

More than eye candy, Watervliet's painters add value

U.S. Army

WATERVLIET ARSENAL, N.Y. (Feb. 13, 2013) -- Imagine walking into a car dealership where every new car was absent of paint. There is no doubt that sight would quickly catch your attention, but once the novelty and curiosity had worn off the likelihood of you buying one of those cars would probably be slim to none. Although a paint job may not significantly contribute to the performance of a car, it is nonetheless so critical to the perception of the overall quality and the visual appeal of the product that its impact is immeasurable.

Much of this is also true with the paint applied by military manufacturing with one big exception -- paint does perform a valuable role to the performance and maintainability of military hardware.

In one of the oldest buildings on the Watervliet Arsenal, which has been an Army-owned-and-operated manufacturing center since the War of 1812, resides one of the most important but unsung heroes of Arsenal manufacturing -- the Arsenal's paint operation.

Steve Koza, the Arsenal's manufacturing support division supervisor, said that his section of five painters work on a diverse workload that includes such military hardware as 155mm howitzer barrels, 120mm tank barrels, 120mm mortar barrels, and baseplates for the 120mm mortar systems.

Each product line has its own painting challenges and therefore, requires a skill set that only a very few workers have at the Arsenal, Koza said.

"This isn't as simple as putting a paint sprayer into someone's hands that they purchased from a local hardware store and tell them to go out and spray their deck," Koza said. "Meticulous preparation, from cleaning to pre-washing to taping, must be precise, otherwise we would spend a lot of time touching up or redoing a part."

Koza said that a specialized paint called CARC, which stands for Chemical Agent Resistant Coating, is applied to places where Soldiers do not touch as a procedure to fire a weapon system.

CARC has been used by the U.S. military for many years and resists the penetration of chemical agents, corrosion, and is very durable against decontamination agents.

Additionally, most of the CARC painting requirements require an epoxy primer to be applied before the paint and lubrication applied before shipment. And speaking of shipment, many of the painters are dual-hatted in that they also build the boxes

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

that the products will be shipped in.

On any given day, there are cannons and mortars being readied for shipment. And so, one may often see one of the painters finish his priming work on a mortar tube and while waiting for the tubes to dry, to begin the packaging an Abrams tank cannon for shipment.

So, the next time a mortarman fires his 120mm mortar or an artilleryman fires his 155mm howitzer, they should have the same level of confidence in the quality of work that is on the outside of their weapon system as they do on the inside.

The Watervliet Arsenal (pronounced water-vleet") is an Army-owned-and-operated manufacturing facility located in Watervliet, New York. The Arsenal is the oldest, continuously active arsenal in the United States, having begun operations in 1813. The Arsenal will conduct its 200th anniversary celebration this July.

Today's Arsenal is relied upon by U.S. and foreign militaries to produce the most advanced, high-tech, high-powered weaponry for cannon, howitzer, and mortar systems. This National Historic Registered Landmark has an annual economic benefit to the local community in excess of \$100 million.

Source URL (retrieved on 10/31/2014 - 4:46am):

http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2013/02/more-eye-candy-watervliets-painters-add-value?qt-recent_content=0