LETTERS

Scout Vehicle Photo Recalls WWII Skirmish in France

Dear Sir:

On return from vacation, I read with interest the July-August issue, particularly the article by Major Tolson. The M-8 armored car in the picture on page 26 was that of LT Charles ("Buck") Rogers, of A Troop, 87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized), the organic recon of the 7th Armored Div. I commanded the 2nd Platoon of E Troop, the assault gun troop. Once we landed in Normandy and started to roll towards Chartres, my platoon was attached to A Troop and that may well be my half-track just behind Buck's M-8. This was the first time our column had been fired on; that is the reason for the non-tactical column and the curious troops.

I later took over B Troop, and spent much of the next months in an M-8. It was not a bad vehicle; one of my sergeants knocked out a German Panther tank by creeping up behind it and putting a 37-mm round into the engine compartment. It had the virtue of being not too noisy. In the recon platoons, each armored car was teamed with two jeeps (called peeps by Armored folk). I rode point on many an occasion and the peep was so quiet, scouts could hear leaves rustle.

After WWII, someone called together men from various recon troops to talk about future vehicles. The heavy recon people (from Italy, etc.), who had fought for information, won the battle over those higher numbered divisions who had scouted for information and who prized quiet and stealth. Never again would mounted scouts have sensitive hearing unmarred by vehicle and track noise.

WILLIAM A. KNOWLTON
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Stealth in Scouting Requires Small, Quiet Vehicles, Not Guns

Dear Sir:

I have studied Major Tolson's article in the July-August 1999 issue of *ARMOR*. I have a problem with this scout/cavalry vehicle dilemma. First, scouts do not fight! Second, they have in the past, and will in the future, employ any method of transportation to accomplish their mission. History tells us that scouts walked, rode ponies, horses, motorcycles, cars, jeeps, and helicopters in order to accomplish the mission. An old axiom is that a scout must abandon his mount, if necessary, in order to get information back to those who need it.

Without question, the best motorized scout vehicles during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam were the radio and gun jeeps in the scout sections of the recon platoon. Many other armies have used armored cars in their reconnaissance units for decades. After the Korean War, the U.S. chose to develop an armored track vehicle for the scout. Against the recommendations of the U.S. Army Armor & Engineer Board, the M-114 was placed in the inventory and was a disaster from day one. In 1969, the Army went further and put a 20mm cannon on the M-114 so it could engage enemy recon elements at long range. I told a group of generals at a Combat Vehicle Review, "The mission of scouts is not to fight; they are to remain unseen. Do not give them a cannon because then they lose their mission."

We cannot armor a vehicle used for scouting and protect it from all kinds of weapons systems. The vehicle must be light and fast and, at best, protect against spears, crossbows, and beer bottles. Of course, there is a need for a cavalry fighting vehicle to overwatch the movement of the scouts, in conjunction with attack helicopters and other systems.

The point I want to make is that U.S. Armor does not need new development of a dedicated scout vehicle. The current research and development people should be aware of the

The Commando Scout Vehicle

numerous high mobility chassis available that would make good scout mounts. As long as scouts have good communications, GPS, detection sensors, and laser designators, they are good to go in many different configurations.

I think the Army made a mistake by not following through with the wheeled XR311. It would have turned out to be the best reconnaissance vehicle the Army ever had. Later, I think we dropped the ball with the Cadillac-Gage Commando Scout. It had CBR protection and was armored against rocks, nails, and small arms fire. It was easy to mount and dismount. It was cursed because it looked like an armored car and it had wheels — heaven forbid!

BURTON S. BOUDINOT
LTC, Armor (Ret.)
31st Editor-in-Chief, *ARMOR*

Merkava Is Plenty Mobile, Says One Who's Driven It

Dear Sir:

I read Jon Clemens's Tank Assessment Survey article with great interest. While I really can't comment on the order of merit between the Leo II and the M1A2, my gut tells me that the M1A2 is a better all-around tank, if for no other reason than it's our tank. I will say what I said to the U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland in 1982 when we were trying to sell the M1 to the Swiss in competition with the Leo II: "They are both great tanks, and I'd be happy to take either one into combat."

