

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Sayonara AGS! Sayonara Scout? Sayonara Armor?



"Approximately a quarter century of taxpayer investment in R&D of light tank systems since the early '70s has not resulted in a light tank that the Army would commit to production."

Above, the late AGS

by Don Loughlin[©]

"The US Army's armored vehicle programs are going nowhere," I said in a recent article in the *Armed Forces Journal International*.¹ The article said that the XM8 Armored Gun System (AGS) has been canceled; yet another scout vehicle program has been started (Future Scout and Cavalry System, FSCS), but I concentrated my ire on the Future Combat System (FCS, intended to replace the tank sometime in the indefinite future) which is busy continuing its Science Fair, probably until it, too, is replaced.

My article criticized the FCS, but nothing I said about it was as to the point as the last sentence of former Congressman Jim Courter's article in the *AFJ*: *"That's a lot better than training for the next war in trucks marked 'Future Combat System.'"*² The article also raised the question: *"Will the Army put itself out of the armored vehicle business?"*

The question can be answered in the affirmative: Yes, the Army most probably will shut down its armored vehicle plants, with the encouragement of the DOD. In fact, the numbers of Armored Force personnel are already ramping down faster than the rest of the Army. In a recent *ARMOR* article,³ Colonel Mark Hertling said *"Since the Army began downsizing in the early '90s, Armor has taken significantly more cuts than other branches."*

This makes sense if the Army is going to close its armored vehicle plants. If the heavy force can't 'get there' in time to influence the outcome, why keep them? Without new vehicles to meet new threats, why would we need trained crews and officers? It would, of course, be a cold day in Hell when the Navy closed its last shipyard or the Air Force closed its last aircraft factory.⁴ All the money saved by shutting down our in-

dustrial base can be used to help pay for the increased cost of salaries for the DOD civilian employees. Yes, the DOD civilian force has been cut back, but mainly in the lower pay grades. With bonuses for superior performance and periodic cost-of-living increases, the DOD civilian payroll costs are higher than ever.⁵

Sayonara AGS! Throughout the '70s and into the early '80s, the Army (with Marine participation) experimented with a number of lightweight weapon and vehicle programs intended to provide a new light tank. Some of these were MPG (Mobile Protected Gun, Army), and MPWS (Mobile Protected Weapon System, Marine); later, both were rolled up into the MPGS (Mobile Protected Gun System.) Somewhere along the line, the Marines spun off into a concept transportable by the CH-53 helicopter, the LAV-105, which was later dropped. In the early '80s, the Army focused on the 105mm tank gun as the preferred weapon of an air transportable light tank.⁶ Then, in 1983, the Army established a program manager and a new program, AGS.

Army leaders established a demanding schedule for AGS that was too tight for the military's ponderous acquisition system to be able to move fast enough. At least two members of industry started development of the AGS in 1984 on their own funds. After that, the AGS was caught up in the struggles of the Army's developmental bureaucracy in trying to determine what its detailed characteristics really ought to be.

After many vicissitudes over the years, four companies ultimately submitted proposals in late '91: A General Dynamics and Teledyne Continental Motors

team (that proposed the only system with an external gun turret), Cadillac Gage Textron, Hägglunds USA, and FMC. The then-FMC candidate won in June 1992,⁷ and the privately developed candidate was tested and evaluated by the Army.

FMC delivered the first six prototypes in 1994, and production/fielding plans were well underway when the Army canceled the program in 1996. The cancellation was based upon a misguided willingness to believe that either air-landed MBTs, or a reliance upon then-state-of-the-art ground-fired AT missiles, could replace a proven, parachutable light tank in the assault phase of early entry options. Since the first production models of the M551 AR/AAV contract were delivered in 1966,⁸ no light vehicle has replaced them. Approximately a quarter century of taxpayer investment in R&D of light tank systems since the early '70s has not resulted in a light tank that the Army would commit to production.

The excuse that funding shortages were the cause for the demise of the AGS is a poor one. What was lacking in the case of the AGS was a true commitment by the 1996 leadership to an earlier decision made by the early '80s leadership. A true commitment would involve mounting a sales campaign and fighting for the funding needed. The Congress is very sensitive to loss of jobs in the defense sector. With true commitment and a real sales effort, support for funding can materialize. The Congress has tried to fund more B-2 bombers that *the Air Force did not want and these bombers cost over a billion dollars each!*

The Army's acquisition bureaucracy was of no help in preventing another long term exercise (AGS) with no useful

output.^(a) The development cycle is too long, and a pitfall when such programs drag on is the changing perception, over time, by the ever-changing leadership of what is needed. This is usually justified as being driven by 'a change in the threat,' but that's not true. The real long term threat was the size of the Soviet military, a military consistently noted for its adherence to the doctrine that "quantity has a quality all its own."

