
Defense Report

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Ammunition for an Army—It Must Be There When It is Needed

There are not many things military analysts can agree on but one of them is the conclusion that the next time the United States Army has to fight a major war the battle will be joined with whatever the Army happens to have on hand in the form of troops, equipment and supplies. One most frequently hears this described as a "come-as-you-are-war." Our Army faces a number of complications affecting its ability to go to war today and sustain itself tomorrow. There are serious manpower shortages in both the Active and Reserve components of the Army and no viable means exists to get more soldiers quickly. The industrial base dedicated to military production has shrunk over the years and is not readily expandable. While sufficient airlift is available to get early deploying troops to Europe there is not enough air or sea lift to haul the massive amounts of supplies that would be needed to sustain an army in combat there.

But there is one specific shortage that especially plagues Army war planners. Ammunition, the most basic commodity for a fighting army, is in critically short supply. There are neither reserve stocks nor quickly responsive production capacity to fill a supply line from the United States to Europe or wherever our forces might be engaged. The Army describes its ammunition predicament as ". . . a minimum sustaining condition," which means it has enough to conduct a barely satisfactory amount of training and to last it through the first few days of violent combat but has nothing to fall back on. Crews manning the TOW antitank missile launchers in Europe are permitted to fire one practice missile each year but the troops in the United States are rationed to one practice missile per three crews. There is similar rationing for every other kind of ammunition.

Ammunition is not cheap and the trend is toward greater cost as our ground combat weapons become more and more sophisticated and as production costs feel the effects of inflation. A single round for an M-16 rifle cost just six cents a few years ago. Its cost has now tripled. The TOW missile, so stringently rationed for training, costs \$5,000 but it is far less expensive than a HAWK air defense missile or a LANCE tactical nuclear missile. The Army has budgeted a billion dollars to buy ammunition during the next fiscal year and plans to shoot \$600 million worth of that ammunition in training. The balance, if it is approved by Congress, will be used to build up the war reserve stockpile.

The procurement of adequate amounts of ammunition and the maintenance of a standby industrial base to produce more quickly is an inescapable expense as long as the United States and its armed forces expect to play a major role in world affairs. Without ammunition our Army is a paper tiger.