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SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 59.

FOURTH REPORT

CONCERNING THE

Aid and Comfort given by the Sanitary Commission

TO

SICK SOLDIERS PASSING THROUGH WASHINGTON.

BY FREDERICK N. KNAPP,
SPECIAL RELIEF AGENT.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 15th, 1862.

TO FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

General Secretary Sanitary Commission.

SIR: My last report bore date of March 21st. In April I went to York river, in the hospital transport service, and was absent from Washington until August. For the first few weeks after I left, Mr. Henry B. Rogers superintended the work of Special Relief, thereby simply laboring still more largely in the field where he had before been working so faithfully and generously.

When Mr. Rogers left, and until my return, Mr. Francis Fowler acted as Special Relief Agent, in connection with the other duties assigned to him. His work during that time, I judge, was eminently humane, judicious, persevering, and efficient. Since my return, I have myself resumed the

general charge of Relief, retaining until recently the assistance of Mr. Fowler, who has labored with untiring patience, and really done by far the larger share of the work.

The main purpose kept in view in this agency has continued to be the same, with enlargement, as that set forth in my first report, viz., to lessen the hardships to which the ignorance of the sick volunteers and their officers of the forms and methods of government make them subject while in the city of Washington; and to provide for certain wants of the volunteers, when detached from their regiments, for which the government arrangements had been inadequate, and which the regular Inspectors of the Commission, in their visits to camps and hospitals, could not attend to.

Practically, the chief duty has been—

First. To supply to the sick men of the regiments arriving here such medicines, food, and care as it was impossible for them to receive, in the midst of the confusion, and with the lack of facilities, from their own officers. The men to be thus aided are those who are not so sick as to have a claim upon a general hospital, and yet need immediate care to guard them against serious sickness.

Second. To furnish suitable food, lodging, care and assistance to men who are honorably discharged from service, sent from general hospitals, or from their regiments, but who are often delayed a day or more in the city before they obtain their papers and pay.

Third. To communicate with distant regiments in behalf of discharged men, whose certificates of disability or descriptive lists on which to draw their pay, prove to be defective,—the invalid soldiers meantime being cared for, and not exposed to the fatigue and risk of going in person to their regiments to have their papers corrected.

Fourth. To act as the unpaid agent or attorney of discharged soldiers who are too feeble or too utterly disabled to present their own claim at the paymaster's.

Fifth. To look into the condition of discharged men who assume to be without means to pay the expense of going to their homes; and to furnish the necessary means, where we find the man is true and the need real.

Sixth. To secure to disabled soldiers railroad tickets at reduced rates, and, through an agent of the railroad station, see that these men are not robbed, or imposed upon by sharpers.

Seventh. To see that all men who are discharged and paid off do at once leave the city for their homes; or, in cases where they have been induced by evil companions to remain behind, to endeavor to rescue them, and see them started with through-tickets to their own towns.

Eighth. To make reasonably clean and comfortable, before they leave the city, such discharged men as are deficient in cleanliness and clothes.

Ninth. To be prepared to meet at once, with food or other aid, such immediate necessities as arise when sick men arrive in the city in large numbers from battle-fields or distant hospitals.

Tenth. To keep a watchful eye upon all soldiers who are out of hospitals, yet not in service; and give information to the proper authorities of such soldiers as seem endeavoring to avoid duty or to desert from the ranks.

Such, in general terms, have been the main objects which have directed the labors of this agency since my last report. I will state in brief some of the results of this labor.

But before turning to details I may say, that the record of these last nine months shows that there was an urgent

necessity for the aid rendered; that without this aid many hundreds or thousands of soldiers would have unavoidably suffered; that although the expense of maintaining this agency has increased, the amount of relief given has more than proportionately increased; and that the results seem fully to justify the care and cost. I may also add, in view of determining upon the course for future action, that the importance of this branch of our service—"Special Relief"—was never more evident than now:—the number of soldiers rightfully claiming such help as we give them was never larger;—our facilities for relieving them never better;—that important changes for securing additional accommodations for comfort and neatness at the Home have been made;—that the co-operation of government officials is more and more free and cordial;—that the Home is more generally known among the regiments and the hospitals;—that our whole system of Relief, at the same time that it is more comprehensive, is more exact and well defined.

