

Fishtanks or Kangaroos?

by Lieutenant Colonel Martin N. Stanton



Recently, while watching the news, I was treated to the rather nauseating spectacle of seeing M48A5s, M60s, and M60A1s being dropped into the ocean to make "artificial reefs." Although realizing that these vehicles were obsolete as tanks and that we are near to completing M1 transition, it seemed so wasteful.

Instead of dumping the tanks into the ocean, we should be looking at alternate military uses. Specifically, we should look to reconfiguring them as turretless armored personnel carriers and engineer vehicles, as was done in WWII. In the last year of the war, the British and the Canadians used tank hulls with the turrets removed as armored personnel carriers (called "Kangaroos"). These APCs afforded their embarked infantrymen greater protection than the APC of the day (the M3 halftrack) and were just as mobile as tanks. The Israelis have done much the same thing with old Centurion and Patton hulls. As these vehicles were replaced by Merkava, their automotively sound hulls were used for a myriad of functions. Their availability solved the problem of an APC's vulnerability to RPG and other light antitank weapons fire.

The M60 hulls would be perfect for combat engineer units in many respects. They would offer an increased degree of armored protection for combat engineer squads engaged in breaching operations. In addition, they would have a greater ability to breach wire than the current M113. The modified M60 hull could also be used to TOW multiple MICLICs and could also be fitted with mine plows.

The proposed engineer tank hull APC would have hatches both on the top and bottom of the hull, allowing for quick dismount over the top of the vehicle or slower but more secure dismount through the bottom hatch. The vehicle would be armed with an M2 .50 Cal MG (with the old Vietnam ACAV turret) and two pintle-mounted 7.62 MGs, as well as smoke grenade dischargers. Stowage bins could be welded on to the hull for engineer equipment. The removal of the turret and ammunition stowage spaces would allow more than enough room for the nine-man engineer squad. The engineer vehicle could have additional armor welded to the front and sides, as well as side skirts over the tracks and drive assemblies. Each vehicle could also be fitted to take either a blade or a mine plow.

In addition to duty as a manned engineer vehicle, M60 hulls could also be used for robotic mine and obstacle clearing. With hardened robotic controls, mine plow/dozer blade and increased armor, the vehicle should be hard to knock out. A platoon of such vehicles could be created in the headquarters company of each mechanized engineer battalion.

Furthermore, the automotively viable M60 hulls could be stored and used for any number of future requirements. A whole family of "funnies" could be based on the M60 hull,

not to mention any replacement tracked ADA system (in the same manner of the ill-fated SGT York). Additionally, all of these vehicles could be used as sources of spare parts for the conversion vehicles.

Another possible use for the M60-series tanks is that of OPFOR vehicles. With the end of the cold war, U.S. forces now face a plethora of weapons systems, including many of our own. It will not be uncommon to see M48- and M60-series vehicles in the hands of our opponents in some future conflict. The addition of M60-series vehicles to the OPFORs of the NTC, JRTC, and CMTC will reflect this. It would also have the advantage of giving the OPFOR a vehicle that many tankers are familiar with and that more PLL exists for than the M551 Sheridan.

If nothing else, the tanks currently consigned (but not delivered) to Davy Jones locker could find a more useful end to their existence as targets. The hard targets on many ranges have been long shot to pieces. What better way to present realistic target arrays than to actually present entire tank companies as targets. This would be especially useful on USAF ranges in that it would give TACAIR pilots valuable practice in attacking actual large armored formations (albeit stationary ones). If the M48s are too long in the tooth to be effectively utilized in either foreign aid or alternative armored vehicle development, then this is by far a more militarily useful end than pushing them into the ocean in order to look politically correct.

"Waste not, want not" is a philosophy we had better get used to if we are to be successful in the incredible shrinking military. Pushing automotively viable tank hulls into the water for what amounts to a photo op is wasteful. These vehicles could still provide useful service to the U.S., either as conversions, as OPFOR, or as targets. We are no longer a military that can carelessly discard. The time may come in the not too distant future that we may have a use for our fishtanks.

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