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Subject: MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF VETERAN AFFAIRS
Date: Saturday, December 21, 2013 5:18:59 AM

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

On Christmas Day, 1878, the New York State Soldiers and Sailors Home in Bath, New York, opened its doors for the first time, serving Christmas dinner to Veterans of the Civil War. Around that Christmas table were 25 Soldiers, who had fought to preserve the Union during a difficult period of divisions.

By all accounts, the Home was spectacular, built in large measure through the leadership of the Grand Army of the Republic, with charitable help from caring New York residents and the communities surrounding the facility. Similar festive Christmas meals followed as the number of Veterans at Bath grew. By 1907, over 2,100 Veterans found comfort, care, and communion there among fellow Veterans.

In 1928, Bath became the last of eleven installations to come under the Federal Government's national system of Civil War Soldiers Homes, which President Abraham Lincoln authorized during the last weeks of the Civil War. In 1930, when the Veterans Administration was established, these eleven facilities represented the cradle of American health care for Veterans, a legacy the Veterans Health Administration continues today.

The bonds of service around the table at Bath remain important. The compassion and devotion we owe our Veterans will never diminish, even as the services we provide them grow, evolve, and greatly transform. Today, the spirit of Christmas 1878 endures through Adult Day Health Care, Home-Based Primary Care, Community Living Centers, and many other options tailored to Veterans' needs and preferences. Every day, some 134 Community Living Centers across our country care for nearly 10,000 resident Veterans, who have sacrificed for our well-being as a Nation.

So as we celebrate the Holidays, let us remember those who broke bread together around the first Christmas dinner table in Bath, New York. Remember, as well, all the men and women who, in an unbroken line of service since 1775, have found themselves on duty during a Holiday Season. We at the Department of Veterans Affairs, some 330,000 strong, thank them, salute their past and present valor, and we pray for them and their families and all of our Veterans, who have so selflessly given us the gifts of freedom and liberty.

Eric K. Shinseki

Kevin Secor sent from Blackberry