The only fact we have to mention with regret, in reference to the future, is the failing health of Dr. Grymes, surgeon in charge of the Home. But though his step is feeble, he is daily at his post of duty for three or four hours, and brings with him the same kind-heartedness as ever, and the same earnestness of desire to do something to help the men who are suffering while fighting for the country's life.

Some of the statistics furnished by the records of the Home, and the Lodge in 17th street, are as follows:

From March 20th to December 15th, 1862.

Number of different individual soldiers received at the Home and the Lodge, 8,429.

Number of night's lodgings furnished, 22,698.

Number of meals furnished, 55,810.

Of the above 8,429, the number who have received medical attention is 4,350. This number does not include those whose wounds have been dressed by our surgeon or his assistant at the Retreat, or on the street on their way to the railroad station—this extra number sometimes amounting, immediately after the battles of July and August, to 40 in a day. Of the above 8,429, there were discharged from service and on their way home, 2,758.

Number sent to General Hospital from the Home, 536.

Number of deaths at the Home, 11.

Three of the men who died had heart disease. Two who died under our charge, and many of those treated, were men sent from general hospitals to return to duty. The process of making room in the hospitals for the wounded, under sudden emergencies, has repeatedly been a hasty one, and men have been ordered to their regiments who were not able to bear transportation, as the results too often proved; some coming under our care were returned to general hospital, others passing into regimental hospitals only to die.

The smallest number cared for at the Home and Lodge any one night, 19,—the largest number, 229.

Average daily number, during April.....				55	
“	“	“	“	May.....	74
“	“	“	“	June.....	62
“	“	“	“	July.....	51
“	“	“	“	August	62
“	“	“	“	September.....	92
“	“	“	“	October.....	109
“	“	“	“	November.....	136
“	“	“	“	December	194

Taking 7,000 names last recorded on the books of the

Home, the distribution of these men among the different States is as follows :

Maine.....	459	Virginia.....	61
New Hampshire.....	198	California.....	2
Vermont.....	324	Michigan.....	329
Massachusetts.....	612	Ohio.....	206
Connecticut.....	109	Indiana.....	224
Rhode Island.....	82	Illinois.....	104
New York.....	2,302	Wisconsin.....	189
Pennsylvania.....	1,209	Minnesota.....	60
New Jersey.....	336	District of Columbia.....	4
Delaware.....	34	U. S. Army.....	148
Maryland.....	25	U. S. Navy.....	5

The total cost to the Commission of maintaining the Home and Lodge during nine months past has been \$7,650 50;—making the average amount spent upon each man cared for during that period, 90 cts.

Of the above total, about \$800 have been expended in furnishing transportation home to discharged soldiers, who were left without a cent of money or any legal claim upon Government—their amount due Government for clothing, more than balancing all the money due them on their final discharge, including traveling and subsistence fees. In each such case, it became simply a question with us, Shall this man, utterly destitute, be left to beg, or shall he be supported for an indefinite period by the Commission, or shall he be sent home at our expense? Economy pointed to the last above the second method, and humanity forbade us to adopt the first.

Of the above total, \$190 have been used for the railroad fare and expenses of agents of the Commission, who were sent to accompany to their homes, and deliver to their parents or wives, discharged men, who, after they had obtained their discharge papers, were too feeble to be allowed to

undertake the journey alone, but who in their longings repeated the heart's old story—one wish only—wanting to go home to die.

In connection with these statistics for the past nine months, I will give the figures which date back to the opening of the Home:—

From Sept. 10th, 1861, to the present date, Dec. 15th, 1862:

Total number of individual soldiers received, 14,106.

Total number of night's lodging given, 36,866.

Total number of meals given, 81,760.

Total cost to the Commission, \$11,030 00.

The average cost of each man being 91 cts.

Part of the money expended has been used for improvements upon the Home which are of permanent value; the houses have all been thoroughly repaired and cleaned; another portable house put up at the end of the row nearest the railroad station; the lease of the entire lot bounded by two streets obtained, and the whole fenced in to exclude all nuisances and intruders. The fences and out-buildings have been white-washed, a bathing room has been added, with a washing and ironing-room; and many improvements made within the main building. A large room has been comfortably fitted up, warm, light, and cheerful, where the inmates of the house can sit, and where they find, constantly, writing materials, and books, and games for amusement.