My problem with the assessment is the Number 10 position of the Israeli Merkava, based on "...its poor power to weight ratio, which limits its mobility..." It's obvious to me that the assessors have not had a hands-on look at the Merkava and are basing their assessment on what has been printed in the open press and not on its true operational capabilities. I'm sure that their comments refer to the Merkava Mk I, with its 750-hp AVDS 1790 Teledyne Continental engine, and not to the current, in-service, Merkava Mark III, with its 1200-hp AVDS 1790 Teledyne Continental engine. Several years ago, while I was working at Teledyne, a study was conducted comparing the horsepower-to-weight ratios of the Merkava Mk III (1200 hp) and the M1A1 (1500 hp). If memory serves me correctly, the Merkava's 1200-hp engine, through a Renk transmission, delivered approximately 1000 hp to the sprockets, as did the M1's 1500-hp turbine, through an Allison transmission — the difference between the two being on the order of 20 hp. If those figures are correct, there should hardly be a difference power-wise between the two tanks. The only difference then would be how the suspension system of each tank handles the delivered 1000 hp. Personal experience, after driving both tanks, tells me that they both do it quite well.

I've had the privilege to drive five of the tanks in the survey, including the M1, the Leo II, the Merkava Mk III, the Challenger, and the LeClerc. (I've also TC'd and gunned several of them.) While my seat of the pants top marks go to the M1, I am truly hard-pressed to discern a difference between the cross-country mobility and agility of the Merkava in comparison to the M1 and/or the Leo II, which are both head and shoulders above the other two. The Merkava runs like a scalded cat and is not in any way horsepower-limited; if anything, it is ride-limited at very high cross country speeds, as are both the M1 and the Leo II. By that, I mean that the cross country speed of each is only limited by the ride tolerance of the crew.

From an operational standpoint, the Merkava moves across the battlefield as well or better than any other tank in the world, and to give it a dead last rating, based on its power-to-weight ratio, (whatever it is) is an injustice to the tank and the valiant tankers of the Israeli Armor Corps who put their lives on the line in it every day.

And yes, Madam Ambassador, I'd be happy to go to war in a Merkava Mark III!!

STAN R. SHERIDAN
MG, U.S. Army (Ret.)

General Sheridan was program manager for the M60 tank program and first program manager on the Bradley program. He is a former Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development and Acquisition, Department of the Army. – Ed.

Israel's Merkava: Underrated in Survey?

Israeli Tank Is Far Better Than Rated in Tank Survey

Dear Sir:

The Tank Assessment Survey published in the July-August issue of *ARMOR* contains a number of questionable judgments and none more so than when it places the Israeli Merkava "at the bottom of the Top Ten."

As someone who has been involved with armored vehicles around the world for many years (it will soon be 50 years since my first article was published in *ARMOR*!) I have had the opportunity to examine the Merkava several times, and only four months ago I was able to drive and to fire it again. I think I might be more familiar with its characteristics than the authors of the Survey and I cannot agree with their judgment.

In particular, instead of "fairly advanced electronics," the Merkava has a most advanced fire control system which was very effective, as I was able to find out for myself. Among others, the fire control system incorporates an automatic target tracker which, so far, is used in only one other tank. It also has a "hunter-killer" target acquisition facility, and the turret drive is all-electric, for which some of the other tanks in the survey are rightly praised.

In addition to its armor protection, which the Survey recognizes to be among "the best in the world," Merkava enjoys the advantage of a low frontal area turret, which reduces its chances of being hit in defensive, defilade positions, and unique protection of its ammunition against fire and spall. It also has the advantages of several other unique features, including a 60mm mortar for the engagement of infantry targets not accessible to direct fire weapons, easy and safe access through a door in the rear of the hull, and the possibility of carrying an infantry squad in place of the bulk of its ammunition or, alternatively, of evacuating casualties.

