
Defense Report

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The Army's Ammunition—It Needs Maintenance Just as a Tank or Truck Does

Ammunition is an army's stock-in-trade. It needs rifle cartridges, artillery rounds and missiles of all kinds to train its recruits and to keep its fighting units in a proper state of readiness. It also needs a substantial supply available to carry out its ultimate mission—fighting a war.

Each year the Army buys ammunition to put in its war stockpile and withdraws some to use for training. This rotation maintains a flow of fresh ammunition into the stockpile but, obviously, there is far more in storage than could possibly be used for training. And, despite earnest efforts to make sure the storage facilities keep the ammunition in usable condition, it is very susceptible to the effect of moisture and the corrosion of its own components. The Army has an on-going program of inspections and rehabilitation.

At the present time the Army has more than 200,000 short tons of unserviceable ammunition in its inventory. Almost three fourths of this is ammunition for its premier artillery weapons, the 105 mm, 155 mm and 8-inch howitzers. Each year the backlog of unserviceable ammunition grows by 58,000 short tons, as the amount of money available for renovation lags behind what is needed. At this rate, by 1983 there will be a half million tons of unusable ammunition in the stockpile.

Any civilian hunter or marksman knows how the cost of simple rifle and pistol ammunition has risen and would have an appreciation for the skyrocketing cost of the far-more sophisticated ammunition items like artillery rounds and missiles. While the Army is still struggling to rebuild its reserve stock five years after the massive draw-downs in support of Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War it is particularly important that salvageable ammunition be reclaimed and returned to the usable stockpile. This process is expensive but still much less costly than replacing it with new purchases.

The Army has asked for \$15 million for ammunition upkeep in the upcoming 1979 fiscal year and, although this is almost twice as much as the amount available this year, it is barely a third of the \$50 million it would like to have to whip the problem into better shape during Fiscal Year 1980. After that it would take about \$30 million a year through 1983 to bring the problem entirely under control.

The Army openly acknowledges it is not in shape to support the ammunition needs of an active combat situation. This is the end result of a variety of cases ranging from shrinking budgets to the Yom Kippur War draw-down. Spending more money to improve the availability of the Army's stock-in-trade would pay extraordinary dividends in military readiness.