It was found necessary for the cleanliness of the Home and the comfort of the inmates, to dispose of the old bedsteads and mattresses which had been in use for a year, and were made especially foul by the large number of returned prisoners—sick—who came back last Spring, whom we cared for, fifty and a hundred at a time. Consequently, new iron bedsteads and new mattresses have been substituted.

Besides the officers previously in charge at the Home, there has been the addition of a matron, Miss Amy M. Bradley, an experienced nurse and admirable woman. She has had entire charge of all that pertains to the neatness and comfort of the Home, excepting the culinary department; and the influence of her presence and the result of her efficient exertions are marked and admirable.

Mr. J. B. Abbott has been laboring for nine months as Superintendent, with great devotion and success. Until recently his services have been entirely gratuitous. Mr. Abbott has now assumed the duties of Assistant in Special Relief, in the place of Mr. Fowler, who has been appointed chief clerk at the central office. In the place of Mr. Abbott at the Home is Mr. J. B. Clark, who during the first six months after the Home was opened was Superintendent, efficient and faithful.

Rules by which to regulate the whole administration of affairs at the Home have been prepared and printed, in order to secure as much system as possible. A copy of these rules appended to this report will indicate, perhaps, more fully the purposes aimed at in the work of the Home.*

Arrangements were made some months since with various railroad companies by which we are authorised to furnish to any discharged or furloughed soldier an order which entitles him to buy from those railroads tickets at reduced rates of fare. It has been our endeavor to secure the advantages of this arrangement not only to the inmates of the Home, but to every man passing through the discharge office. A careful estimate shows the amount of money thus saved to soldiers on their orders for tickets at reduced rates, which we

* See Appendix (A.)

have issued since last spring, is not less than \$65,000. It is expected that these arrangements will soon be extended over other routes, and to more distant points. I hope also to arrange for through-tickets, so that we can see the baggage of each discharged soldier checked to his home before he leaves the station here. I am likewise endeavoring to have a ticket office opened by an authorised and responsible railroad agent close to the paymaster's office, where the discharged soldiers can buy their tickets at once, without the necessity of taking out their money again at the railroad station.

For a while last summer we had two annoyances to contend with in our endeavor to assist discharged soldiers, viz: pickpockets, who found these sick and weary men easy prey; and certain railroad runners who tried to interfere with our ticket arrangement, telling the soldiers that the orders for reduced fare-tickets were worth nothing. Through Lieut. Col. Doster, the Provost Marshal, and Mr. Webb, Chief of Police, these wrongs have been mostly remedied. We have also had daily opportunity, by a watchful eye, to warn and defend discharged soldiers against men who are constantly laying hold of soldiers, whom they meet with discharge papers, and offering to render them "valuable assistance" in getting their pay speedily; often asserting, falsely, that without such assistance the soldier would be long delayed, or perhaps defrauded; and for this promised service, the soldier is made to pay his three or five dollars.

The Lodge in 17th street is of great service, daily receiving the soldiers in the upper part of the city who are found there needing care. But the paymaster's office has now been removed from 17th street to the corner of 15th and F streets, near the Treasury building; and an urgent need was seen for some spot near at hand where we could receive and

care for those sick soldiers who gathered and waited there. Sometimes there were seventy-five or one hundred collected on the side-walk, (two hundred each day is the average number discharged,) and among them many who were very feeble and others upon crutches, maimed. This large number of applicants for discharge and pay necessarily detains many of them there through the whole day; and want of food, and of a place to rest, causes much suffering to these men, many of them just out of hospitals.

To meet this need, we have just built a small house, (16 by 70 feet, at a cost of about \$500,) nearly opposite the paymaster's office on F street, where provision is made to receive and render comfortable all who need rest and food. A table, which will seat fifty, is kept constantly spread, and a person is always at hand to give any information or assistance that may be needed by the discharged soldiers.

The Paymaster in this department, Major Pomeroy, and his assistants, very cordially co-operate with us in endeavoring to secure to the disabled soldiers the comfort offered by this Lodge. Each soldier who presents his discharge papers at the paymaster's office, receives from one of the clerks there a printed ticket, which we furnish for the purpose. The ticket reads thus:

"The bearer, _____, an invalid soldier, will find a resting place and food, without charge, at the Lodge (No. 3) of the Sanitary Commission, No. 210 F street, opposite paymaster's office."

