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RELEASED

# Inadequacy Of Protection Provided And Extent Of Damages To Government-Owned Property At Miller Army Airfield, New York

B-165868

Department of the Army

**BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

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090208

APRIL 1, 1974



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-165868

The Honorable John M. Murphy  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Murphy:

On February 26, 1973, you requested that we obtain information on the agency responsible for protecting the Government's interests at Miller Army Airfield, Staten Island, New York; the adequacy of such protection; the property's appraised value; and the extent of loss and damage to the property because of vandalism and other reasons.

As discussed in detail in the report, the security and maintenance at Miller Field did not prevent major deterioration and damage. The Army's nearby installation, Fort Hamilton, in Brooklyn, is responsible for the security and maintenance. The Miller Field land, acquired in 1919 at a cost of about \$400,000, was appraised at almost \$10 million in 1971. The buildings, costing about \$2.6 million, were considered valueless by the Army. Although we could not accurately estimate the total loss to the Government resulting from vandalism and poor maintenance, facilities acquired at a cost of \$600,000 have been destroyed or heavily damaged by fires since August 1971. The Director of Facilities at Fort Hamilton told us that it would cost an estimated \$10 million to rehabilitate the buildings.

The Department of Defense said it was advising the Department of the Interior that Miller Field, including the family housing, would be transferred without restrictions for use in the Gateway National Recreation Area. The military families located at the airfield would be relocated to other Government-owned or leased quarters on a priority basis.

We do not plan to distribute this report further unless you agree or publicly announce its contents.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James B. Stacks".

Comptroller General  
of the United States

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ABBREVIATIONS

DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
GSA	General Services Administration

*COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S REPORT TO  
THE HONORABLE JOHN M. MURPHY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*

INADEQUACY OF PROTECTION PROVIDED  
AND EXTENT OF DAMAGES TO  
GOVERNMENT-OWNED PROPERTY  
AT MILLER ARMY AIRFIELD, NEW YORK  
Department of the Army  
B-165868

D I G E S T

WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

Congressman Murphy asked GAO to determine

- the agency responsible for protecting the Government's interests at Miller Army Airfield, New York;
- the adequacy of such protection;
- the appraised value of the property; and
- an estimate of damages to the property and losses. (See p. 15.)

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Officials at the Army's nearby installation, Fort Hamilton, are responsible for the security and maintenance of Miller Field. However, the facilities at the airfield suffered major deterioration because the security and maintenance were not adequate.

The land, acquired in 1919 at a cost of about \$400,000, was appraised at almost \$10 million in 1971. The buildings, costing about \$2.6 million, were considered valueless by the Army.

GAO could not accurately estimate the total loss to the Government resulting from vandalism and poor maintenance. However, facilities acquired at a cost of \$600,000 had been destroyed or heavily damaged

by fires since August 1971. (See p. 4.)

An Army official estimated it would cost \$10 million to rehabilitate the buildings at the airfield.

In declaring Miller Field excess property, the Army directed the disposal agency to provide housing for the military families still located there.

Although Miller Field was included as one of the sites for the Gateway National Recreation Area, the Department of the Interior was unwilling to accept the property from the Army and provide housing for the families. (See pp. 9 and 10.)

GAO concluded that the Army should provide housing for the military families at some other site so that the Interior can receive the property without restrictions and use it for the recreation area. (See p. 10.)

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Department of Defense said it was advising the Interior that Miller Field, including the family housing, would be transferred without restrictions and that the families would be relocated. (See p. 15.)

Defense thought that providing additional security to prevent unauthorized access to the property

would require an inordinate expenditure of funds and personnel because the facilities have exceeded their life expectancy and are scheduled to be demolished.

GAO believes that the facilities deteriorated before the Army

declared them excess. This resulted because the property had not been used since 1965, when the Army declared the base inactive, and because only minimum maintenance had been performed since 1966. (See p. 11.)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

At Congressman John M. Murphy's request of February 26, 1973, we inquired into who was responsible for protecting the Government's interests during the transition of Miller Army Airfield to the Gateway National Recreation Area, the adequacy of such protection, and the losses and damages to Government-owned property. (See app. I.)

On April 3, 1973, Congressman Murphy requested that we also include in our report information on (1) the property's appraised value and (2) the source of the decision resulting in a reported lack of adequate security and maintenance.

