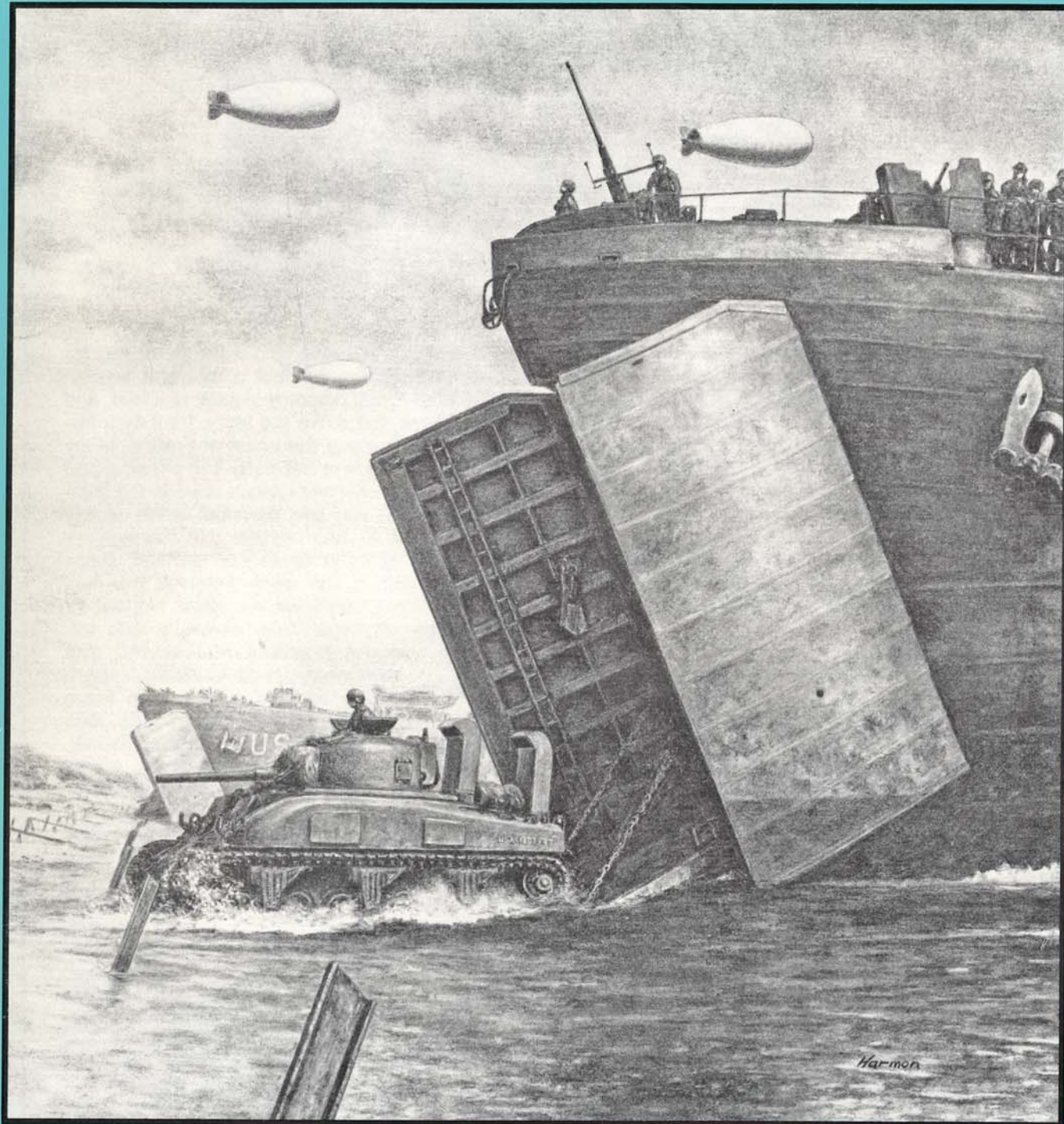


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The Making of an M1 Tank Driver

by Captain Oakland McCulloch



Photos by SSG Robert A. Roy, TNARNG

In today's unstable world — with unrest in such places as Somalia, Bosnia, Southwest Asia, and the former Soviet Union — the U.S. Army does not know when it will be called upon to fight the next war. However, one thing is certain in today's "force projection" Army — we will have to fight as we are, with little or no time for train-up.

A tank is a crew-oriented system. For the tank to be an effective weapon system, every one of the four crewmembers must know his job and know it well. If one of the four crewmembers fails, then the tank fails. Obviously, the area of greatest concern is the newly arrived driver.

The U.S. Army has historically looked upon the tank as a mid- to high-intensity conflict weapon. In Vietnam, the U.S. Army sent only a minimum of armor units with its 500,000 troops. However, as our recent experience in Somalia has shown, the M1 Abrams and the M2 Bradley are needed anytime U.S. troops are sent anywhere.

With that in mind, 2d Battalion, 13th Armor Regiment (One Station Unit Training for 19Ks) has taken steps to ensure that the newly arrived private sitting in the driver's seat is well trained. The training process can be broken down into five phases: 1) Inprocessing, 2) Static Training, 3) Certification, 4) Verification, and 5) Licensing.

Phase I, inprocessing, includes all the paperwork and administrative work needed to license the trainee. First, every trainee fills out a DA Form 348 during his first week here. He must also attend an accident avoidance class given by a DOD police officer. During this four-hour class, the trainees are given classes on drinking and driving, how long it takes to stop a moving vehicle, and defensive driving techniques. Then, a drivers testing instructor from the Director of Logistics (DOL) gives each trainee the following physical evaluations: reflexes, depth perception and an eye test. If the trainee cannot pass either of these evaluations, he will not receive his learner's permit.

