

BOSNIA REPORT

Swedish Mechanics

Help U.S. Troops Maintain

SUSV All-terrain Vehicles



Photo by author

Keeping SUSVs Goin' When It's Snowin'

by Staff Sergeant Conrad College
372nd MPAD

With the frigid, unpredictable Balkan winter fast approaching, Task Force Eagle called on the Swedish Army to help train U.S. soldiers on an unfamiliar, yet useful, all-terrain vehicle.

The Army has about 30 Swedish-built small-unit support vehicles — or SUSVs — deployed throughout the task force, to be used to transport troops and equipment to remote locations.

The SUSV is a great winter vehicle; just ask any Swedish soldier. But U.S. soldiers who recently came to Bosnia didn't know how to work on them, leaving most out of service. To get the fleet up and running, a team of Swedish Army mechanics taught U.S. soldiers how to conduct routine maintenance and, probably most important, how to drive the vehicles.

"The reason we have SUSVs here is to serve the troops on the hilltops," said Captain Lance Eldred, the 1st Armored Division's maintenance readiness officer. "Snow and rough terrain will not stop this vehicle."

The SUSV is a two-part tracked vehicle that hinges in the middle, excels in moving across snow, drives easily down the highway, is as silent as a shadow, floats and swims like a duck. Its Army designation is the M-973A1 carrier, cargo, tracked, 1½-ton, or small-unit support vehicle. The Swedish Army, which employs 4,000 SUSVs, calls them "tracked wagons." The vehicle is used extensively by Swedish companies for off-road transportation in snow and ice. The telephone company in Sweden uses the

SUSV to get to telephone poles and towers in remote locations, according to Swedish Army Major Lennart Malmgren, chief maintenance officer at Camp Odin near Tuzla.

Malmgren and a group of his staff came to Eagle Base recently to train U.S. mechanics from several different units. Built by Hagglunds Vehicle AB in Sweden, the SUSV can carry four people in the front section and up to 12 troops in full combat gear, or a little more than 3,000 pounds of cargo, in the back section. Malmgren said the vehicle has a Mercedes-Benz six-cylinder, in-line diesel engine and a Mercedes Benz four-speed automatic transmission.

"Sweden is a small country. We can't afford to order many special engines and other components," he said. "So we often use off-the-shelf parts that are already being mass-produced. This engine is basically the same as in a Mercedes Benz 300 automobile."

The driver's controls are user-friendly. Sitting in the driver's seat, the steering wheel, dashboard, and console-mounted gear shifter are almost the same as in a car.

"It's very easy to drive. It feels about like driving a small car," Malmgren said. "We have an Army of conscripts, where military service is compulsory. So we designed this vehicle to be easy to drive. When a person starts military service and has a driver's license for a small car, we can teach him or her to operate everything on this vehicle and in all sorts of terrain in three weeks."

The SUSV makes an excellent military ski-rescue vehicle. "The tracks are so

broad that, when fully-loaded, it weighs less per unit of surface area than a skiing soldier," Malmgren said.

U.S. troops found working on the SUSV relatively easy.

"It's pretty good. It's simpler than you'd think," said Specialist Adam Petersen, a mechanic stationed at Eagle Base with the 88th Air Defense Artillery, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. "But you can't get underneath it to work. The bottom is a solid sheet like a boat, so it's like working on an inboard engine on a boat — you have to do things like change the transmission fluid from inside the cab. Even then, you pump the fluid out, using a hand-pump."

He said the Mercedes-Benz engine is nearly trouble-free. "There are very few problems with the engine, but I hear they have a lot of trouble with the track."

From a distance, the track looks like a regular, metal track, but it is actually a one-piece, rubber track. If it gets torn completely across, it must be replaced. Several Swedish Army mechanics and maintenance officers from Camp Odin worked with the American mechanics for four days at Eagle Base, showing them, not only maintenance by the book, but, also, many tricks and tips they have learned over the years.

Editor's Note: The Swedish vehicle described here is similar to the Bv 206S, also made by Hagglunds, that is mentioned in the previous article that begins on page 30. The major difference is that the Bv206S is armored while the M973A1 SUSVs are not.