

LEAD IN AMMUNITION IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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Although the use of lead in the manufacture of ammunition in the United States cannot be classed in importance with such applications as storage batteries or anti-knock compounds, it is nevertheless one of the brightest spots on the lead consumption scene. Last year ammunition accounted for approximately 5 percent of total U.S. lead consumption. It has grown from about 31,000 tons in 1925 to nearly 57,000 tons in 1964. This is a substantial increase in tonnage, but more important, the per capita consumption over this 40-year span, while fluctuating considerably from year to year, was about 0.6 lb. in 1964 compared with about 0.55 lb. in 1925. Of even greater significance is the trend over the last five years. Each of the last five years has shown an increase, rising from about 44,000 tons in 1960 to 57,000 tons in 1964 or about 30 percent. Early figures for 1965 permit us to estimate a further major rise this year.

Now, no statistics are 100 percent accurate and those I have quoted are no exception. For example, they do probably include in recent years the small amount of lead shot, a couple of thousand tons a year, that goes into free machining steels, a use which did not exist 40 years ago. They do include military ammunition which caused the figure to soar to 178,000 tons in 1943. However, we do not consider that military ammunition greatly distorts the picture in normal years. As nearly as we can determine the great bulk of the tonnage is used in what may be termed sporting ammunition, that used for hunting, trap, skeet, and target shooting.

What are the factors that affect the use of lead in this industry? On the negative side is the great growth of concentrated population areas which tend to reduce the land over which people can hunt. There has also been the general tendency to lower bag limits to protect game as more hunters get into the field, meaning less shooting per person. A third factor has been a trend to more restrictive legislation governing the sale and possession of firearms, often ill advised, in the interest of controlling crime.

On the positive side the American population has much more time for recreation today than ever before. They need golf, bowling, boating and other participating sports, including shooting, to occupy their time. And while the arms and ammunition manufacturers may have been a little slower than some of the other sporting goods manufacturers to recognize their opportunity, they have recognized it and are doing a fine job of taking advantage of it. They are bringing the shooting sports closer to the people and making it easier and cheaper to shoot.

It is a many faceted program and I will try to describe the major steps briefly. They have encouraged, for example, the establishment of

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-2-

private shooting preserves within reasonable distances of populated areas where game birds are bred and people can shoot for a fee for a much longer period than the usual hunting season in exchange for some of the birds which are turned over to the state for release on public lands. They have encouraged farmers to band together and open their lands to public shooting under controlled conditions, often in exchange for free advice on conservation. They have established franchised shooting ranges for skeet, trap and target shooting near urban areas where a man can often stop off for a half hour of shooting on his way home from work. Some of these are even lighted so that a family can go out after dinner in an evening and have an hour of shooting fun. They have encouraged shooting clubs in communities or sponsored by large businesses for their employees. Manufacturers and hunters alike have contributed heavily towards conservation and game propagation measures to increase the wild life population so there can be more and better shooting. And they have encouraged women to look on the shooting sports as not just for men.

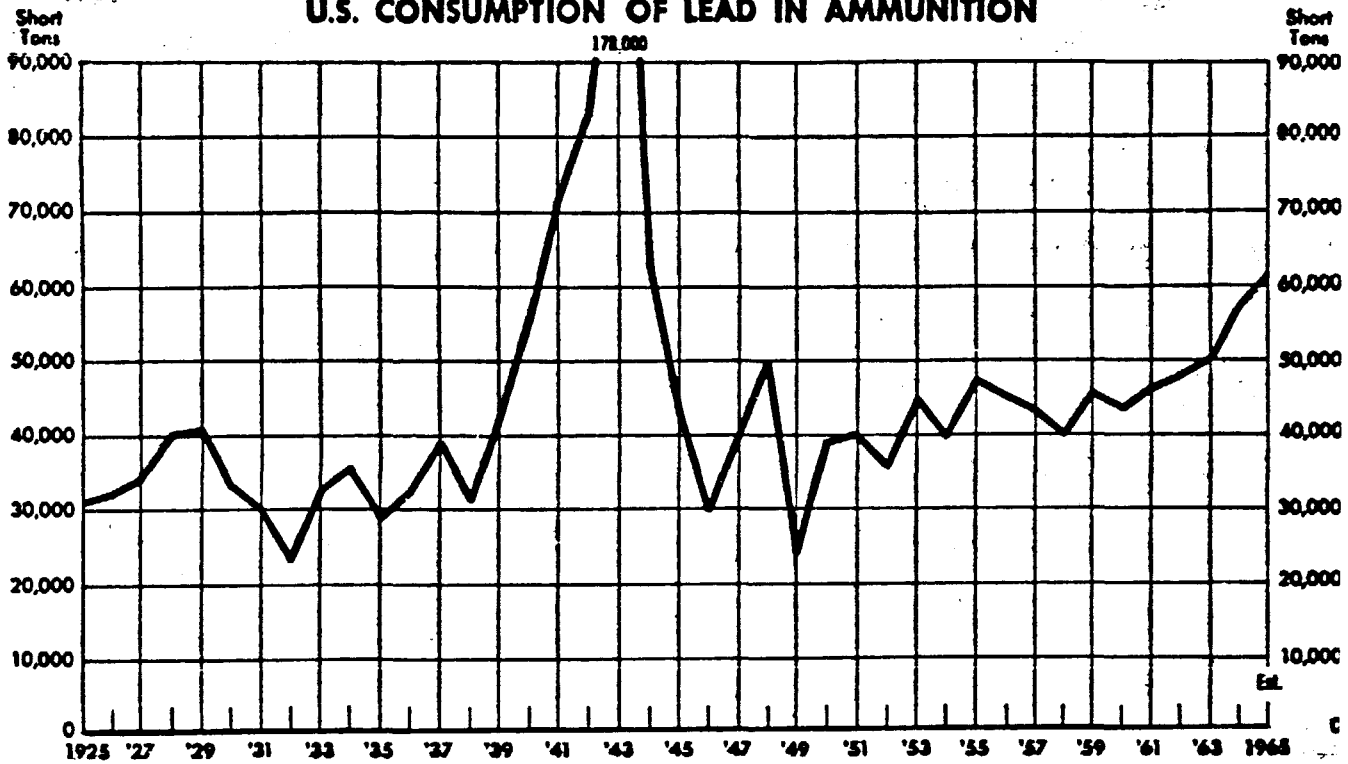
These measures sound simple but there are many ramifications such as safety instruction and instruction in handling and shooting firearms. Plans for shooting clubs are made available and guidance is provided. Often guns are supplied on some inexpensive, convenient basis.

Another development on the positive side is the growth of reloading ammunition by shooters. This has become extremely popular because to the expert it means loading his own ammunition and coming up with something he feels is superior to anything he can buy. To the average shooter, on the other hand, it is an economy measure which makes it less expensive for him to engage in shooting sports in a large way. This trend has established a whole new industry to supply shooters with reloading equipment and the lead shot or bullets to reload.

All of these factors have combined to popularize the shooting sports with the public. They have made it easier, cheaper and more fun for more people to engage in them. Under these circumstances the future of lead in sporting ammunition in the United States appears to be not only assured but bright.

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