

FORCES
ARMÉES



—Rod MacIvor, Citizen

Handicapped vacationers are helped aboard armed forces Hercules aircraft for flight to camp

Finally, after 20 years, a holiday

By Jacquie Miller
Citizen staff writer

When John McGill basks in the sun and does a little fishing on the shores of Long Lake this week, it won't be a routine summer retreat.

The 10-day camping trip is the first vacation the White Lake resident has had in more than 20 years.

McGill, 43, has been living with his parents in the small village near Arnprior since being confined to a wheelchair after a car accident when he was 20.

The accident broke his back, leaving him paralyzed from the

waist down and with limited feeling in his hands.

McGill is one of 12 Ottawa-area handicapped adults who left Tuesday to attend a 10-day camp operated by the March of Dimes.

The group, including six from St. Vincent Hospital on Cambridge Street North, were flown to the Sudbury-area camp courtesy of the defence department.

"It's going to be quite a change," McGill said Tuesday while waiting at Uplands Airport to load onto a Hercules plane.

"This is the first time I've ever been on an airplane, too.

I'm looking forward to that as one of the main things.

"I'm going to wait and see what's going on. I've never swam in my life. I'll watch the other ones first, then maybe I'll try it. I'm also looking forward to meeting new people. It'll be a change all around."

John's sister, Esther McGill, said the vacation is also a change for the family.

"His room seems so empty," said Esther, who moved into the family home with her three sons to help their father care for John after their mother died a year ago.

"He's never really been away,

except to the hospital, since the accident.

"Between us all, we take care of him. We get him in and out of the wheelchair, but he can feed and wash himself. It's hard to explain. He's not the sort of person who is always demanding things, it's really no problem."

Many of the others waiting for the plane Tuesday said the camping trip was a long-awaited break from the city.

"I intend to hijack the plane on the way back," said Margaret Milkes, 54.

That way, she explained with a laugh, her precious holiday will last a little longer before she returns to the daily routine at Ottawa Centre Nursing Home on Maclaren Street.

"I want to do everything they have going. I'm interested in everything and I want to try it all," said Milkes, who was confined to a wheelchair about a year ago after a long bout with multiple sclerosis.

The camp is one of three operated by the March of Dimes to give handicapped people a vacation.

The \$400 cost for a 10-day session is subsidized for those who can't afford to pay the full amount, said March of Dimes official David Clarke.

About 200 adults will attend the camps this summer at Long Lake, Albion Hills and Clairmont.