Next, the driver testing section does a background investigation of the driving record of each and every trainee to ensure that he has a valid state driver's license. If a trainee does not have a valid state drivers license, he will not be issued a learner's permit.

Phase II, static training, is conducted by the tank commanders in the motor pool. Each trainee is given classes on the driver's station. He must learn everything about the driver's station and the tasks that he will be expected to perform as a driver of the M1-series tank.

During this phase, the trainees are given a tank demonstration where they can see the M1 and M1A1 tank in action. They are taught the follow-

ing tasks that they will be required to perform as a driver: prepare drivers station for operation, start/stop M1/M1A1 and secure drivers station, trouble shoot M1/M1A1 using the driver's control panel warning and caution lights, extinguish a fire, operate the gas particulate filter unit, unlock stuck parking brakes, perform a fuel transfer, refuel an M1/M1A1, and slave start an M1/M1A1.

The trainees are then taught their responsibilities for Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services. Each trainee is taught the following tasks: maintain the equipment record folder, inspect the hydraulics, perform before- (4 hours of training) and after-operations (1.5 hours of training) PMCS, and service the air induction system and precleaner.

Every trainee must learn these tasks to the standard. Each of these tasks is tested on the Armor Crewman Test I (ACT I) but, more importantly, they will be tested on the next battlefield. The tank commanders allow no deviation from that standard. Their motivation to train strictly to standard is in part due to the possibility that any trainee could be their driver in the next war.

Phase III, certification, is all simulation oriented. The trainee is introduced to the M1 Driver's Trainer. These trainers, based on the flight simulator model, are an exact replica of the driver's station in an M1-series tank. Therefore, the trainee must do

everything exactly as he would in his real tank in a real situation.

The trainee must negotiate 22 different scenarios to be certified. By the Master Training Schedule (MTS), each trainee is allotted 12 hours in the simulator. (At this time, trainees receive less than that because only 10 of the 18 simulators are on line.)

In the simulator, the trainee must follow a ground guide in the motor pool; drive on a dirt trail, a secondary road, a major highway, and cross-country; drive with the hatch open and closed, during day and night and under NBC conditions; he must drive in fog, ice, mud, rain and snow; he must load/unload the tank from a HET and a rail car, cross an AVLB, and go through a tunnel. The trainee must perform the tasks required by a driver: react to a loss of brakes, detect and react to low transmission pressure, react to a low fuel warning, and transfer fuel.

During the tactical portion of the driver's training, he must drive through and around obstacles while the main gun is firing and artillery is falling around him. He must be able to pick out the best route through the obstacle with minimal direction from the tank commander, just as he must do in a real combat situation.

Before the trainee ever drives a real tank, he has driven approximately 30 miles in the simulator. Just as important, he has learned to operate the tank and he has learned this under conditions that we cannot safely replicate in peacetime.

During Phase IV, verification of the trainee's driver training, the trainees are taken out to the Advanced Driver's Course (ADC) where they get to drive a tank.

In this phase, the trainee drives approximately eight miles. He must cross an AVLB, negotiate a water obstacle, drive around a traffic circle, like those found in small German villages, and drive up and down steep paved roads. They do all of this with



open and closed hatch, in day and night, and under NBC conditions. They actually drive up on a concrete slab the exact dimensions of a rail car. They also go through the steps required to remove the power pack. They must also perform the PMCS of the vehicle before, during, and after operations.

The trainee must continue to negotiate the course until his tank commander is confident that he can drive the M1 tank. If there are problems then the Master Driver or Senior Tank Commander takes the trainee back out on the course to reevaluate him and give him the extra training needed.

The trainee then drives approximately four miles on the cross country (mud) course. He is introduced to tactical driving. He drives while his fellow trainees are doing a TCPC in the turret with their permanent party tank commander. This phase helps prepare the trainees for their move-out gunnery. They must select the best route through the woods to their next fighting position, which is a hull-down position.

The last phase of verification is during gunnery. Some trainees get to drive during a move-out gunnery. They drive approximately one mile while the main gun and coax are being fired; the remainder of the trainees must fire on a stationary range. However, they are still taught berm drills and they experience a live round being fired while they are in the driver's seat. By this time, the trainee has completed his actual hands-on training and he has over 45 miles of combined simulation and actual driving.

The last phase of training is Phase V, 19K10 licensing. Once the trainee has completed all required driver's training, the company commander signs his DA Form 348. The DA Form 348 is then sent to DOL and they produce the trainee's OF 346. The DA Form 348 and OF 346 are then issued to the soldier upon graduation.

When the soldier leaves Fort Knox, he is a licensed M1/M1A1 tank driver, however, this soldier is still a novice. At his next duty station, leaders are required by regulation to test drive the soldier before letting him drive. Their new tank commander must immediately build upon the OSUT training. We have taught the basics but continued on-station training is imperative to develop a true M1 driver ready for combat.

U.S. troops today are expected to be battle-ready at all times. The present world instability increases the likelihood that a number of units could be drawn into battle with newly arrived OSUT graduates. The quality of the M1 driver's training program at 2d Battalion, 13th Armor Regiment ensures that these new soldiers are confident and ready to meet the challenge.

Captain Oakland McCulloch is a Distinguished Military Graduate of Northern Illinois University. He received a Regular Army commission in Infantry in 1986. He has served as a Bradley, ITV, and mortar platoon leader, aide-de-camp and S3 Air with the 24th Infantry Division. He was recently re-branched Armor and is currently Delta Company Commander, 2d Battalion, 13th Armor Regiment, 1st Armor Training Brigade at Fort Knox, Ky.