Miller Army Airfield is on the Atlantic Ocean side of Staten Island, New York. The airfield facilities and 37 of the 46 buildings were constructed before World War II at a cost of \$2.5 million. The cost for the other nine buildings and a parking area built between 1940 and 1962 was about \$126,000.

From 1965 to 1969 the Army used the airfield for reserve training and as of June 1973 the Army was still using 17 of the 22 family housing units.

The airfield was placed on inactive status in June 1965. By May 1966 the Army had declared it excess to its needs pending a decision on the continued use of Miller Field for reserve training. It was reported to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees as excess to the needs of the Department of Defense (DOD) in November 1969. The General Services Administration (GSA) accepted Miller Field as excess to DOD's needs in August 1970. When the act establishing the Gateway National Recreation Area was passed in 1972, Miller Field was included as one of the sites for the project.

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

We interviewed officials from the Department of the Army in Washington, D.C.; Fort Meade, Maryland; and various locations in New York. We held discussions with officials from the Corps of Engineers in New York and GSA officials in Washington and New York. We also reviewed available documentation on Miller Field.

## CHAPTER 2

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The security and maintenance at Miller Field did not prevent major deterioration and damage. The Army's nearby installation, Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn (see exhibit A), was responsible for the security and maintenance arrangements.

The Miller Field land, acquired in 1919 for \$396,000, was appraised by a New York firm hired by GSA at almost \$10 million in 1971. The buildings, costing about \$2.6 million, were considered valueless by the Army. Although we could not estimate the total loss to the Government resulting from vandalism and poor maintenance, facilities acquired at a cost of \$600,000 have been destroyed or heavily damaged by fires since August 1971. The Director of Facilities at Fort Hamilton told us that it would cost an estimated \$10 million to rehabilitate the buildings at Miller Field.

### RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS RESULTING IN LACK OF ADEQUATE SECURITY AND MAINTENANCE

Fort Hamilton has been responsible for security and maintenance of facilities at Miller Field since June 30, 1965, the date the airfield was inactivated, and will be responsible until the Department of the Interior takes over.

#### Security

From June 1965 to August 1970, when GSA accepted Miller Field as excess, the security was in line with applicable provisions in Army Regulation 210-17, Inactivation of Installations, which states that:

"Adequate physical security measures will be provided \* \* \* to safeguard property and installation against trespass, sabotage, theft, arson, or any other illegal or criminal act. \* \* \* Agreements should be made with local civil police to include the installation on their assigned patrol route and any noted evidence of vandalism should be reported to the installation commander."

From August 1970 until September 1971, security for Miller Field appeared to be in accordance with the Federal Property Management Regulations. For facilities with a high market value which are fenced, the regulations require that:

--A guard be on duty 24 hours a day at the open gate used for access to the facility.

--All buildings be locked.

--Local police and fire protection can be secured by telephone.

A 6-foot chain link fence surrounds the field. Behind the fence in certain areas is a ditch which prevents vehicles from entering the airfield. The property is posted with no-trespassing signs, the local police patrol the area, and the New York City Fire Department responds to fires.

From June 1965 to September 1971, security was provided by one military policeman stationed for 24 hours a day at the main gate and an hourly, roving, two-man patrol. The Deputy Commander at Fort Hamilton removed the guard at the main gate on September 30, 1971. However, the roving patrol was continued. The rationale for this decision was that Fort Hamilton had a police manpower shortage and conditions had become too hazardous for the guards at the gate (intruders were attacking them).

Between 1966 and 1969 certain buildings at the field were occupied by the 11th Special Forces Army Reserve Unit. The Director of Facilities at Fort Hamilton told us that, after these Reserve troops left in 1969, vandalism began and has continued to increase. Since then Fort Hamilton officials have made numerous attempts to secure the buildings from vandals but these attempts failed after the guard at the gate was removed. All major fires at Miller Field occurred after the guard was removed from the main gate in September 1971.

On December 23, 1971, a letter from the Assistant Chief, Division of Fire Prevention of the New York City Fire Department, to the Commanding General of Fort Hamilton stated that inspecting fire officers had reported the abandoned buildings on Miller Field were open and being entered by itinerant

people and neighborhood children. Also, a certain section of the fence needed repair. The Commanding Officer was asked to reduce potential hazards by properly repairing the fencing and maintaining regular onsite watchman service.