This place has been opened but two weeks; during that time there have been each day over two hundred and fifty meals furnished there, and each night beds for about forty. This place is considered simply as a branch of the "Home."

Another branch just established is the "Home for Nurses,"

where kindly care can be given to hospital nurses, when unwell or off-duty, or just arriving, strangers in the city, waiting for a place of duty to be assigned them.

The chief work of aiding soldiers in getting their discharge papers and their pay, likewise in getting their pension papers, has fallen upon Mr. Fowler. I will therefore make the following extracts from the report which he has rendered of his work. He says:

“The business of aiding the soldiers in perfecting their discharge papers and getting their pay has been steadily continued, and, as heretofore, has been accompanied with delays and difficulties, some of which have been necessary, but others are attributable to the culpable neglect or ignorance of regimental officers who have in charge the accounts and papers. The movements of the army and loss of many officers have rendered the adjustment of these matters by mail communication unusually difficult. We think, however, that among the volunteers, as a whole, there is a better knowledge of army rules, and more fidelity in executing them. It is unnecessary to enlarge on the importance and interesting character of this branch of work. But it is suggested that means be used to extend its benefits.

“We are indebted to the officers in the Paymaster's, and to those of the Discharge office, for much assistance in the prompt settlement of the cases.

“The applications for aid in securing pensions, arrears of pay, and bounties, though not numerous, have led to inquiries which have disclosed more or less deficiency in the provisions for transacting this business, causing delays very unjust to the claimants. In the Second Auditor's office, to which claims for arrears and bounties are brought, there are now accumulated at least twenty thousand claims of soldiers;

and although forty clerks were added last winter, the prospect of clearing the docket is affected by the fact that two hundred new ones are received daily, while one hundred are settled. I presented a poor widow's claim for arrears of two month's pay and the bounty. She had followed the Excelsior Brigade for ten months, doing washing for the soldiers. Her husband was killed at Williamsburg, while she was away under a doctor's care; worn out with the work and exposures of camp life. When she came to me, she did not know that her husband was dead, but wondered he did not send her money. A fortnight passed before I could by any means learn the facts about him, when I communicated to her the sad intelligence, and sent her safely to her friends. But this woman, I was informed, must wait from six to ten months before her claim would be reached, and then some slight defect might throw it back in its order another six or ten months. I might have conveyed to her the comforting statement made to me, that the claims growing out of the Mexican war remained unsettled for three years after its close, and that in Europe such matters often rest on the hard-hearted shelves twenty years. Mr. E. B. French, the head of this office, anticipated the present state of the business, and exerted himself a year ago to prevent this accumulation; but the needed facilities could not be obtained.

“In the Pension Office, the work has been delayed by the accumulation of papers in the office of the adjutant general; but this hindrance is in process of removal, and it will no doubt move on with vigor and dispatch, blessing the thousands of dependent families who look to this public provision as a substantial help and solace, a shield, on the one hand from alms-asking, and a recognition of honorable service on the other. The new pension law is simple in its

details, as well as generous in its provisions, extending the rights to dependent mothers and orphan sisters, with other important improvements. In addition to the above standard claims, which came under our observation, are those of a more exceptional character: as for the re-issue of discharges, descriptive lists, and other papers that have been accidentally lost; for correction of alleged mistakes in accounts after receipt has been given, or when the captain or paymaster refuses to make it. Many of this kind in civil life would be adjusted at a glance; but under the present system there must be a formal application, supported by various evidence and depositions, sometimes impossible to be obtained. If authority were given to the Paymaster General to dispose of all minor and miscellaneous demands on such examination and evidence as would suffice in ordinary civil transactions, thousands of them could be promptly settled, by avoiding the slow processes incident to formal claims. Mr. E. A. Brooke, chief clerk in his office, has shown much readiness to assume the responsibility of so doing in many instances.

