

THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, INC.

455 FIRST AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10016
TEL. 340-4600

JUL 9 1971

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7/7/71

Dear Matt -

This is the extent of the
information I have on WMRI -
It's impossible to tell what really
will go on there, but their official
posture seems to be on the "up and
up"

I'll let you know ^{anything} ~~what~~ more
that I may learn -

Sincerely yours

Bob Benjamin

Summary of telephone conversation with Colonel Jordan, July 1, 1971,
concerning the Western Institute of Medical Research:

Colonel Jordan advised that the program started out there is phase one of a three-phase program which has just begun. Ground-breaking is about a few weeks away, but it will be about two years before the building is completed.

If interested in a job there, one should write a letter and include biographical data, to Colonel Gary Rapmund, U.S. Army, Medical Research Development Command, Washington, D.C. 20314. (They are in the Forrestal Building). Colonel Rapmund is the new Deputy, who was until recently the Chief of Research Planning, and can give some idea of the long term program.

In response to a question as to whether the Institute will be working on human tumor viruses, Colonel Jordan replied "No".

When asked if he expected that any classified work would be carried on there, Colonel Jordan said the work will not be classified. He said that primarily the work will be in tropical skin diseases and how these diseases affect the troops in the field, so that a very limited amount of it is classified. He said the only classified material one might get would be foreign reports that were classified prior to being sent there, but that material coming out of there is not classified and will be open to the public.

When asked if there would be any work on biological warfare research, he replied that there was no intention whatsoever - none of that.

When asked if a security clearance would be required to work there, Colonel Jordan replied "Yes".

April 30, 1971

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We, residents living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area, have become quite concerned that an upcoming construction project could seriously endanger the health of San Franciscans, and quite possibly the entire Bay Area, in addition to destroying a major portion of the last remaining open space within San Francisco.

The Department of the Army is planning to build a \$28 million research facility, the Western Medical Institute of Research, adjacent and to the northeast of the existing Letterman General Hospital in the Presidio of San Francisco. We feel that our argument in opposition to this project is twofold:

Firstly, the Western Medical Institute of Research (WMIR) is a serious health hazard. We have recently become familiar with the Army's program for WMIR and have consequently learned facts which are probably unknown to the general public. Officially, WMIR is to be a facility for the study of Asian diseases, specifically those of Southeast Asia. The program for WMIR calls for large building spaces to be equipped with extensive biological seals, sterilizers, air locks, ultra-violet barriers, etc. (devices for closing off building areas to permeability by biological agents such as bacteria, microorganisms, etc.). This strongly implies that a major portion of the building will be used for experimentation with highly contagious and virulent diseases.

Furthermore, the prototype for the design of this building was given by the Army to be the Medical Biological Research Laboratory at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Although this prototype was originally shrouded in semi-secrecy, as is WMIR today, it has become publicly known as a facility for research into biological warfare. The similarities between the two projects are overwhelming. As we are all aware, laboratory accidents are not uncommon; no facility, however sophisticated, is exempt. In addition, WMIR is located in the highest zone of earthquake probability in the United States. We have recently witnessed in Los Angeles the total destruction of buildings engineered to meet the most rigid earthquake design criteria. Yet the biological seals of WMIR are not capable of resisting earth tremors. In the event of even a minor earthquake, contamination, possibly uncontrolled, could result. It must be noted that the Golden Gate Bridge approach, a major traffic artery serving the entire Bay Area, lies but two hundred yards away.

Regardless of whether WMIR will stand as originally programmed or will surreptitiously follow in the footsteps of Fort Detrick, the hazards are tremendous. We, therefore, feel that such a project, if built at all, should certainly not be located in such a densely populated metropolitan area such as San Francisco.

