

On-the-Spot Quiz May Delay Ouster Of 71 Paraplegic Vets at Halloran

3 Lawmakers Will Hear Men Affected

By Don Sheard

An on-the-spot inquiry that may lead to a delay of the ouster of the 71 paralyzed veterans from Halloran Hospital until new quarters under one roof can be found, will be conducted today by a Congressman, a State Senator and an Assemblyman.

Rep. Anfuso (D.), of Brooklyn, made a special trip here from Washington to get first hand accounts from the paraplegics, who have been pleading in vain to the Veterans Administration, rather than disperse them to three widely separated institutions.

The men, originally 87, are in the process of being transferred to the Kingsbridge VA Hospital, the Bronx, Cushing Hospital, Framingham, Mass., and McGuire Hospital, Richmond, Va., despite earlier pledges of the VA to keep them at Halloran on Staten Island until the new Manhattan Veterans Hospital is completed late next year.

Anfuso will be joined at Halloran on Staten Island by State Sen. Gittleson (D), who represents the 9th Senatorial District and Assemblyman Corso (D.), of the 20th A.D., both Brooklyn.

'MUST HEAR PARAPLEGICS.'

"We have heard the Veterans Administration side, now we must hear the side of those that will be affected the most, the crippled veterans themselves," Anfuso said.

Accompanying the party will be Robert Moss, executive secretary of the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, 99 Park ave., the spokesman for the paraplegics, who last month petitioned the VA to transfer them en masse to the Ft. Hamilton VA Hospital, Brooklyn, so that they could be near their families and keep their morale sustaining friendships.

Another member of the party will be Joseph Governale, of 178 Central ave., Brooklyn, who with Michael Bodamo, an attorney, head the Independent Citizens Committee for Paraplegic Rights, which was formed to crystallize the hundreds of protests of the average citizen.

PUBLIC BEHIND VETS.

This move, the second by a group of legislators within a week, was hailed by the paraplegics as evidence that the public is solidly behind their fight to retain their group identity.

On Thursday, two Brooklyn Democrats, State Sen. Mario de Optatis and Assemblyman Ryan, introduced a joint resolution in both houses at Albany, calling on Congress to demand that the VA live up to its pledge to maintain the paraplegics at Halloran until Dec. 31, 1952, when the new center is due to be opened at the N. Y. University-Bellevue Medical Center in the East 30's.

Branding the order to transfer the men as a "heartless and ill-conceived measure," the State legislators, who commended the New York Journal-American for its series of articles on the plight of the men and for enlisting public support, said:

"The progress in the rehabilitation of these ailing veterans

will be definitely retarded because of the separation from their loved ones and the lack of adequate and similar facilities in other admittedly overcrowded hospitals."

VET GROUPS IN SUPPORT.

Flocking to the support of the paraplegics were numerous chapters of the American Legion, the Catholic War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Marine Corps League and the Army and Navy Union.

Rabbi Simon G. Kramer, president of the New York Board of Rabbis, composed of 500 spiritual leaders of the Jewish community, was among the many distinguished civic leaders who stepped forward and urged the VA to keep the paralyzed men under one roof.

"New quarters under one roof must be found for them so that they can carry on the group interest developed at Halloran. Breaking up and dispersing them is going to cause untold hardships to a great many of them," he said.

The VA's position is that they were forced to give up their lease because New York State demanded the facilities at Halloran, which is also caring for tubercular and

general medical and surgical veterans cases, because it needs space to house mentally retarded children and senile men and women.

VA ACCUSED OF FAILURE.

They are being currently cared for in the old Navy barracks at Sampson, N. Y., which was requisitioned by the Air Force due to the national emergency.

The paraplegics, who are willing to make further sacrifices, charged the VA with failure to work out a long range program and only ask to be kept together at some other local hospital. Many of them furnished apartments nearby so that they could receive daily treatment.

Jacob Gerhardt, 25, an ex-infantryman, who daily travels from his home at 179 John st., Elm Park, S. I., for treatment, summed up the feelings of his buddies.

"I feel pretty low. I'm supposed to travel to Kingsbridge every day now. It's too congested up there. Here we have a lot of room and a gym to work out in."

Hospitalized for two years, he is now getting physio-therapy and learning to walk with braces and crutch.

"This will set us all back," he added.