

# Stillwater air base 'looks good' for new prison, says state aide

By MARGIE LAW  
Staff Reporter

STILLWATER — After touring the former U.S. Air Force Radar Station at Ketchem's Corners with local officials Friday, state officials said the federally-owned site shows potential for being transformed into a medium-security prison.

"This base could be converted into a very secure correctional facility with safe custody and minimal concern to the community. It looks good to me," said William Gard, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Corrections.

The radar facility could easily house about 160 to 200 inmates from a security point of view, he said, but the engineers and architects might have some problems with the base.

At the beginning of the tour, Gard said he was making a "feasibility visit" and added the state is considering sites at Watertown and Lockport, which are also former military installations.

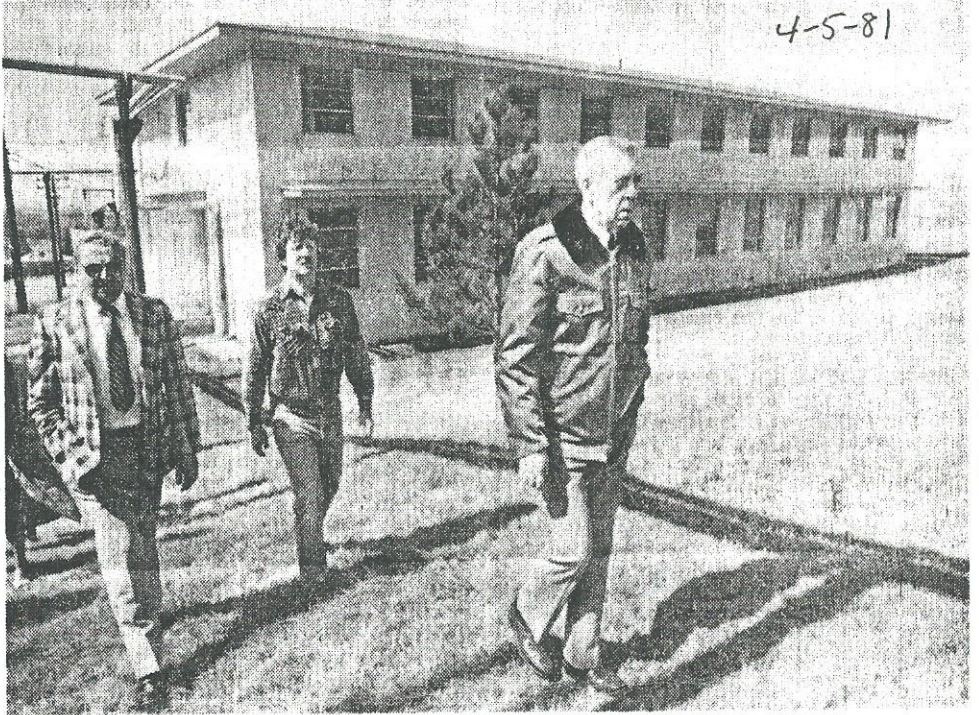
Accompanying the deputy commissioner Friday was an entourage of officials from the state Office of General Services, the state Division of the Budget, the state Department of Corrections as well as Fred McNeary, chairman of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors.

Stillwater Town Supervisor William Herrick along with board members Thomas "Copper" Kinisky and James Farnan were on hand and afterwards, they voiced disappointment at the state's positive reaction to the facility.

The tour came in the wake of Thursday's Town Board meeting at which local residents from both Stillwater and Saratoga banded together in opposition to a correctional facility at the base.

Besides passing a resolution and circulating petitions against the opening of a state prison, the Town Board decided Thursday to hold a special meeting at 7:30 p.m. Monday at Stillwater Central School Auditorium on North Hudson Avenue.

The state Department of Corrections unveiled its consideration of the radar base for a prison Thursday and Louis



INSPECTING SITE — Local and state officials inspect the grounds of the former U.S. Air Force Radar Station in for possible use as a prison. Local people are opposed to a prison in the remote area near Saratoga Lake. From the left are Thomas Kinisky and James Farnan, Stillwater Town Board members, and William Gard, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Corrections.