The Commanding Officer replied that:

- The security fencing was continually being repaired and that patrols made hourly security checks 24 hours a day.
- At that time the Deputy Commander and the Assistant Deputy Commander of nearby Fort Wadsworth visited Miller Field daily.
- The buildings were sealed and secured when the site was vacated and that, since then, the openings made by illegal entry have been resealed many times.

In conclusion, the Commanding Officer stated that

" \* \* \* presently the Director of Facilities is investigating less costly methods of securing the buildings and it is expected that resealing will commence within 10 days."

The Director of Facilities advised us that the resealing consisted of putting barbed wire over some of the windows in the buildings. He advised us further that Fort Hamilton stopped repairing the fence in December 1972 because repairs were becoming too expensive and did not serve any purpose. An official in the Facilities Directorate estimated that it would take about \$25,000 to restore the fence to its original condition.

The security provided to Miller Field after September 1971, when the guard at the main gate was removed, was not in accordance with the standards outlined in the Federal Property Management Regulations relating to the protection of excess real property. However, Army officials noted that vandalism and unauthorized entry occurred even when they had perimeter patrols and a policeman at the main gate.

## Maintenance

A Fort Hamilton official told us that the maintenance of Miller Field was minimal between 1965, when it was inactivated, and 1969, when the buildings were secured after the Reserve unit stopped using them. This maintenance consisted of repairing the fence, replacing broken windows, and other minor maintenance.

The Director of Facilities indicated that maintenance was minimal because a 1966 directive from First Army Headquarters stated that the expenditure of funds at Miller Field should be held to the minimum essential for preserving life and property.

In February 1971 a directive from the Continental Army Command to all installations stated that, because of a scarcity of funds, only weatherproofing and such maintenance required to prevent major deterioration would be performed for permanent structures. Temporary facilities not being used would no longer be maintained or repaired.

In a November 1972 letter First Army Headquarters advised the Commander of Fort Hamilton that, because of the marginal quality of the facilities at Miller Field, any expenditure to preserve them would be unwarranted.

According to the Director of Facilities, it had been expected as early as 1964 that the major portion of Miller Field would be disposed of. As a result, and in accordance with First Army policy, expenditures for maintenance and repair to protect the interiors of the buildings were kept at a minimum. However, these expenditures were even further limited by the Post Engineer's meager resources. As a result, the facilities kept on deteriorating.

Officials at Fort Hamilton told us that in 1965, when Fort Hamilton took control of Miller Field, the buildings were already in dire need of repair.

In 1966 a project to restore the facilities was submitted to the First Army for approval and funding. The project included repairing the roofs, walls, gutters, windows, and doors of several buildings; replacing or repairing boilers; and replacing electrical lines and transformers.

The First Army disapproved the request and commented that only essential maintenance would be performed to protect the interiors from the weather. Subsequently, a Fort Hamilton survey of the facilities indicated that the total costs for this essential maintenance would be \$209,500.

On the basis of a preliminary report of excess real property submitted in November 1969, it was estimated that annual maintenance costs for Miller Field, excluding the military housing portion, would be \$9,000 for repairs and maintenance and \$1,000 for electricity.

In October 1970, GSA advised the Army that, on October 1, 1971, it would assume financial responsibility for the costs of protecting and maintaining the unused portion of Miller Field. GSA asked the Army to provide it with cost estimates. However, the Army did not ask GSA to reimburse costs for the unused portion because only a minimal amount was being spent.

Officials of Fort Hamilton, First Army Headquarters, GSA, and the National Park Service advised us that the permanent buildings at Miller Field had deteriorated so much that they were valueless, unusable, and dangerous. It appears that, because the buildings had reached this state, the maintenance performed on the facilities at Miller Field was not in accordance with Army regulations or the directive of the Continental Army Command to do maintenance necessary to prevent major deterioration of permanent buildings.

#### PROPERTY'S APPRAISED VALUE

Officials at GSA Region 2; the Corps of Engineers, New York District; Fort Hamilton; and First Army Headquarters (Fort Meade) stated that the buildings on Miller Field had not been appraised. However, a New York firm hired by GSA appraised the 212 acres at \$9,930,000 as of February 1, 1971 (\$10,150,000 for the value of the site less \$200,000 for demolishing the buildings). A GSA official advised us that this was the most recent appraisal.

