

Daily Mirror
3/31/58

Vet to get honored burial

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Thanks to the concern of his neighbors, a South Ozone Park man will be buried with honors tomorrow at Calverton National Cemetery instead of in a pauper's grave at Potter's Field.

Walter Olson, 76, was found dead of cancer in his home on 135th St. on March 15. Officials estimated that he had been dead for at least three weeks before his next-door neighbor, Claudia Potts, called police because she became suspicious that something had happened to him.

With the body was Olson's elderly wife, Ellen, but because of physical and mental problems, she was incapable of helping herself, the police said. Mrs. Olson was taken to the Queens Hospital Center in Jamaica for treatment while her husband's body was taken to the Queens Morgue in the same hospital,

where it remained unclaimed.

At the time, there were no known relatives to take responsibility for Mrs. Olson's care and her husband's burial. It was feared that his body would be buried by the city in the Potter's Field on Hart Island.

Alarmed at that possibility, Potts and other neighbors began calling the offices of local elected officials. Ann Rychlenski, a staff worker at the office of Rep. Floyd Flake (D-Rosedale), discovered that Olson had been a World War II Army veteran and a retired Postal Service worker. As a veteran, Olson would be entitled to burial in a National Cemetery.

But Rychlenski said she faced a "Catch-22" situation because there was no one available to sign a release for the body from the Morgue. The city Public Administrator's Office said it could au-

thorize such a release but someone had to line up a funeral director to accept the body with the understanding that payment might be arranged at a later date from the estate of the deceased.

Finally, Olson's neighbors turned to the Daily News for help in cutting through the red tape. On Monday, an article about the Olsons' plight appeared in the newspaper and things moved quickly after that.

Paul Rudolph, the owner of the Walker Funeral Home in Woodhaven, stepped forward and offered to handle the funeral arrangements for Olson without charge.

"I'm a veteran and I felt it was something I should do," Rudolph said.

A nephew of Mrs. Olson, Kenneth Carlson of Westbury, L.I., also saw the story and has said he will seek to

become her legal conservator.

Anthony Romeo, a member of the David J. O'Connell Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2264 in Ozone Park, also saw the article and remembered that Olson had belonged to the post.

"He (Olson) had stopped coming to meetings, but I recalled driving over to his house a few years ago to give him his life membership in the post," Romeo said.

Tonight, Romeo and other members of the post will conduct a service in Olson's memory at the Walker Funeral Home, 27-34 80th St. Visiting hours will be from 7 to 9 p.m.

Also among the mourners will be some of the strangers who came to know Walter Olson through his lonely death.

"I just want to say goodbye to Mr. Olson," Rychlenski said. "I'm glad he will be buried with dignity."