



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

James L. Oberstar
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

John L. Mica
Ranking Republican Member

September 28, 2007

David Heysfeld, Chief of Staff
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

James W. Coon II, Republican Chief of Staff

The Honorable Calvin L. Scovel III
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Scovel:

Enclosed please find a copy of an email from a United States Marine describing the treatment of Marines and soldiers at Oakland International Airport on September 27, 2007. (The Marine who contacted us has asked that his identity be protected.) These active duty military personnel, who were returning home from theater in Iraq, were not allowed into the passenger terminal at Oakland International Airport. Instead they had to deplane about 400 yards away from the terminal and were denied access to the terminal building and its facilities.

It is our understanding that this was not an airport security issue. The Transportation Security Administration has indicated that the soldiers and Marines were cleared through security screening and Customs at JFK and traveling from one sterile area to another. Thus, additional screening would not have been required. Rather, indications are that this was an airport operator decision and may have been related to the payment or non-payment of airport fees.

We would ask that you initiate an immediate investigation into this matter. We believe that this is not an isolated incident. If this is discovered to be a decision by the airport authority, a recipient of Federal funding and operator of a public use airport, it is simply unacceptable and may be a violation of Federal laws and regulations.

Please contact Holly Woodruff Lyons (226-3220) or Jim Coon (225-9446) should you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,



John L. Mica
Ranking Republican
Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure



Thomas Petri
Ranking Republican
Subcommittee on Aviation

Email received by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Staff,
September 28, 2007:

.....
**Marines and Soldiers Returning from Iraq not allowed
into Oakland terminal**

On September 27th 204 Marines and soldiers who were returning from Iraq were not allowed into the passenger terminal at Oakland International Airport. Instead they had to deplane about 400 yards away from the terminal where the extra baggage trailers were located.

This was the last scheduled stop for fuel and food prior to flying to Hawaii where both were based. The trip started in Kuwait on September 26th with a rigorous search of checked and carry on baggage by US Customs. All baggage was x-rayed with a "backscatter" machine AND each bag was completely emptied and hand searched. After being searched, checked bags were marked and immediately placed in a secure container. Carry on bags were then x rayed again to ensure no contraband items were taken on the plane. While waiting for the bus to the airport, all personnel were in quarantined in a fenced area and were not allowed to leave.

The first stop for fuel/food and crew change was in Leipzig Germany. Troops exited the aircraft and took a bus to a reception area in the terminal, where there was a convenience store, phones, Internet and restrooms. As we exited the bus we were given a re-boarding pass. Three troops remained on the plane with the rifles and pistols. There was no ammunition on the plane and the bolts of the rifles had been removed. After about 2 hours troops re-boarded the plane and flew to JFK in NY.

At JFK the procedure was similar to Germany, 3 troops stayed on the plane to guard weapons while the rest deplaned. At the gate we were each given a re-boarding pass and spent about 1.5 hours in the terminal, at which time we re-boarded and flew to Oakland.

As we came in for the final approach to Oakland a Lieutenant who served in Afghanistan with the same unit in 2006 mentioned how when they landed in Oakland they were not allowed in the terminal. He said, "they made us get out by the FED EX building and we had to sit out there for 3 hours". He also indicated he was almost arrested by the TSA for getting belligerent about them not letting the Marines into the terminal.

Well the same thing happened again. This time we did not park by the FED EX building, instead we were offloaded near the grass that separates the active runway from the taxi ramp, about 400 yards from the terminal. When we inquired why they wouldn't allow us in the airport they gave us some lame excuse that we hadn't been screened by TSA. While true, the screening which we did have was much more thorough than any TSA search and was done by US Customs. Additionally, JFK didn't seem to have a problem with our entering their terminal, nor did security in Germany.

It felt like being spit on. Every Marine and soldier felt the message loud and clear, "YOU ARE NOT WELCOME IN OAKLAND!"