
Defense Report

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The Infantry Fighting Vehicle— A Key Part of the Army's Combat Team

A good army fights as a team, with each of its elements playing a carefully designed part in a game plan that maximizes the contribution of each of the team's members. One of the best examples of this kind of teamwork is the careful coordination and mutual support found in the tank/infantry team. With the proper training, leadership and equipment, and back-up by effective artillery support, this combination of combat elements produces an awesome assault team. It combines the very best in ground maneuverability, firepower and shock action.

No single army has exclusive rights to this concept. The Soviet Army has perfected its version. The United States Army is committed to the use of the tank/infantry team in any area that provides the trafficability and maneuver room to permit its proper employment. It would play a major role in the defense of Western Europe and, if the experience of the 1973 war in the Middle East is indicative, would be the core of any substantial U.S. fighting force there.

Implicit in the tank/infantry concept is the need for the infantrymen, who will ultimately close with the enemy on the attack objective, to move with the tanks, to be protected from small arms fire and artillery shrapnel and to bring their own firepower to bear as they advance. The vehicle they use should complement the tanks, not limit the speed of the advance or, due to excess size, make detection by the enemy easier. With the T-73 tank and the BMP personnel carrier the Soviet Army has a well-matched team.

Unfortunately the Army is still buying an armored personnel carrier that entered the inventory 18 years ago. Compared to the new XM-1 tank, now going into production, the current M-113 personnel carrier is too slow, too lightly armed and armored and presents a very high silhouette to enemy observers. A year ago the Army was convinced it was ready to go into production with a replacement vehicle but the Department of Defense used controversy over the vehicle's characteristics as an excuse to trim money for long-lead time components out of the 1979 procurement budget. With a relatively small research and development budget of \$29 million the Army is now keeping the program moving toward production.

The Army now plans to request \$100 million for the first increment of infantry fighting vehicle procurement in Fiscal Year 1980. No one close to the program has any doubt it will be ready then—in fact they maintain it has been ready for at least a year. Hopefully the budgeteers will not place any more impediments in the path of this badly-needed fighting vehicle. Every year the procurement decision is put off will only delay the time at which the U.S. Army's tank/infantry team is fully ready for commitment to combat.