
Defense Report

AUSA



Living Conditions for Our Troops in Europe — They Are Poor at Best

When an unmarried American soldier is assigned to a tour of duty in Europe, he or she must look forward to a long period of living under the most unsatisfactory conditions that exist in the Army today. This has nothing to do with the fact that our units in Germany spend a substantial amount of time in the field on maneuvers. In fact, some soldiers probably prefer to be living in a tent during good weather than to be existing in old, run-down barracks.

With very few exceptions, the barracks the U.S. Army inherited at the end of World War II were built many years before the war started. Some of them even date back to the period before World War I. This in itself is not so bad — some of the best quarters the U.S. Army has are quite old, but they have been well maintained over the years. This is not true, however, of the barracks in Germany. The typical troop billet has bad plumbing, ineffective heating, poor ventilation, collapsing ceilings and paper-thin walls. Under conditions like this, it is easy to see why troops tend to spend little of their off-duty time in their barracks and why commanders frequently have difficulty instilling unit pride.

The U.S. Army would like to leave these military ghettos behind and move many of its units in Germany further east, into better positions to execute defensive plans. This would be a very expensive undertaking and is probably not feasible without considerable help from the German government or from NATO in general. In the meantime, the U.S. Congress has been very reluctant to appropriate money for maintenance of the dilapidated barracks, apparently hoping that the host country, Germany, and the other members of the NATO alliance will take pity on American soldiers and do something to make life more bearable. For their part, almost all German soldiers live in post-World War II quarters that are meticulously maintained.

Our soldiers enlist voluntarily and are trained at bases where new barracks have been built as an enticement for enlistment. If assigned to a stateside unit they are almost always housed in modern, well-kept buildings. But when they are dispatched to serve in what we consider to be our most important overseas area, we condemn them to live under extremely poor conditions. It doesn't make much sense.