
Defense Report

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GAO Combat Readiness Report Scored as Out-of-Date

The Secretary of the Army, Martin R. Hoffmann, recently told the Associated Press that a General Accounting Office report made public by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey in July which attacked the combat readiness of U.S. Army forces in Europe (Seventh Army) reflected conditions 18 months and more ago.

Secretary Hoffmann said that the combat readiness of Army troops in Europe has "dramatically improved" since the time of the GAO investigation. He added, "We're making tremendous progress."

The GAO report itself tends to support Secretary Hoffmann's contention that the report is already out-of-date. It said that followup work (done by the GAO) at the units in November 1975 showed "significant improvement".

Senator Humphrey, in announcing the GAO report, said that "the readiness of first-line U.S. combat armored units in Europe is woefully deficient."

He added, "I particularly deplore the fact that war reserve tracked vehicles (tanks, personnel carriers, and other such vehicles) in Europe were substantially reduced from 1973 through 1975 to meet foreign military sales commitments and have yet to be replenished." He also berated the Army for personnel shortages in combat units and the "lack of experience and combat skills among a portion of the existing personnel."

In writing about the report in the *Baltimore Sun*, senior Pentagon correspondent, Charles Corddry noted that a Defense Department spokesman, "said the Senator had noted problems the Pentagon had called to Congress' attention for three years and has put 'his own interpretation' on them."

A retired major general, combat veteran of three wars, who visited Seventh Army in June, backed Secretary Hoffmann. He said, "The GAO report is really out-of-date. The facts are that the Army is rapidly getting well from the ills of 'personnel mismatch' (individuals trained in specialities other than those being performed), and enough personnel are now on hand." He pointed out that lack of adequate funding played a major role in both past training deficiencies and the slow rate of replacement for the tracked vehicles sent to other countries (mostly Israel) in 1973-75.

He concluded, "The Seventh Army is fast returning to its status prior to the Vietnam War when it was considered to be the best peacetime field army the U.S. has ever had."