



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your letter of February 16, 1971, enclosing a suggestion by Major Clarence H. Walker, Jr. that the M17 field protective mask not be replaced by a new model] the M17A1. Major Walker indicates that by cancelling the production contracts for the M17A1 masks and mask carriers and not modifying the standard canteen to accept the drinking device an immediate savings of about \$35 million could be achieved.

The M17A1 replaced the M17 as the Army's standard protective gas mask in June 1966. A multiyear contract was awarded to the Mine Safety Appliance Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on December 9, 1966, for production of a minimum quantity of about 1.6 million M17A1 masks at a total cost of approximately \$28.9 million. By exercising various options under the contract, the Army actually purchased in excess of 2.2 million of the masks at a total cost of about \$38.4 million. These quantities include masks purchased by the Army for all military services as well as reserve units. Final deliveries are to be made during May 1971. Consequently, no savings would be feasible in this case.

A slightly enlarged mask carrier, which provides additional room for the resuscitation tube and special canteen cap, was developed with the M17A1 mask. A total of 2.4 million carriers were purchased at a unit cost of \$2.62. These quantities include additional spares for the number of M17A1 masks purchased.

The M17A1 mask requires a special canteen cap to enable its wearer to drink water without removing the mask, but no modifications to the standard Army canteen, as alleged by Major Walker, have been necessary. The special cap is carried in the M17A1 mask carrier and is substituted for the regular canteen cap when needed. Three hundred and six thousand of these special caps were purchased at an average cost of \$0.64.

Major Walker based his argument against the incorporation of the

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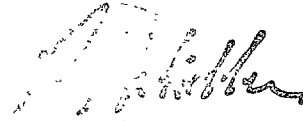
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resuscitation and drinking devices into the M17A1 mask on his belief that the danger of a sustained gas attack is minimal. However, our discussions with Army officials regarding the highly classified subject of threat analysis raise doubts as to the accuracy of Major Walker's contentions.

We will be happy to be of any further assistance in this matter.

Sincerely yours,



Assistant Comptroller General
of the United States

The Honorable William Proxmire, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economy in Government
Joint Economic Committee
Congress of the United States