Ganim, department spokesman, said temporary cell space is needed because projections for new prisoners in 1981 have jumped from 700 to 2,000.

Gard agreed Friday that the radar base, if selected, would only be utilized as a state prison for a few years.

"Once we moved out, it would revert back back to the community. It's federal now — they're surprising it and we asked about it," he added.

Kinisky then asked Gard if the state has any plans to turn the facility, if selected, over to Saratoga County for a \$1.

"I haven't heard about it, but that doesn't mean it's not accurate," Gard replied.

Meanwhile, Ballston Town Supervisor William E. Sewell,

chairman of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors Public Safety Committee, expressed doubts Friday about any county intentions to take over the base if the state goes ahead and selects it.

It would be an expensive proposition for the county to secure and staff such a facility and maintain its present complex at the same time, he said.

Gard said he would make a recommendation Friday on the radar base to Thomas A. Coughlin III, commissioner of the Department of Corrections.

The ultimate decision, he added, would include the commissioner, the state Division of the Budget, the governor's office and the community.

"People have a fear of the unknown.

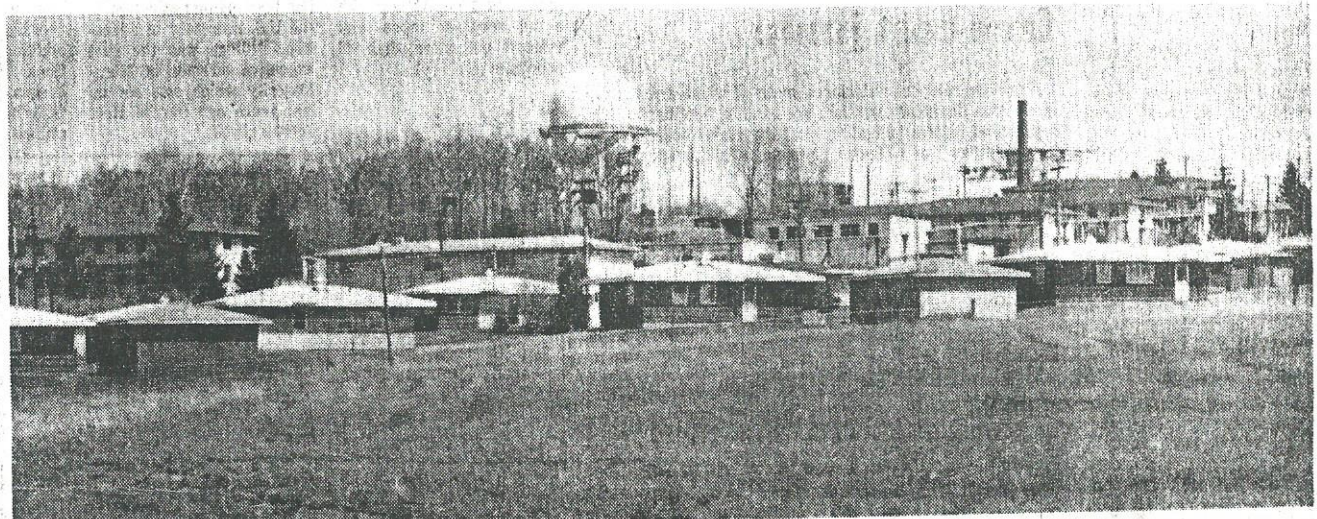
If you would talk to people in communities where we have prisons, they would say that they consider us good neighbors," Gard said.

He also said a medium-security prison is for inmates with less than 30 months left to serve who don't present a serious security risk.

The state urgently needs more cell space because of a rise in felony indictments in the New York City area in recent months, Gard added.

"I see a light at the end of the tunnel, but the headlight on the locomotive is burning down on us," he said.

With a visit to Lockport planned in the near future, Gard said he doesn't know when a facility choice would be made.



POSSIBLE PRISON — This view of the abandoned U.S. Air Force Radar Station at Ketchem's Corners in the town of Stillwater shows the radar dome in the foreground and the enlisted men's barracks in

the background just ahead of the radar dome. State officials say the site has potential for being transformed into a medium security prison. (Photos by Mike McMahon)