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April 4, 2011 Rev 1

TECHNICAL NOTE 87: CARE OF AMMUNITION

Modern NATO standard ammunition is generally of high quality, and is assembled and sealed to protect against damage from environmental influences such as dampness. Ammunition is too often taken for granted though. The purpose of this Technical Note is to provide information important in field conditions.

A recent analysis of ammunition malfunctions in Iraq and Afghanistan has revealed that common practices of handling ammunition in the field can actually damage ammunition and cause failures. To prevent ammunition problems:

1. Keep ammunition in its factory container until needed. Avoid exposing it to direct sun, dust, and weather to avoid deterioration of the exterior surface or propellant.

2. Wipe ammunition clean and dry if it becomes damp, sandy, or dusty. The friction from even a slight amount of corrosion or contaminates (especially powdery sand) can prevent extraction.

3. Do not use chemicals or polishes to "pretty up" ammunition. Polished and/or waxed or oiled ammunition can reduce the friction between the cartridge case and the chamber walls resulting in dangerous pressures against the bolt. Oiling ammunition may cause contamination of the primer and deactivate it, preventing the cartridge from firing when needed.

4. Avoid repeatedly unloading and rechambering a single round of ammunition. In some weapons including the M16 and M4, each time a cartridge is chambered it receives a light strike from the firing pin. Repeated strikes on a single cartridge can result in damage to the primer and subsequent failure of the damaged cartridge to fire at an awkward moment. Repeated chambering can also deform the cartridge. Cartridges that have been repeatedly rechambered should be exchanged for fresh cartridges and then should be saved and fired during training.

 Reformatted 110404. *THE WIZ*