



Crane Army Ammunition Activity

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Media Release

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Crane Army nears SPAM completion

By Randy Tisor, Crane Army Ammunition Activity Public Affairs

CRANE NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY, Indiana – As Army acronyms go, the Super Pull Apart Machine, or SPAM, is certainly a memorable one since it brings to mind the famous canned meat product first introduced in the 1930s or the much newer reference to unsolicited and usually unwanted email.

The Army SPAM, however, refers to a giant mechanism designed to safely and efficiently break-down 30-millimeter projectiles that have been deemed obsolete and need to be eliminated from ammunition stockpiles. The system, according to Stacy Van Hoy, an engineer tasked with leading the project for Crane Army Ammunition Activity, is also capable of safely disassembling other ammunition calibers, but the initial need is focused on 30-millimeter.

“We have what we call the ‘combat mix’,” Van Hoy said, “and that consists of specially hardened rounds and high explosive rounds mixed together and used mainly as tank killers.”

“We (the Army) don’t use them anymore,” he added, explaining that the rounds have largely been replaced by more modern 20-millimeter rounds. The Air Force also recently announced a drawdown in the number of A10 Thunderbolt II close-air support aircraft, further decreasing the need for the 30-millimeter round used by the venerable fixed-wing tank hunter.

“The warfighters can basically carry a lot more ammo because of the (lesser) weight, and the technology has improved to the point where they are just as effective as the 30-millimeter had been,” Van Hoy said.

The large-footprint SPAM, currently operating in a beta phase to work out any kinks and issues, is the right tool to separate the obsolete projectile from its metal cartridge casing. Propellant and other materials within the casing are handled within the various steps of the Rube Goldberg-like operation.

Propellant is sucked into a vacuum system several hundred feet away for disposal in a controlled burn. Primers used in the rounds are, while still in the casing, fired individually in an isolated section within the SPAM. Like many of the efficiencies anticipated to be garnered by SPAM, the step of igniting the primers as a distinct process within the SPAM operation actually contributes to the project’s overall cost savings.

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Van Hoy added that the process was also safer and environmentally friendly with the addition of an air-scrubber ventilation system that collects particles emitted with each primer ignition. Over several hundred primers per hour, or thousands per shift.

Rounds, Van Hoy stated, are processed through SPAM at a rate of one every one to two seconds, and the system runs independently of the need to have hands-on operators during the many steps in turning rounds into various forms of scrap. "You load up the SPAM with rounds, and nobody touches them until everything's processed and done at the other end," Van Hoy said.

Metal pieces are sent to recyclers, generating revenue for CAAA operations. "It's immensely important to run this line," Van Hoy stated. "We (the Army) don't have too many like this," he added, noting there were only two other SPAMs currently in use at Toole Army Depot in Utah.

"If we had the funding, we could run this line around the clock, year-round. There's plenty of old ammo out there – millions and millions of rounds that we could get rid of to make room for newer ammo," Van Hoy stated. "I mean, you're talking six to seven years of non-stop running to keep up with what's out there."

The CAAA SPAM is scheduled to be online and busy turning old ammunition into scrap sometime this spring.

Crane Army Ammunition Activity produces and provides conventional munitions in support of U.S. Army and Joint Force readiness. It is part of the Joint Munitions Command and the U.S. Army Materiel Command, which include arsenals, depots, activities and ammunition plants. Established Oct. 1977, it is located on Naval Support Activity Crane.

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An empty 30-millimeter test casing prepares to enter the core of the Super Pull Apart Machine, or SPAM, during a briefing of the Crane Army Ammunition Activity machine's capabilities Feb. 20. (Photo by Randy Tisor)

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An explosives operator supervisor with Crane Army Ammunition Activity discusses the capabilities of the Super Pull Apart Machine, or SPAM, during a briefing of the machine's capabilities Feb. 20. (Photo by Randy Tisor)

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