



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release JANUARY 7, 1957

DEPARTMENT SUBMITS NOMINATION FOR "HANDICAPPED AMERICAN OF THE YEAR"

A Fish and Wildlife Service biologist who lost both hands and the sight of both eyes during World War II has been named by the Department of the Interior as its nominee in a Nation-wide competition to select the "Handicapped American of the Year", Administrative Assistant Secretary D. Otis Beasley said today.

The Department's nominee is Thomas Z. Atkeson of Decatur, Alabama, whose loss of hands and sight resulted from a land mine explosion during Army training maneuvers. Mr. Atkeson had been a Fish and Wildlife Service employee prior to his Army service, and upon convalescence and discharge from service returned to his former Department of the Interior position, Mr. Beasley said.

The individual chosen as "Handicapped American of the Year" receives the President's Trophy, presented annually by the President of the United States in conjunction with the meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped. The trophy has been presented each year since 1951.

Mr. Atkeson plans and supervises the cooperative farming program involving more than 5,000 acres on the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge near Decatur. His work entails management of the farming details as well as conducting biological investigations and preparing management recommendations for Wheeler and other refuges in the Southeastern section of the country.

Mr. Beasley made special mention of public relations services rendered by Mr. Atkeson, who speaks before civic groups and sportsmen's organizations to outline Fish and Wildlife Service problems and objectives. He writes numerous articles for local newspapers and is the author of a weekly column for the Decatur Daily.

Upon Mr. Atkeson's return to duty with the Department after his convalescence, Mr. Beasley said, he displayed "remarkable determination to return to useful active service in his chosen profession."

"He has been an inspiration in his local community, to employees of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and to other handicapped persons," Mr. Beasley concluded in his letter nominating Mr. Atkeson.

x x x