PS1 for 1/22/87#SECRET ARMS SHIPMENTS THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE NEWS

Without controversy or media coverage, Congress last year voted an appropriation to spend $10 million to rejuvenate the Army Ammunition Plant in St. Louis, Missouri. The Defense Department will soon start spending the funds to renovate the plant's electrical system so that, in case of emergency, the plant will be ready to produce metal parts for 105mm artillery shells.

No production is planned. The purpose of this appropriation is simply to renovate an unused facility and have it on a ""ready'' basis in case of need, and thereby save the first 12 months of preparation that would be required if and when we need to produce this particular shell.

This sounds like exactly what the Defense Department ought to be doing, namely, maintaining readiness for emergency. That's the primary purpose of our gigantic Defense establishment. But there's a lot more to this story, so stay with me.

During World War II, this St. Louis plant was the largest ammunition plant in the world. It turned out 6,718,230,796 cartridges and bullets of .30 and .50 caliber, and had a peak employment of 42,000 people. I know because I was one of the 42,000.

So, with this personal interest, I telephoned the Army public affairs officer to get the story on the use of the plant in recent years. My inquiry was handled by a very cooperative young soldier who probably wasn't even alive during World War II.

He sent me the entire file on the plant as it now exists in the Department of Defense. Called ""History of St. Louis AAP,'' it starts off by stating accurately that ""the original St. Louis Ordnance Plant was the largest small arms ammunition installation in the world.''

Then, however, the ""history'' consists of three short paragraphs which simply relate the changes in title of the property and the names of the private contractors connected with it. This ""history'' falsely leads the reader to believe that the plant has been under maintenance contract during the 30 years

since we stopped producing ammo for World War II.

Now let me tell you what really happened to the St. Louis ammunition plant. In 1946, this gigantic plant was dismantled, the equipment sold or scrapped, and the buildings turned into a government records center. Those were the years when naive people thought that the United Nations would prevent all future wars.

When the Korean War came along, the plant had to be re-equipped and reactivated -- of course, at a far higher cost. After the Korean War, the Eisenhower Defense Department did not make the same mistake the Truman Administration had made in 1946.

In 1955 the entire plant was put on a ""lay-away'' basis. A beautiful job was done of preparing the equipment to keep it in perfect condition; all the machinery was greased and carefully covered.

Like this, the plant would have remained in excellent condition for decades, ready to produce on a day's notice. The plant remained like this from 1955 through 1960.

Then came Robert Strange McNamara, the Secretary of Defense in the John F. Kennedy Administration. In one of the gigantic giveaways of all time, McNamara (BF)gave(end BF) the entire ammunition plant to India.

A special appropriation covered the expensive job of crating all the machinery and transporting it to New Orleans. Then it was shipped to India and installed in 1963 on a site 155 miles west of New Delhi.

Our St. Louis plant began producing ammunition there in the summer of 1965, just in time for the India-Pakistan war. So, this great plant, twice paid for by the U.S. taxpayers, ended up producing ammunition to kill our Pakistani friends, at the same time that American troops suffered ammunition shortages in the Vietnam War.

Funny thing, I never saw a network television expose of (BF)why(end BF) American soldiers suffered life-endangering ammo shortages in Vietnam. I never saw TV anchormen have a tantrum about surreptitious shipments of (not only arms but) an entire ammunition plant to India.

George Orwell's classic (BF)1984(end BF) describes how, in the totalitarian Communist state, inconvenient and embarrassing history is simply eliminated by dropping it down the Memory Hole. That's what happened to the history of the St. Louis Ordnance Plant in the Pentagon files.

But, of course, that censorship of history happened in pre-Watergate America when the networks weren't interested in getting ""all the facts.'' It's too bad that the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations weren't held to the same standard to which the liberals are trying to hold the Reagan Administration.