
Defense Report

AUSA



The Best Army in the World Can't Fight Without Ammunition

The United States Army is probably better, man-for-man and division-for-division, than any other in the world. Setting aside any arguments about the long-range impact of the all-volunteer concept, we can safely say that given the proper weapons and support our Army can guarantee a solid, professional performance under the most trying circumstances.

There is one thing this best of armies can't do, however, and that is to fight without adequate supplies of ammunition. It does little good to have well-trained soldiers with the most modern weapons if they cannot depend on a reliable flow of ammunition.

It has been almost four years since U.S. Army ammunition stocks were denuded to provide support for Israel during the Yom Kippur attacks by Egypt and Syria. In the intervening years those stocks have been only partially rebuilt and recent assessments of the readiness of Army units in Europe indicate that the lack of reserve ammunition stocks continues to diminish their ability to carry their share of the defense of Western Europe. The shortage of ammunition Army-wide has also weakened the effectiveness of training.

In the face of these realities the Carter administration has chosen to cut the Army's ammunition procurement account by well over \$100 million for Fiscal Year 1978. Included in the total is money intended to improve production facilities. One of the first direct effects of the cut will be the shut-down of production at the Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant in Tennessee, the loss of employment for hundreds of civilians and, worst of all for the Army, another gap in its plans to replenish its ammunition supplies.

Unlike production lines for trucks, radios or hundreds of other items of military hardware there is no civilian counterpart to the plants that produce artillery shells, rockets and the whole spectrum of sophisticated ammunition. The United States would have to start any war with the ammunition stocks on hand with the only source of replenishment found in whatever government-owned ammunition plants might be in operation. In the weeks and months it would take to get standby plants going again the Army, and the other services for which it produces ammunition, would be in peril of running out of ammunition.

The Army knows it can't have everything it wants but a request for something as basic as ammunition should be taken more seriously. To do anything else would be like sending a baseball team into the game without any bats. The only way they could score any runs would be on walks and bean balls.