

Misfiring Cannons, Rotted Tires in US Army Gear Pulled for Ukraine, Watchdog Finds

It's not the first time the unit and its contractor have been faulted for poorly maintained equipment by the service's inspector general.

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When technicians got a look at one U.S. Army howitzer set to ship to Ukraine, it wasn't pretty. The [M777 cannon](#), which an Army contractor was presenting for inspection, "would have killed somebody" if it were fired, the technicians said, according to a recent [report](#) by the Defense Department's inspector general.

The investigation details numerous failures by an Army unit and a contractor that could have endangered the lives of Ukrainian or U.S. troops if the faulty equipment had been fielded. The report also exposes problems with a program designed to help soldiers deploy quickly across the world.

Nor is it the first time the inspector general faulted the Army's 401st Army Field Support Battalion and Amentum Services: a [report](#) in June 2018 cited similar problems.

Near the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, the Army requested that the 401st send all six of its M777 howitzers stored in Kuwait to Europe. The cannons were part of the Army's prepositioned stock program, which stores vehicles and weapons abroad to speed and simplify the process of deploying units from the United States.

The commander in charge of the stores told his superiors that the M777s were not fit to be sent to Ukraine, the inspector general report said. According to the report, the contractor had skipped the quarterly and annual services for the cannons for 19 months.

In response, the Army sent out a field repair crew that found the M777s in a sorry state. Four of the six cannons had breech-blocks that could not properly lock, meaning that firing could result in misfires that would kill soldiers manning the gun. On all the cannons, old

hydraulic fluid had been recycled, which threatened further malfunctions.

Even when the issues were fixed and the guns shipped to Europe, problems persisted. Staff in Europe found worn firing pins and faulty firing mechanisms that forced the Army to yet again delay the howitzers' shipment to Ukraine.

The cannons weren't the only problem, though.

The 401st's logisticians in Kuwait had previously rated 28 of their 29 [M1167 Humvees](#) as fit for use. The M1167 is an up-armored version of the Army's standard utility vehicle that carries an anti-tank missile launcher.

When the military ordered the 401st to send all 29 vehicles, though, the unit found that 26 of the vehicles were non-functional. Among the vehicle problems were dead batteries, fluid leaks, and faulty gauges.

After fixing the problems, the 401st sent the vehicles to Europe, only for the Army to find other issues. A Europe-based unit had to replace the tires on 25 of the 29 vehicles due to dry rot.

One vehicle had a tire shred due to dry rot in the middle of delivery to Ukraine's military, according to the report. When the Europe-based unit replaced the shredded tire with the spare, the spare also failed "due to dry rot" the report said.

The vehicles should have been kept in condition such that they would be operational with little or no major repairs, a standard known as [Technical Manual 10/20](#), the report said.

With little time to spare, one vehicle that was missing an non-essential part was eventually sent to Ukraine with a note for Ukrainian forces to request a replacement part later.

The commander of Army Materiel Command, Gen. Charles R. Hamilton, told inspector general auditors that maintenance had been funded at 30 percent of its requirement in fiscal year 2023, or \$27.8 million of the \$91.3 million requirement.

Both Army Materiel Command and the 401st disputed some of the inspector general's findings, launching yet another rebuke from the inspector general.

Army Materiel Command claimed the contractor was not contractually obligated to maintain the equipment in a state such that it was immediately ready to go. Auditors shot back that this was untrue, citing the agreement with the contractor.

Army Materiel Command and the 401st commander in charge of the Kuwait stores also said that auditors picked the wrong service manual to evaluate the rot in the tires. Again, inspector general auditors weren't having it, noting that whatever the manual might say, the vehicles' tires were so poorly maintained that they shredded under use.

The 401st has not sent faulty equipment since these errors arose, thanks to increased inspections by their staff, the report said. Auditors cautioned, however, that the 401st had not written these checks into its policy, meaning that the next commander may not enforce the same inspection standards.

The contractor [responsible](#) for maintaining the supplies is Amentum Services, according to USASpending, a government-run database of federal contracts. The inspector general report did not name the contractor in its own report.

Amentum has held the contract since 2016 and will continue until January 2024, charging \$947.6 million for its services so far. The company is among the largest providers of government services, [employing](#) more than 20,000 workers.

It's not the first time the inspector general has cited 401st and Amentum for a failure to maintain equipment.

In 2018, an inspector general report [found](#) that the 401st was not ensuring that its contractor was properly maintaining prepositioned equipment. Consequently, auditors found that 314 of 433 vehicles they inspected were not on the correct maintenance schedule.

The contractor at that time was URS Federal Services, later acquired by a firm named AECOM, which in 2020 [spun](#) out Amentum as a separate business.

The chief of the land-based prepositioned stocks at Army Sustainment Command did not respond to the 2018 inspector general report.

In a bleak prediction that was eventually fulfilled, the 2018 inspector general report warned that "vehicles and equipment that are not properly maintained are less likely to be operable and combat-ready for deploying units."

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