Secondly, the Western Medical Institute of Research is an environmental hazard. WMIR is so designed and located as to encroach upon all of the remaining level open space of the Presidio. It will be 350,000 square feet in area (approximately eight acres) and approximately 60 feet high (40 per cent of the total area of the 52 story Bank of America Headquarters Building in San Francisco). A building of such tremendous bulk is totally out of keeping with its location; it will do nothing but add its ugliness to the already tainted environment of Letterman General Hospital. In addition, it will obliterate the view of the Bay and the Golden Gate for countless citizens living adjacent to the Presidio. There also have recently been serious discussions within the government and the community to have the Presidio set aside as a National Monument for public use. Needless to say, if WMIR is built this would drastically impair this objective. Furthermore, President Nixon has issued a directive that all federal and military projects must consider the welfare of the surrounding community --- there has been no evidence of this. In fact, in a recent random survey by our group of the residential areas surrounding the Presidio, not one resident was aware of this impending project, much less its implications.

This building and its program promise no benefits to the citizens of San Francisco and the Bay Area. On the other hand, the benefits of maintaining such select land for eventual public use are only too obvious.

We feel the time has come to inform the community of what we consider potential danger. By writing this letter we are also hoping that, by your position within the news media and the community, you will be able to assist us in bringing WMIR forward for public scrutiny.

Time is a crucial factor, for the project is scheduled to begin in July, 1971.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this information and our position presented here. In view of the current trend of federal investigations into the activities of private citizens, we feel, unfortunately, that it is necessary to withhold our identity.

Western Institute of Medical Research

1. Construction

- plans to build a \$28 million dollar research facility adjacent to and N.E. of Letterman General Hospital in the Presidio of San Francisco.

- bidding open to prospective contractors June 22, 1971.

- construction to begin in the latter part of July, '71.

Project administered through the Sacramento, Calif. district office of the Army Corps of Engineers (Tel. Area 916 - 449 - 2215), and the resident engineers office at the Presidio (Tel. Area 415 - 561 - 5536).

Consulting engineers : Buonaccorsi & Associates
215 Market St.
San Francisco, Ca. 94105

2. List of rooms included in the plans for intended use

| Sheet No. (FLOOR) | Description |
|-------------------|---|
| A2 | Hazardous equipment room |
| A5 LR/A-1 | Field biology Insect physiology Virology Entymology Infectary |
| | Closed Area: |
| | Immunology transmission Cold room Change room, contamination Shower room, changing room Infected animal holding arbovirus lab Ultra-violet pass box, showers Safety anchors, air locks |
| A6 LR/B-1 | Microbiology Tropical medicine Virology extraction |
| A9 - LR/A-2 | Micropathology Parisitology Immunoparasitology Applied immunology |
| A10 LR/B-2 | Nuclear medicine Pharmecology Virus lab Comparative biomedical research |

WIMR (cont.)List of rooms (cont.)

| Sheet No. (FLOOR) | Description |
|--------------------|--|
| A10 LR/B-2 (cont.) | Immunodiagnostic lab Blood Parasitic lab snail room Schistosomiasis lab Serology lab |
| A17 RS/A-1 | All animal rooms |

3. Units to be consolidated in WIMR

- a. Letterman Army Institute of Research, Presidio.
- b. tropical medicine portion of the Infectious Disease Dept. from Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.
- c. Medical & Metabolic Research Section from the Research and Nutrition lab in Denver, Colo.
- d. Psychophysiology, Biophysics, & Laser Research Sections from the US Army Research Lab, at Fort Knox, Louisville, Kentucky.

4. Press coverage

- a. S.F. Examiner, March 9, 1970, pg.30,sect.A, article by George McEvay, "Walter Reed of the West". Article said that Letterman Army Institute of Research to be moved into a twelve story complex. ...like Walter Reed and the Central Medical Institute of Research (Ft. Sam Huston,Texas)
- b.release from the Office of the Surgeon General, 16 March 1970, indicated that 600 people, plus 100 scientists would be employed by the Army at the new facility. About the work it said,scientists would be "operating on teams investigating exotic diseases in remote areas of the world where American troops may be stationed. It is important to be able to prevent or treat such diseases"
- c.Another release indicated that one reason for choosing the Bay Area as the site for the project was the availability of scientists.