
Defense Report

AUSA



Minding the Stores

The Operations and Maintenance Programs (O&M) of the various military services have been prime targets for Congressional fund cuts through the years, apparently through a lack of understanding of their importance. Cuts have reduced already austere maintenance of both real property and equipment, and the backlog of unfinished repair, overhaul, and modification work have grown substantially.

Training has also been seriously constrained, with time in the field reduced, training exercises curtailed, and troops often diverted from training to non-military housekeeping jobs.

In FY76 for example, Army O&M funds were cut by \$111 million, a small figure considering the total budget, but a sum equivalent to the annual supplies used by over five divisions. Moreover, the budget process itself does not take the serious impact of inflation sufficiently into account. A recent Army report says, "We currently project that the O&M Appropriation will have to absorb a total of \$446 million (of inflation) in FY76 and, under the budgeting rules, we will absorb \$328 million in FY77". This loss is most serious considering highly inflated costs facing the Army: coal up 102% last year, truck mufflers up 113.6%, tank tracks up 132%, and self-propelled howitzer tracks up 186%.

The Army's O&M problems (which are typical of all services) become even more difficult when one considers the tremendous spread of activities funded by O&M money. For example, for FY77 the Army O&M request of \$8.06 billion will fund:

—The training and operation of over 650 combat/combat support Army units.

—The operation and maintenance of 1,153 posts and stations around the world, 158,000 buildings and structures, and 16,000 miles of streets.

—The training of 601,000 military and 111,588 civilians in 45 training centers, schools, and civilian institutions.

—The medical treatment of a potential patient load of 3.4 million individuals.

—The movement of about 5.4 million tons of supplies and equipment.

—The wages of 238,550 U.S. and foreign national civilians.

—Depot maintenance, including equipment overhaul, about one billion dollars worth.

O&M Funds are truly the life blood of the U.S. military and absolutely essential to the basic readiness of our forces.