

---

# Defense Report

AUSA



---

## **Almost a Fifth of Our Army Lives In Military Tenements**

The early days of the Volunteer Army were dotted with news releases about plans to build better barracks to house this new breed of professional soldier, a man or woman who could be expected to stay in the Army longer because they would no longer be subject to many of the unsatisfactory conditions typical of a predominantly draftee force. They were to have semi-private rooms where they could have their own stereo equipment, hang pictures and use an adjacent bathroom with a modicum of privacy. The rows of double bunks in one big room were to be relegated to World War II movies and old episodes of "Sergeant Bilko."

But now, as we close out the sixth year of pure volunteerism, the best we can say is that some progress has been made toward modern troop housing. Army posts throughout the United States are still using clusters of ramshackle wooden barracks built at the outset of World War II, 36 or more years ago. Here and there some amenities have been added, like stall enclosures around the toilets in the communal bathroom. The original electrical wiring has probably been replaced in all of them to provide some measure of protection against a fire but, considering the uncountable coats of paint that hold their rotting timbers together, it is nothing short of miraculous that the Army has never had a major disaster in the form of a fire in a crowded troop barracks.

Overseas, particularly in Germany, the situation is even worse. Many of the old German Army barracks occupied by our troops there were built in the late 19th Century and they suffer all the ills of aged structures. Worldwide, 18% of the soldiers occupying military quarters live under conditions called "substandard." That totals 50,000 of the volunteers who cost so much to recruit, to train and to replace when they become disenchanted.

Congress has been appropriating money to build troop housing but progress toward the goal of having the entire Army in adequate quarters has been slow. Some large military posts, like Forts Stewart and Polk, are still almost entirely in their World War II configuration. Fiscal Year 1979 funding will only reduce the barracks backlog by 1½%. In Germany the host nation, as part of an agreement to help offset the costs of maintaining US forces, has made some progress toward rehabilitation of the ancient barracks.

But if we are to maintain an Active Army of true volunteers and to reduce the costly turnover rate we must convince the first term enlistees that they are something more than second class citizens. It was wrong to force draftees to live in military tenements but at least they knew they could escape back to normal creature comforts after just two years. We want and need our volunteers to stay longer.