DOLLAR LOSS TO THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE OF  
VANDALISM AND POOR MAINTENANCE

Officials from the Corps of Engineers, New York District, and from Fort Hamilton stated that the only Army records concerning the value of the buildings at Miller Field were the acquisition costs. As a result we could not determine the total loss resulting from vandalism and poor maintenance.

Acquisition costs of the buildings damaged or destroyed by fires set by vandals through April 1, 1973, was about \$600,000. (See exhibit B.)

Because of the deterioration of the buildings at the airfield, Fort Hamilton and Park Service officials advised us that the buildings would be demolished when the Park Service took over the field for the Gateway National Recreation Area project.

The Director of Facilities told us that the estimated cost of rehabilitating the buildings would be \$10 million. Even if the fires had not occurred, at least 80 percent of this figure would have been necessary to rehabilitate the buildings.

If the buildings had been kept in good condition, Army officials stated, the hangars, with some modifications, could have been used for warehouse space and the rest of the facility could have been used for administrative or office space or for Reserve activities, as was done for several years.

STATUS OF MILLER FIELD

Public Law 92-592, dated October 27, 1972, established the Gateway National Recreation Area and designated the sites or installations to be used, one of which was Miller Field. The Department of the Interior requested GSA on February 26, 1973, to transfer Miller Field to the National Park Service for the Gateway Project, subject to the Army's continued use of certain structures. On May 7, 1973, the Army submitted the necessary papers to transfer the field, but with the restriction that the Park Service accept responsibility for the family housing. If the Park Service decided to remove the housing, it was to provide housing elsewhere for those families living at Miller Field. On May 15, 1973, the Park

Service refused to accept the property, primarily because of the lack of appropriated funds for operating and maintaining facilities. However, the Park Service stated further that, when such funds became available, it would be in a position to accept the transfer of vacated facilities, including the housing.

As of January 1, 1974, funds had been made available to the National Park Service for operating and maintaining Miller Field. A Park Service official stated that the Park Service will take over the field when the Army vacates it.

We understand that the Park Service does not intend to use the buildings on Miller Field because of their poor condition. We do not know if the Park Service would use the buildings even if they were in good condition.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The restriction and continued use of the housing has delayed transfer of Miller Field to the National Park Service. The Army should provide housing elsewhere for those families located at Miller Field so that the Department of the Interior can receive the property without restrictions and use it for the Gateway National Recreation Area.

## CHAPTER 3

### AGENCY COMMENTS AND GAO EVALUATION

In commenting on our suggestion that the Army provide housing elsewhere for those families at Miller Field, DOD stated that retaining family housing at Miller Field until satisfactory facilities could be provided at another location without cost to DOD was a condition for declaring Miller Field excess. (See app. II.) DOD believed that the disposal agency, GSA, had failed to fully recognize the restriction at the time the field was declared excess.

