



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS
DIVISION

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The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter summarizes the results of our review of the Department of Defense (DOD) housing referral program in Europe and the actions DOD has taken or planned on our recommendations for improving Housing Referral Office (HRO) operations. In June of last year we reported to the Congress on HRO activities in the United States (B-133102, June 12, 1973).

The European review was made at Army HROs in Frankfurt, Wuerzburg, Schwabish-Hall, and Kaiserslautern, Germany; Navy HROs in Naples, Italy, and Rota, Spain; and Air Force HROs in Alconbury, England, and Ramstein, Germany, and Torrejon, Spain. We also held discussions with officials of the European headquarters of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and some intermediate commands.

The housing referral program was established to insure that military personnel are quickly, adequately, and economically housed in off-base housing near their duty stations. Additionally, HROs were made responsible for a number of related activities, including administration of the anti-discrimination policy.

In Europe the housing referral program was started in July 1970 by the Air Force, January 1971 by the Army, and February 1972 by the Navy. The number and estimated costs of HROs in the area for fiscal year 1972 are shown below:

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<u>Service</u>	<u>HROs</u>	<u>Operating costs</u>
Army	64	\$1,174,000
Navy	8	59,000
Air Force	<u>29</u>	<u>348,000</u>
	<u>101</u>	<u>\$1,581,000</u>

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS,
AND AGENCY ACTIONS

Our review showed that many military personnel were reluctant to check in at the HROs when seeking off-post housing because HROs did not have adequate listings from which to choose available housing. HRO efforts in this regard were somewhat hampered because many military members residing in the community did not provide to the HROs the required rental information on the housing they were planning to vacate.

Additionally, we found that efforts to provide nondiscriminatory housing could be improved and that erroneous information was being reported on HRO operations. These problems reduced the effectiveness of the housing referral program in Europe.

On August 9, 1973, we brought our findings to the attention of the Secretary of Defense and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. We suggested that the Secretary of Defense increase emphasis on the European unit commanders' role in stimulating HRO staffs to locate more vacant rental units and in having military personnel in their command comply with the requirement that they apprise the HRO of the status of their off-base housing.

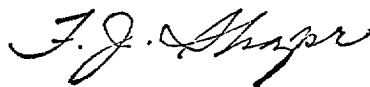
In a letter dated October 15, 1973, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Installations and Logistics) agreed that more emphasis of the kind we proposed was needed at the time of our review. He said that the three military departments hoped to realize the effectiveness needed in HRO operations by increasing unit command support and cited the following examples of actions taken or planned:

- Joint DOD-military department team visits to identify operational deficiencies on which corrective action could be taken or planned.
- Renewed emphasis on having Inspectors General review HRO/equal opportunity in off-base housing programs and procedures as an integral part of their inspections.
- Plans for a European housing referral seminar in Germany in October 1973 (actually held in early November) to be attended by departmental representatives.
- Revisions to the HRO instruction (later issued in November 1973) to update the procedures and guidance covering the establishment, performance, and associated reporting requirements of HROs.

The management initiatives listed above should substantially improve the operation of HROs, particularly in ameliorating the discrimination problem. However, continued vigilance will be required to insure that the followthrough essential to resolving the problems does actually occur. Therefore, although we have no further recommendations to make at this time, we do plan to review in the future the effectiveness of the corrective actions taken.

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Sincerely yours,



F. J. Shafer
Director