
Defense Report

AUSA



“Selling“ a New Piece of Military Hardware—It Can be a Very Frustrating Process

The process by which our military services acquire new weapons and equipment is highly dependent on the kind of reaction the equipment gets from decision-makers in the upper strata of the executive branch, on the members and staff of cognizant congressional committees and upon the members of the press. While it is important to develop good hardware, it is, unfortunately, just as important to bring that equipment into public view in a manner that will build confidence in its worth. Too often, early test results become engraved in the consciousness of all these concerned parties and the new weapon or system is forever damned.

An excellent case in point is the Army's M1 tank. The M1 is faster, more nimble and more capable of first-shot kills under all weather conditions than any tank in the world. Unfortunately, early tests uncovered some deficiencies which were and corrected as the testing progressed. But reports of those early tests reached the hands of some individuals who were more than willing to leap at conclusions about the long-term value of the M1, and the Army was faced with a need to rebut charges that, at times, reached a level near hysteria.

One charge, for example, claimed that the tank was a death trap because it used highly flammable hydraulic fluid. The claim was totally false. The Army challenged these claims and appeared successful. Congress approved the full-scale production of the tank and those sent to troop units in the United States and overseas have built up a remarkable record of performance and serviceability.

But many months after all this misinformation had apparently been laid to rest, a new round of press reports has surfaced, apparently based on the same sources that generated the initial apprehension. One of these reports rekindles the imaginary hydraulic fluid controversy.

The “experts” who point their fingers at nonexistent problems and the members of the press who report the finger-pointing without independent verification do a disservice to themselves, to the concerned service and to the nation.