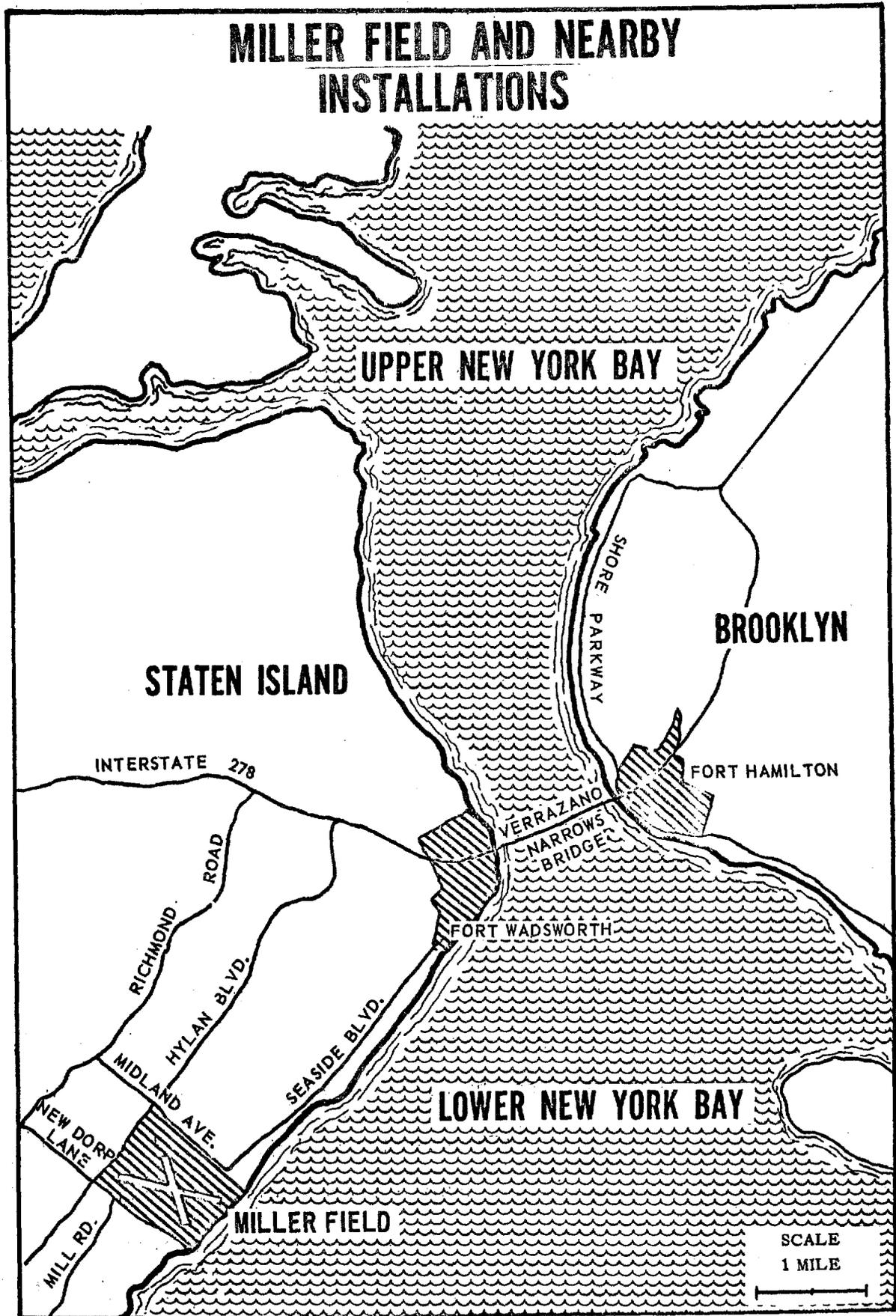
DOD said that, in view of its inability to obtain replacement housing through GSA, it was advising the Department of the Interior that Miller Field, including the family housing, would be transferred without restrictions and that the families would be relocated.

In commenting on our suggestion that the Army tighten security to prevent unauthorized access to Miller Field, DOD said additional security would require an inordinate expenditure of funds and personnel because the facilities have exceeded their life expectancy and are scheduled to be demolished.

We believe the facilities at Miller Field reached a state of deterioration before they were declared excess. They deteriorated because they had not been used since 1965, when DOD declared the base inactive, and because only minimum maintenance had been performed since 1966.

After Miller Field was inactivated in 1965, it took until August 1970 for the Army to declare the facility excess. From October 1968 to October 1972, GSA, at the request of the former Secretary of the Interior, tried to acquire the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., by exchanging it for Miller Field. The exchange proceedings were discontinued, however, when Miller Field was made part of the Gateway National Recreation Area.

DOD said the disposal of the excess Army property at Miller Field was delayed because of GSA's attempts to negotiate the exchange. DOD also said that the long delay caused by the negotiations meant an increased chance for vandalism, arson, and theft and drained Army manpower resources for nonproductive purposes.



## EXHIBIT B

BUILDINGS DAMAGED OR DESTROYED BY FIREAT MILLER FIELD

<u>Building</u>	<u>Acquisition cost</u>	<u>Date of fire (note a)</u>	<u>Reported damage</u>
Flammable materials storehouse	\$ 500	8-21-71	Demolished
General storehouse	500	8-22-71	Demolished
Sentry station	5,200	1-18-72	75 percent demolished
Flight control tower	2,900	8- 9-72	Demolished
Helicopter shop	3,800	8-12-72	Demolished
Administration building	26,000	8-14-72	Demolished
Motor repair shop	1,000	10-22-72	Demolished
Administration building	65,500	11- 4-72	Heavy damage
Barracks	153,600	12-25-72	Heavy damage
Post utilities	26,200	1-29-73	75 percent demolished
General storehouse	81,400	11-13-71	Minor damage
		10-25-72	Heavy damage
		3-18-73	Half demolished
Ordnance shop	205,000	10-22-72	No damage
		3-18-73	Demolished
Administration building	<u>30,800</u>	4- 1-73	75 percent demolished
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>\$602,400</u></b>		

<sup>a</sup>Fires after September 1971 are subsequent to the removal of the guard from the gate.

