

AMERICA'S HEROES

Helping Americans With Spinal Cord Disabilities

by Gerard M. Kelly

(NAPSA)—In 1946, a small group of veterans who had received spinal cord injuries on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific during World War II created an organization called Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association. The government issued wheelchairs to these heroes but they had little else: no suitable housing to live in, no transportation to move around in and no ramps to get into the corner store.

They worked together in those early years, and by 1948 they convinced Congress to pass laws providing paraplegic veterans with one-time grants toward a wheelchair-accessible home and a specially equipped automobile. A few years later, some of these war veterans helped to write the first design standard requiring access for wheelchair users in new public buildings.

Selflessly, some 40 years later, their leaders lent their voices to the groundswell of support for the federal Fair Housing Amendments Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

After 60 years, our organization, now known as United Spinal Association, has greatly expanded our mission to include all people with spinal cord disabilities nationwide, but our commitment to veterans has never been stronger. For instance, last year we helped get crucial legislation passed that provides much-needed traumatic injury insurance to our wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

We dispatch trained service officers directly to VA hospitals



Deputy Secretary of VA Gordon H. Mansfield (r) thanks Gerard M. Kelly (l) for funding VA research.

to find out what our veterans need and to help them apply for, and to receive, their veterans benefits. We aggressively represent their interests before the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C., and we sponsor numerous recreation events and athletic competitions to help wounded veterans readjust to civilian life. We also helped fund two prestigious spinal cord research facilities located at veterans hospitals.

With our roots in service to veterans, we have become the fastest-growing organization in the country dedicated to helping people with spinal cord disabilities. To join our ranks, to help us advocate for veterans and persons with disabilities or otherwise support our work, visit www.unitedspinal.org.

Gerard M. Kelly is the Executive Director of United Spinal Association. United Spinal is a national veterans service and disability rights advocacy organization based in Jackson Heights, New York. Membership is free and open to any individual with a spinal cord injury or disorder.