As to its mobility, far from being "poor," the power-to-weight ratio of the Merkava is more than adequate under tactical conditions and is not lower than that of some of the other tanks in the Survey. Moreover, its excellent suspension system provides more road wheel travel than that of almost any other tank, which enables it to move faster over rough ground.

When all its characteristics and capabilities are taken into account and compared with those of other tanks, the Merkava proves to be superior to most of them. In consequence, instead of being placed at the bottom it should be near the very top of the list of tanks covered by the survey.

RICHARD M. OGORKIEWICZ
London, England

Suggestions from a Scout Unit's Successful Experimentation

Dear Sir:

I am a scout/driver with HHT, 1/16th Cav Regt. I've been in the Army five years, spending two at Ft. Carson and the remainder here. I have had five rotations to NTC, one to Camp Doha, and one to a National Guard base in Idaho.

I am not an officer with a college degree or an NCO, junior or senior. I am just a simple Joe, like many other Armor and Cavalry enlisted soldiers. But we also enjoy your magazine, whenever we can scout it out from one of our officers or NCOs.

Your magazine's advice on jury-rigs, enemy doctrine, and equipment help us (the EM) out a lot. For example, the tailgate rack (back cover, May-June 1999 *ARMOR*) can help motorized scouts... Statistics on Soviet equipment is important. They are major weapons exporters and, at the present time, most Third World nations that we might fight are going to be fielding this equipment against us.

Finally, I wish to submit an idea on scout platoon organization in behalf of my former PSG, SFC Duane La France, and the other scouts from 1/8 INF, 1/12 INF and 1/68 AR. This idea was a doctrinal shake-up from the norm, but was extremely beneficial.

At the time, the scout platoon had ten HMMWVs (five M1025s and five M1026s). The scout platoon for HHC 1/68 AR was divided as follows:

- HQ 20 - LT
- HQ 25 - PSG
- HQ 21 & 22 - Alpha Section
- HQ 23 & 24 - Bravo Section
- HQ 26 & 27 - Charlie Section
- HQ 28 & 29 - Delta Section

Our platoon also happened to have an influx of 11Hs (Anti-Armor Infantry), which presented us with a golden opportunity. We were able to get an M998 HMMWV, which we had manned by a scout, a medic, and a mechanic. That vehicle was able to perform resupply, recovery, evac, and -20 level maintenance, freeing up other vehicles so that more time could be spent on the mission.

Our platoon had ten M2s, five MK-19s, and two TOWS. At the time, we had no MILES for the MK-19s, so everyone had an M2 except for the two TOW vehicles (one Alpha and one Delta). Normally, the lieutenant and the two section sergeants (21, 23, 26, & 28) had the MK-19 and the PSG and squad leaders had M2s.

When we went to the field, we received engineers, GSR, COLTS, linguists, and more. At one time, we had around 40 soldiers in and/or attached to our platoon. This was probably putting a strain on our resupply efforts, but we were definitely able to increase our endurance and our area of recon.

I believe that this TO&E is definitely beneficial and worth mentioning.

SPC JASON COMBS
HHT, 1/16 Cav Regt.
Ft. Knox, Ky.

Another Source Cited For Info on the "Super Pershing"

Dear Sir:

ARMOR Magazine for Jan-Feb 99, pages 59-60, contains a review of *Death Traps: The Survival of an American Armored Division in World War II,* reviewed by CW2 Stephen Sewell, in which the reviewer states that the author of this book "provides the only known description of what he calls the "M26A1E2" or Super Pershing, better known formally as the "T26E4." More than adequate information on the T26E4 tank is provided in R.P. Hunnicutt's excellent book, *PERSHING, A History of the Medium Tank T20 Series,* Feist Publications, 1971, which shows photographs, drawings, and tabulated data of this vehicle and its 90-mm Gun T15E2 in Mount T119. In addition, some history of the adventures of the T26E4 in Europe is presented, together with photographs of local up-armoring.

For those not familiar with them, the books by R.P. Hunnicutt on the subject of American tanks are outstanding works covering development and history of these vehicles, along with photographs, drawings, illustrations of details, and data in a large format with first-class reproduction.

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