JOHN M. MURPHY  
17TH NEW YORK

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## Congress of the United States

### House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

February 26, 1973

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Honorable Elmer B. Staats  
Comptroller General of the United States  
441 G Street N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Staats:

Miller Field, an ex-Army Air Field on Staten Island, New York, part of my district, is one of the government properties involved in the establishment of the Gateway Recreational Area under Public Law 92-592. I am concerned about the ~~about~~ security and the vandalism of buildings and other property on this field. Consequently, I request that the General Accounting Office investigate on a routine priority the following with a report to me of:

Who and what agency has been and is currently responsible for protecting the government's interests during the various phases of the transition of this property to Gateway? This to include what internal decisions, regulations policies and orders within that agency, addressed this security, and any other factors which impact on these actions.

An assessment of the adequacy of this security; an estimate to date of the losses and cost of damages to government-owned property; who was responsible or is liable for such, if possible to determine; and any apparent dereliction of responsibilities or malfeasance which may surface during this investigation.

Kind regards.

Sincerely,

  
JOHN M. MURPHY  
Member of Congress

JMM:mbb  
Administrator, General Services Administration  
Secretary of the Army  
cc's



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

IR  
INSTALLATIONS AND LOGISTICS

6 NOV 1973

Mr. V. L. Hill  
Assistant Director-in-Charge  
Facilities Acquisition and  
Management Group  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Hill:

This is in response to your letter of August 13, 1973 to the Secretary of Defense transmitting the draft report (OSD Case No. 3685) on the adequacy of protection provided and extent of damages to Government owned property at Miller Army Airfield, New York.

We have reviewed the report and while acknowledging that certain losses of Government property have occurred from outside vandalism and possible arson believe there were extenuating circumstances which were outside of Army control.

The primary security system at Miller Field was a six-foot high chain link fence that extended around a 10,200 linear foot perimeter. Since inactivation of the post, the fence has been vandalized and destroyed. Replacement is estimated to cost \$60,000. When the fence was intact and the main gate manned by military police, unauthorized entry via the fence line also occurred. Since the physical presence of military policemen at the main gate or patrolling the perimeter of the field did not deter vandalism, theft, or suspected arson, the current measure of a motorized military police unit patrolling the interior of the property fifteen minutes of each hour on a twenty-four hour basis was instituted. Providing additional security measures to prevent unauthorized access

to the property is not considered feasible because of the inordinate expenditure of funds and personnel to secure facilities that have exceeded their life expectancy and are being planned for demolition.

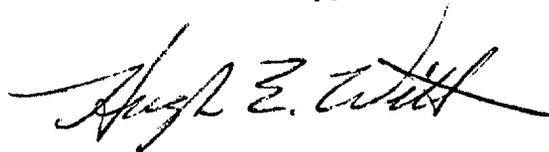
The retention of the family housing area consisting of 22 units until satisfactory replacement facilities were provided at another location without cost to the DoD was a condition of the excessing of Miller Field (Department of the Army Disposal Report No. 294 to the Armed Services Committees, November 28, 1969.) The disposal agency (GSA) has failed to fully recognize this condition of the excessing.

The disposal of the excess Army property at Miller Field, excessed in 1969, has been delayed for an extraordinary period by GSA, in its attempts to negotiate an exchange for the Willard Hotel in Washington, D. C. With such a long caretaker period, chances for vandalism, arson and theft naturally increase. This long delay has also resulted in the drain of Army manpower resources for non-productive purposes.

The loss of facilities to the Recreation Area is questionable not only on the basis that the Gateway legislation was not even under consideration during 1969-1971 (only being signed into law on October 27, 1972) but the fact that such obsolete facilities as were destroyed would have a possible negative contribution to the Gateway plan.

In view of our inability to obtain replacement housing in the critical area through GSA, we are advising the Department of the Interior that Miller Field, to include the family housing, will be transferred without restrictions and that the military families now located thereat will be relocated to other Government-owned or leased quarters on a priority basis.

Sincerely,



HUGH E. WITT  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Installations & Logistics)