

2015 Ammunition Hall of Fame Inductee
LESTER GRIFFIN



Mr. Lester Griffin began his distinguished civil service career in 1959 at Picatinny Arsenal in Dover, New Jersey, as a Munitions Design Engineer. In his early career he was well known for identifying the cause and solution for massive failures in sintered gears and pinions in ordnance fuzes. At the outset of the Vietnam War, his focus shifted to manage mortar fuze production and the ramp-up of the industrial production base. He was a key participant in the “Close Hold” 1967 study to assess the capabilities of the munitions production industrial base to support 600,000 U.S. troops and 2 million Allied troops in Vietnam. This study became the master plan for the construction of many new facilities for the war. Mr. Griffin became the key player for a major modernization effort for the Army’s munitions and armaments Government-Owned Contractor-Operated and Government-Owned

Government-Operated (GOCO/GOGO) production facilities.

During his career, when faced with a shortage of fuzes for mortar rounds in Vietnam, Lester designed an interim fuze which was produced in-house at Picatinny and Frankford Arsenals. Over a short time span, fuzes were produced alleviating the fuze related battlefield shortage of mortar ammunition. He was subsequently recognized by the Commander of the U.S. Army Materiel Command and the Secretary of Army for this effort. After successfully ramping up the mortar fuze production, Mr. Griffin changed career paths to pursue a career in quality, advocating improvements in processes and process control in munitions manufacturing to replace inspection. This endeavor took him from Picatinny Arsenal to Rock Island with the merger of the Munitions Command and the Weapons Command in 1973. Through Mr. Griffin’s leadership, many significant contributions were realized. These included bringing a 1930’s ammunition production base into the 20th Century, with process controls, certifications, improved technical data packages, more robust designs, modern non-destructive tests and inspections, and ultimately, bringing up to par the quality and safety of ammunition.

Because of his vision, leadership and the quality assurance strategies he put in place, the Army has fought with world class ammunition. Under his leadership, malfunction rates declined dramatically, accuracy went up, paving the way to today’s precision munitions. Specifically, Mr. Griffin championed many initiatives during his career:

Mr. Griffin conceived this Contractor Performance Certification Program (CP2) program as a means to improve the quality of both our organic and commercial base. While many on the commercial side purported MIL-Q-9858 level quality management programs, the organic base was largely a MIL-I-45208 inspection system. Both sectors, however, needed to improve their quality and Mr. Griffin utilized this as a continuous improvement tool and a way for HQ,

Armament Munitions and Chemical Command (AMCCOM) to partner with their supplier base to improve quality. He continuously advocated and championed the Government working with contractors/manufacturers to improve the quality of products produced for the government; he made the phrase "we're from the government and we're here to help you" a truism. Likewise, the manufacturers "we're glad to see you" and meant it. His vision with respect to this very worthwhile program paved the way for the Army Materiel Command (AMC) institutionalizing the CP2 AMC wide. By 1994, 46 contractors were actively participating in the program of which 15 became fully certified. Seven of these certified producers went on to become ISO 9001 certified. This success was due to Mr. Griffin's unwavering leadership, dedication and direction.

To internally support this initiative and give credibility to the CP2 audits, Mr. Griffin directed product quality managers and engineers engaged in the program to secure individual Certified Quality Auditor (CQA) and Quality System Lead Auditors (QSLAs) credentials. He ensured training dollars were available and institutionalized job description changes making certifications a job requisite. At one time, the Quality Assurance (QA) Directorate had the largest Registration Accreditation Board (RAB) certified quality auditor group in the nation.

The CP2 also served as a means to engage all Service customers in improving quality at suppliers, with substantial participation by the Marine Corps, and support from the other service members supported by the Single Manager for Conventional Ammunition (SMCA). The program was dynamic in that it readily transitioned from a MIL-Q based to the emerging International Standards Organization's (ISO) ISO 9000 more robust Quality Management System (QMS) approach. Mr. Griffin personally assured his organization and staff had the credentials and audit criteria that met all the RAB requirements and therefore the ability to legitimately provide ISO registration as a by-product of CP2 certification. AMCCOM was the only government activity anywhere capable of accomplishing this action, recognized as a significant benefit to the manufacturers.

Concurrent with CP2 and continuous improvement thrusts, was the push to use Statistical Process Control (SPC) to improve quality. Mr. Griffin championed efforts to instill the benefits across DoD through development of SPC policies and contractual clauses. In addition to the inherent benefits of SPC to the manufacturer, there was the added incentive to reduce or eliminate otherwise stipulated inspections/tests, given the contractor could demonstrate statistical process control of those characteristics. By 1994, SPC requirements were included in almost 950 contracts. HQ, AMCCOM continued to accumulate tangible benefits from the test reduction and process control initiatives totaling \$163M. As an example, \$2.5M in savings was accumulated on the M1A1 Abrams, 120mm gun mount, by using simulation testing instead of live fire testing. Emphasis on process capability assured full understanding of quality levels and promoted continuous process and quality improvement.

Critical Defects were so categorized that if one should be present, it could cause death or mission failure. Such defect classifications were almost inherently limited to the ammunition sector. Mr. Griffin recognized the variability in classifications and forced an exhaustive look at how a Critical Defect should be defined uniformly across AMCCOM, and the ammunition community in particular. Often times a characteristic was classified Critical to force 100%

inspection as opposed to actually being life critical should it occur. Both a new more definitive Critical Defect definition emerged as well as contractual clauses that dictated actions required by the government and the manufacturer should one be detected. This was only made manageable for operations due to the massive (~75%) reduction in previously designated “criticals” through application of the updated definitions.

As the head of a Tri-site Product Assurance Organization (Picatinny, Edgewood, & Rock Island), Mr. Griffin effectively advocated the standardization of QA clauses used in the contracting process, regardless of site.

Mr. Griffin led the Army’s effort in adopting open standards replacing military standards culminating in the adoption of the ISO 9000 Series of quality standards; the first in the DoD. His initiatives were incorporated into the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) “Blueprint for Change,” a military specifications and standards reform initiative, by Dr. William Perry, the Secretary of Defense, and approved by the Vice President, Al Gore, in 1994. These standards are now the de facto standards for the Army today.

Mr. Griffin served as the Chair Joint Ordnance Commander’s Group (JOCG) Quality Assurance (QA) Subgroup for many years utilizing this platform to further discussions and agreements across all Services on SPC, Critical Defects, CP(2), QA contractual clauses and emerging QA policies and procedures.

Mr. Griffin’s career held no boundaries. During his tenure he led the Army quality delegation for armaments and munitions through a Quadripartite QA Working Group with Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States where he built strong relationships and utilized this forum to continue to advocate the various initiatives near and dear to his heart.

Lester Griffin entered the Senior Executive Service in 1985 as the Deputy for Product Assurance & Test and Industrial Operations Management for the U.S. Army Armament Munitions and Chemical Command (AMCCOM). He was the principal advisor over the integration and execution of the AMCCOM product assurance and test mission, production mission and contractor industrial relations.