

GENERAL DYNAMICS

Land Systems Division

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313-82

July 19, 1990

Mr. Robert H. Giles
Editor and Publisher
THE DETROIT NEWS
615 Lafayette Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mr. Giles:

Your lead article on July 16, 1990, "Michigan-built tank a bad deal for Army, report says," was disappointing to our 7,000 dedicated employees who build zero defect tanks with pride and skill. The article is fraught with misinformation, myths, and outright errors, which we sincerely hope you will correct.

At a time when we are striving to preserve the industrial base necessary to maintain a warm production line and save jobs in Detroit, we cannot understand why the DETROIT NEWS would publish a devastating article creating such a false impression, based on accusations from Project on Government Procurement in Washington. That small "watchdog" group is notorious for its use of dated and inaccurate information to bash the defense establishment. Even your article acknowledges that the claims are attributed to an "unpublished report," based on periodic research of old studies, Congressional Record and trade journals. Dredging up irrelevant and misleading historical data to indict a proven, mature weapons system that is the envy of the Free World and the pride of the U.S. Army is unconscionable. It ignores the enthusiastic acceptance of this technically superior machine by U.S. soldiers and strong international interest in buying it. It is being purchased by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and is being considered by the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Sweden, Pakistan and Canada. It is recognized internationally as the best main battle tank in the world.

Project on Government Procurement in Washington is adept at carefully selecting bits of information from old reports to support their thesis, rather than objectively reporting positive and negative information. Their conclusions about this tank are absolutely wrong. Even though their

charges against the M1 tank have been refuted time and again; here are the facts to offset their fiction:

Fiction: The M1 is shoddy.

Fact: The M1 tank is the highest quality tank in the world today. We routinely build "zero defect" tanks that are the envy of the world and we participate in the U.S. Army's Contractor Performance Certification Program, which is reserved for defense contractors which consistently exceed Department of Defense standards for excellence.

Fiction: The M1 tank is by far the most expensive tank in the world.

Fact: The M1 tank was designed to be affordable and, on an equivalent basis, is less costly than foreign competitors--considerably less than some. The initial price of the M1 tank in 1972 was \$507,800. The price quoted by the Army is somewhat higher because they include the cost of training and spare parts. The acquisition cost of the M1 tank today, in constant 1972 dollars, when adjusted for inflation and changes like upgunning to a larger cannon, is \$7,800 less than it was in 1972. The Abrams tank is an exceptional value.

Fiction: The M1 tank has never met its basic requirements.

Fact: The M1 tank had to meet its basic requirements before the Army would buy it. This includes reliability and performance. The Abrams tank is the centerpiece of the U.S. Army's force structure. It is the only Army weapon that is designed to withstand all forms of threats on the battlefield. Over 4,000 ballistic firings on the M1 and test sections have confirmed the robustness of the M1 design. It is the most survivable, most lethal, most mobile, and most supportable assault weapon in the Army's inventory. And it has consistently met or exceeded the Army's requirements.

Fiction: The bonded rubber track pads make the M1 difficult to maneuver in mud, snow, or ice.

Fact: Whether the track pad is bonded or replaceable has nothing to do with maneuverability in adverse environments. Metal grousers (grippers) can be fitted to either track, with equal improvements in traction on ice and snow, as demonstrated in competitive tests in Sweden this past winter. Also, the T-158 track which is a removable pad track, is currently in production.

Fiction: The M1 tank is unique in that it can be identified at extremely long ranges due to its "enormous heat signatures."

Fact: While the volume of heated exhaust in the M1 is greater than that of a diesel powered tank, the temperature of the exhaust is lower than that of a diesel powered tank. The very sensitive infrared sensors available today can identify any tank at extremely long ranges. Regardless of engine type, exhaust treatments would be required to match sensor technology. Equally important, these treatments are available should threat projections require them. Of more immediate need on the battlefield, the turbine is characterized by a lack of smoke plume, as contrasted with the common white or black smoke plume of diesels. The gas turbine engine is also dramatically quieter than the diesel.

Fiction: The M1 tank is unreliable.

Fact: The M1 tank consistently has operational readiness rates above 95%, considerably higher than current diesel powered tanks.

Fiction: The turbine requires frequent maintenance.

Fact: The turbine engine was chosen specifically for its high reliability, low weight, good acceleration and low life cycle costs. Its low weight allowed for use of an additional 1,000 lbs of armor protection. Low life cycle costs are achieved with its high reliability, fewer parts, modular maintenance concept, and no scheduled overhaul. The U.S. Army is experiencing fewer engine returns and about one-half of the repair costs of diesel tanks.

Fiction: The M1 tank is a gas guzzler.

Fact: While it is a multifuel engine, the preferred fuel is diesel. Fuel consumption reports of 6.6 and 7.7 gallons per mile include the high percentage of idle time being experienced with obviously no miles being accumulated. Operationally in Europe, tanks are kept in a ready state and experience a high idle time. To address the idle time, changes have been made to improve idle fuel consumption by 20%. Also, since turbines can start at much lower temperatures, they do not have to be idled all night to start on cold mornings. Fuel costs are less than 1% of total operational and support costs and the turbine has resulted in higher reliability and more armor protection, which are more directly related to the basic mission of the tank.

Fiction: The vehicle also can have problems crossing water as little as one foot deep.

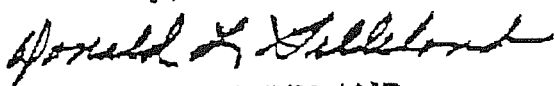
Fact: There are no restrictions on water crossings within the designed water limits of four feet, and all tanks pass fording tests prior to delivery. Any inspections after a water crossing are only precautions under unusual conditions and are not indications of problems.

Despite the fact that the Warsaw Pact threat is diminishing, a formidable threat still exists, and the Abrams tank still remains the only survivable Army assault weapon available for land battles.

I know this response is long, but the topic is extremely important to our company and to the nation. The kind of impression your article and its front page play created will certainly be difficult to change. At best it is not good for the morale of our employees; at worst it can damage the international reputation of the most successful acquisition in the U.S. Army's inventory.

We are proud of the quality we build into this tank, and we hope you will take appropriate editorial steps to remedy the wrong impressions created by the Michael Clements article.

Sincerely,



DONALD L. GILLELAND