Hamilton Hospital, Brooklyn. The original plan was to keep them together at Halloran in two wings until a new center is completed in Manhattan.

A German sniper's bullet smashed the spine of ex-Sgt. George Stewart, 35, in the battle of the Siegfried Line, six and one-half years ago. He has not walked since.

In the last two years he has divided his life between Halloran and his home at 90-14 217th st., Queens Village, where his wife, Anne, and their son, George, 8, live.

He shares the common despondency that has clouded the wards at Halloran.

"I feel there are enough paraplegics in the metropolitan

area, plus those now coming from Korea, to justify a new hospital somewhere in New

York, with adequate facilities care for us now and in the future," he said.

"We could easily be put in the Ft. Hamilton Hospital which would be accessible to the vets here and New Jersey and their families. Kingsbridge Hospital is over-crowded," he said.

Suffering from bed sores, a common complication that adds torture to the paraplegics, he hasn't been home in months.

"Now we must suffer for the lack of planning," he said.