
Defense Report

AUSA



Living and Working Conditions for Our Troops in Europe—Testimony to Misguided Parsimony

No secret has been made of the fact that living and working conditions for our soldiers in Europe and for their families leave a lot to be desired. Nevertheless, when the commander of U.S. Army, Europe, prepared two books of photographs illustrating the actual conditions he induced a reaction of genuine shock.

The pictures of places where soldiers are expected to work include offices set up in condemned trailers, motor pools in which soldiers are attempting to maintain tracked vehicles while standing in mud up to their shins, other soldiers working on helicopters in a gymnasium that had been converted to a hanger because it was the only dry, heated space available and data processing offices in cramped, damp basements.

The pictures illustrating the living conditions for troops serving in Germany without their families showed examples of four or more men crowded into tiny rooms, leaking roofs, falling plaster, inoperative or missing plumbing, boilers rusted out and disintegrating floors.

As depicted in the photographs, conditions in family quarters were no better. They showed water damage to floors, walls and electrical wiring, inefficient, hand-fired boilers serving large apartment buildings and hot water heaters so corroded that they will not function properly.

The illustrations do not show isolated, worst cases. These conditions predominate throughout the command. Some barracks, motor pools, offices and family quarters have been refurbished and some new ones have been built; but they are the exceptions. Soldiers being assigned to duty in Germany for three or more years know they have a better-than-even chance to spend that time living under conditions they would expect to find only in the most run-down areas of a U.S. city.

The answer, of course, is money—enough money to begin catching up with many years of misguided parsimony by a Congress that wants an outstanding fighting force in Europe but hasn't wanted to pay for it. Our soldiers and their families should not be expected to live and work under these conditions.