“The calls on the Commission through the Special Relief Agent for information about soldiers in hospitals have been numerous; until recently the investigations involved in this work have taken much time, and it has not been uncommon for a long and repeated search to prove fruitless. But we have so often been able to restore the lost communication between the suffering soldier and his friends at a distance, as well as personally assist those who came to this city on the sad errand, that, as a whole, we must regard the work as very satisfactory. How many have been aided in this way it is impossible to tell. After the Peninsula campaign opened, the work rapidly increased, and for weeks the town seemed to have received marked accessions to its population;

but the anxious northern faces, just from home, could be easily distinguished, seeking neither gain nor office. At that time the lists at the medical director's office and the hospitals were necessarily imperfect, causing delay and mistakes. Our rooms at times were crowded with inquiring friends. As in many cases the record of every hospital in the District was searched by the same party, it was often a vain as well as wearisome and expensive inquiry, and the father, mother, or wife returned home in their sore disappointment, when they had perhaps brushed by the very couch they were seeking. Much of this anxiety and unwise expenditure of time and money were owing to the common prejudice against hospitals, together with the hope of removing the sick or wounded soldier to his home. Confidence in general hospitals has in the meantime been increasing, which, with the publication of the strict orders respecting the removal of patients, has checked this action; and friends have learned to communicate by letter either directly with the hospitals, or through the Commission. Some chaplains have been very efficient in conducting such correspondence.

"It has been necessary to collect and daily examine and re-examine the lists published in all the leading papers. Friends have often sent inquiring, when not knowing that the soldier was in the District, or whether alive or dead. Hence examinations of muster pay rolls and correspondence with regiments have often been necessary. Notwithstanding all that has been done, the list of lost and unknown is a long one."

I may here remark that the delay and difficulties of obtaining information in regard to friends in hospitals, referred to in this extract from Mr. Fowler's report, has been, in a great measure, removed since that report was written in

September, and consequently our labor in this particular direction is diminished. This is the result of the accurate and well ordered "Hospital Directory"* established by the Sanitary Commission.

The number of men who apply to the Special Relief department of the Commission for advice or assistance in correcting discharge papers, or obtaining their pay, or getting transportation to their homes, averages now about one hundred daily.

Whenever men have been brought in numbers to Washington or to Alexandria, from battle-fields or hospitals, it has been the endeavor of this agency to minister at once to their relief so far as was possible. But three or four weeks since, we thus cared for 500 men at one time, rendering them essential service. Notice was sent to the Commission saying, "500 sick and hungry men are aboard of canal boats, on their way to Washington, from Edwards' Ferry. Can you do something for them?" Provision was immediately made, so that by the time the boats arrived at Georgetown, we were ready at the canal there with three wagon loads of supplies; enough to feed all these men: and the aid was timely, for at Leesburg, where they had been in hospital, the supplies had become very short, even before the men started upon the boats, on account of the difficulty of communicating with this port, the rebels having cut off approach from all points but one. After the boats arrived at Georgetown, some time necessarily elapsed before the ambulances could be summoned, and all these men distributed among the various hospitals; meantime the hungry were fed and cared for.

* The arrangements have been continued by which we endeavor to lay our hand upon every soldier who is found in the city, wandering without care. The police constantly bring

* See Appendix (B.)

to us men whom they have found sick and needing assistance. With the same end in view, the guard-houses and railroad stations and saloons are visited by us. Benevolent individuals, throughout the city, have now learned the aid we seek to give, and they bring to the Home many soldiers who are needing help.

After stating thus the opportunity that is found for Special Relief, it is fit to call attention to the fact, that the occasion for this service exists, not on account of deficiency in the methods or executive working of the Medical Department; but they are only part of the many exceptional cases which must necessarily present themselves, under the most perfect system, where men are massed and to be cared for by hundreds of thousands. While we see and seek for these exceptional cases, which call for special relief, we also see and gratefully recognize the wise, humane, generous, and persevering methods which are adopted and pursued by the head of the Medical Department, and by the medical officers under him. While special relief is doing what it may, there is a great, full tide of daily bounty poured out through the regular channels, never fully estimated, because it is in the ordinary course.

The service which is rendered by the Commission, through the agency of special relief, is appreciated, I think, by the soldiers and their friends. Many letters have come with expressions of deep gratitude. And though our record-book seems to indicate but a plain and dull repetition of common acts of relief, yet actual contact with the men themselves, day by day, shows how this relief, in itself slight, is a fresh good to each man who, in his turn, receives it.

Respectfully submitted.

FRED'K N. KNAPP,

Special Relief Agent of Sanitary Commission.