

Feb. 5, 1951

Key of Hope for Vets Ft. Hamilton May Take Paraplegics

By DON SHEARD

Paralyzed veterans facing ouster from Halloran Hospital were told today by a high official of the Veterans Administration that the possibility of setting up facilities for paraplegics at Fort Hamilton Hospital in Brooklyn would be fully explored.

The assurance came from Dr. Robert C. Cook, Assistant Chief Medical Director of the VA.

Dr. Cook added that "this of course will take many months, since paraplegics require special facilities and a trained staff such as are available here now only at Kingsbridge VA Hospital in the Bronx."

Dr. Cook's statement came as hopes vanished that the New York Congressional bloc could obtain a 60-day delay in the transfer of the 54 paraplegics remaining at Staten Island's Halloran.

At least 42 of these veterans will be moved to Kingsbridge not later than Feb. 15. The rest will go to two other States.

This first concession by the VA, in their month-old decision to disperse the crippled veterans to Kingsbridge, Massachusetts and Virginia, despite earlier pledges to keep them on Staten Island until the new Manhattan center is opened in December, 1952, was a small comfort.

Many of them furnished apartments for themselves and their families on Staten Island. All will miss the spacious grounds and parking facilities, not available at Kingsbridge and are depressed over the loss of their painfully established friendships.

DELAY IS ADVISED.

Rep. Victor Anuso (D.) of Brooklyn, who led a congressional fight to get a 60-day stay in the eviction and pressed for the conversion of a floor of Ft. Hamilton, asked Dr. Cook if the men should hold any hope of staying on at

Halloran and what they should do with their apartments.

"I would advise them not to break up their homes. We might work out something more satisfactory than present arrangements," he replied.

A special seven-man State legislative committee today was to hear from State Mental Hygiene Commissioner Newton Bigelow on whether or not the State would delay in taking over all the facilities of Halloran, called Willowbrook Hospital by the State, for the use of civilian mental cases.

The State was forced to ask the VA for the return of Halloran by April 1, after the Air Force requisitioned the buildings occupied by mental cases at Sampson, N. Y.

"If we can find our way clear we can postpone the transferral of the mental patients until the status of the paraplegics is fully determined," Bigelow told State Sen. Harry Gittleston, (D.) of Brooklyn.

Reconciled to the certainty that the Veterans Administration would not yield to the hundreds of protests poured in on them by every veteran organization, civic leaders, businessmen and the man in the street, the paraplegics, nevertheless felt they achieved a victory.

All were elated by the country wide support they received in their long fight to keep their group identity and they had the complete assurance of the VA that the facilities at Kingsbridge would be enlarged so that they would receive the same excellent medical care they got at Halloran.

For Peter Yorkus, 26, of Easton, Pa., his transfer to Cushing V. A. Hospital in Framingham, Mass., means that he may never see his buddies at Halloran again. A non-service connected case, he broke his spine after he left the Navy, where he served as a fighter pilot at Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

"I'll be 300 miles more away from home. I get to see the folks about twice a month now but traveling from Cushing will be pretty tough," he said.