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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

PROCUREMENT AND SYSTEMS
ACQUISITION DIVISION

74-0319

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MAR 18 1974

B-174472

The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense



Attention: Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Comptroller)

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In April 1973 we informed you that we would initiate followup work on our report to you titled "Combat Soldiers Need More Head and Body Protection," B-174472, May 8, 1972 (code 67035). In that report we stated the Army's attempts at reducing the weight of its vest and helmet without increasing their ballistic protection may not be warranted because Vietnam data indicated that greater ballistic protection was needed. The same data showed that only 19 percent of the Army soldiers included in the analysis wore vests.

Our report recommended, among other things, that the Army deemphasize weight reduction and put a higher priority on developing a new helmet and vest which meets the soldier's need for head, face, neck, and body protection, and that the Army use the vest in training programs so that soldiers will become accustomed to using it.

We reviewed the actions taken by the Army as a result of the above-cited report and found that the Army has made changes in its body armor program which could significantly alleviate the conditions cited in our report. Specifically, we found that the Army revised its materiel need for personnel armor and now gives first priority to casualty reduction followed by human factors, reliability, and maintainability. We were informed that the armor development plan is being revised to reflect this change in priorities. We also found that the Army revised its training regulations to encourage unit commanders to use body armor and helmets during appropriate periods in training and to stress the importance of protective head and body gear as a means of preventing or minimizing wounds in combat operations.

We believe that these actions, if properly implemented, should result in the development of a vest and helmet which will provide the soldier with the desired protection. Furthermore, the Army's training

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program should increase the soldier's willingness to use the vest and helmet in combat situations. Thus, we believe the Army's actions will significantly decrease future battlefield casualties.

Because of the Army's positive actions, we do not plan to do any further work in the area at this time. If you or your representatives wish to obtain further details concerning this matter, please contact Mr. Harold H. Rubin, Deputy Director (Technology Advancement), on code 129, extension 4325.

Copies of this letter are being sent to Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Armed Services, and Government Operations; Senator Charles McC. Mathias, Jr.; and Congressman Henry P. Smith, III. Copies are also being sent to the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, the Secretaries of the Army and Navy, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

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Sincerely yours,



R. W. Gutmann
Director