

---

# Defense Report

AUSA



---

## The M1 Tank—Proving Itself Where It Counts

The Army's new M1 Abrams tank is rolling off the assembly line in growing numbers and finding an enthusiastic welcome in the units where it is being assigned. From the battalion commanders down to the tank gunners there is praise for the Abrams' speed, agility, quietness and gunnery accuracy. From the maintenance officers and mechanics there is praise for its reliability.

The latter comments are music to the ears of the harassed project managers who have spent years defending the radical departures incorporated in the tank's design, particularly in the vehicle's turbine engine and the balance of the drive train. As is true in the prototypes and early production models of almost every piece of complex machinery, either civilian or military, there were problems with the early M1s that raised questions regarding the program's future. Some quality control problems are still occurring intermittently, but the recent performance of the M1s in Germany, participating during the big "Reforger-1982" exercise, has been nothing short of spectacular.

Maneuvering with three battalions of M1s (a total of 174 tanks), the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division was able to defeat aggressive attempts by the maneuver enemy to outflank its positions—with the speed of the new tanks the decisive factor. The M1's critics were confounded by a 97-percent operational availability rate for the three battalions during the 11-day exercise.

Of the M1s that had mechanical problems, none was out of action for more than 24 hours. The 174 tanks experienced a total of nine engine failures, six of which were repaired in the field without an engine change. By comparison, the division's 63 "tried and true" M60 tanks had seven engine failures requiring replacement over the same period of time.

For many months the Army has been telling the M1's critics—in Congress, the press and elsewhere—that what the tank needed most was a chance to prove itself. That opportunity arrived during the "Reforger" exercise and the Abrams met the challenge where it counts: in the hands of troops in the field.