If every decision made in the past is to be re-evaluated in the light of today's perturbations, then no commitment is safe. In speaking of the Army's delays in fielding a new tank, MG Stan R. Sheridan, USA (Ret.), said in a 1994 Letter to the Editor of *ARMOR*, that the Army "... must bite the bullet now and set the tough dollar, technical, and schedule priorities and adhere to them through development and into production against an established fielding date; and most important, the Army must have the courage of its convictions to stay the course."⁹

Not the least lost here is the Army's credibility with what's left of its industrial partners, particularly those who did bite the AGS bullet for the Army. There has been no public outcry about the AGS cancellation, since these executives are well aware that they operate in a market with many sellers and one buyer. The company that originally designed and built the first AGS with its own funds, and those of many of its contractors, is now out of the defense business.

Sayonara Scout? The Future Scout and Cavalry System (FSCS) is a cooperative development effort between the US and the UK.¹⁰ It has a requirement for reduced signature, advanced sensors and communications, sustained cross-country mobility, tailored weapons for specific missions, and RO/RO for three vehicles on the C-17 (with C-130 lift desirable.) Reduced signature and state-of-the-art sensors will be expensive, but surely necessary. If the vehicle is to be kept affordable, it is important to avoid an FCS-like Science Fair. They especially need to avoid spending money on failed ideas. Will they do that? Probably not, because some in the user community favor an external gun turret^(b) (EGT); and there is also pressure to buy the elderly Cased Telescoped Ammunition and Gun Technology (CTAGT).

1. Confirmation of preference for an external gun turret is in a statement made to AFJI: "... To keep the FSCS's signature as low as possible, the scout will likely not have a turret. ..." ¹⁰ That is a euphemism for using an EGT.

2. CTAGT has already consumed more than 40 years and approximately \$213 million in 'then-year dollars' (over \$470 million in FY 98 dollars!) *without ever getting into production*, and people are still trying to sell it.¹¹ In the early '90s, the CTAGT supporters exported the data and concept (undoubtedly with DOD authority) to a British/French joint venture.¹² Now the 'new and improved' CTAGT has been offered to the US as an automatic cannon candidate.¹³ The Army's CTAGT development contractor, who participated in the data transfer, has signed on as the marketing organization for selling it back to this country.¹⁴

The prognosis for FSCS is poor, but not yet terminal. Mired in international politics, it will face schedule delays and cost growth. If the Army couldn't make a decision to buy an AGS, or the earlier ARSV, then the new scout vehicle may also be doomed. Look for a later, directed procurement of a so-called non-developmental item (NDI), a foreign AGS and/or scout vehicle, when we run into an emergency – i.e., after we have shut down our vehicle plants.

Sayonara Armor? The Army's Armored Force is in deep trouble, most of it self-inflicted. No one listened three years ago when they were told: "*As a branch, we have been flirting with extinction, or at least significant modification of our utility, for a long time ... because we are too heavy, cost too much to operate, and can't really participate in a force projection strategy because we cannot rapidly deploy.*"¹⁵ Add indecision to that mix, and the Armor community is on its way to extinction. What the Army has accomplished in the last three years is to shut down AGS, create new paper programs, cut Armored Force personnel faster than the rest of the Army, and make plans to shut down our production facilities. Sayonara!

Notes

^(a)Worth Noting — A Pentagon source relates that following the last round of Army board pro-

motions to full colonel, there are more O-6s in acquisition corps slots than in the infantry." "Washington Pulse," *National DEFENSE*, October 1995, p. 8.

^(b)A variation on this bad idea is the Remotely-Operated Gun. See: "The External Gun Turret: 'Often a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride'," *ARMOR*, Jan-Feb 1996, and also Reference 3, below.

References

¹Loughlin, Don, "Remaining Relevant," *AFJI*, October 1997.

²Courter, Jim, "*Politics by Other Means: The US Army Needs a Strategy for Peacetime Success*," Jan. '98.

³Hertling, Col. Mark, "Managing Career Progression in a Smaller, Higher Tempo Army," *ARMOR*, November-December 1997.

⁴Loughlin, Don, "You Want to Shut Down the Tank Plant!?", *ARMOR*, May-June 1997.

⁵Bellingham Herald; Monday, February 9, 1998; " 'Reinvented' government is costliest ever." p. A8. (Scripps Howard News Service).

⁶Hunnicut, Richard P., *SHERIDAN: A History of the American Light Tank, Vol. 2.*, Presidio Press, Novato, Calif., 1995, p. 178.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹Sheridan, MG Stan R., USA (Ret.), LETTERS, *ARMOR*, September-October, 1994.

¹⁰Sherman, Jason, "Future Scouts," *AFJI*, June 1997.

¹¹Evaluation Report of the Inspector General, DOD, "DOD Cased Telescoped Ammunition and Gun Technology Program," Report No. 96-164; June 14, 1996.

¹²"GIAT's 45mm telescoped ammunition cannon system," *International Defense Review*; 2/92.

¹³"France, UK brief USA on telescoped system," *Jane's Defence Weekly*; 2 Oct 92.

¹⁴News Release, Alliant Techsystems, *Alliant Techsystems Teams with CTA-International to Market Cased Telescoped Weapon System*; April 9, 1997.

¹⁵Bergeron, A.J., "LETTERS," *ARMOR*, May-June 1994.

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