



Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

"The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" I wonder how many times the death of the tank has been proclaimed? *ARMOR Magazine's* cover boldly declared the tank dead in 1972. The Jan-Feb cover, based on an article by LTC Warren Lennon, stated: "The tank today is as anachronistic as medieval body armor. Though it has many obvious advantages, it has evolved to the stage of imminent extinction because it has become increasingly inefficient in an age which demands more of machines than ever before."

To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of the tank's demise have been greatly exaggerated. *ARMOR's* readers took Lennon to task. One letter writer pointed out that Lennon's argument that future tanks will look nothing like the mounts of today (1972) is correct, for today's tanks look nothing like the tanks of 1916. Lennon's article may have pointed more toward the evolution of the tank than its death. In the same article he adds, "There will continue to be a need for vehicles which can carry heavy firepower wherever it may be needed... There will still be a requirement for a fast cross-country vehicle to strike at the enemy."

Hmmm...sounds a lot like a tank.

The tank's demise has been announced once again; this time spurred by General Shinseki's announced plans for a medium-weight brigade. *Army Times'* headlines like "OFF TRACK? Armor Soldiers Question All-wheeled Future," (8 November 1999) have caused many to declare the tank dead again. But is this the case? What has the Army's Chief of Staff really said? Has General Shinseki given the Abrams main battle tank its last rites?

Quite simply, the answer is "No!" The Army Chief of Staff has asked the science and technology community to study different capabilities, such as electric drives, active protection systems, and enhanced armors, to determine what advances in these fields might mean for the future of mounted war-

fighting. This is far from revolutionary; in fact, the Marines are doing the same. Marine Corps materiel developers have launched a four-year project to study evolving technology to determine the merit of a revolutionary new combat system to replace the M1A1 and the Light Armored Vehicle by 2025 (*Armed Forces Journal International*, November 1999). The Marine Corps study includes: directed energy weapons, non-petroleum-based propulsion, advanced composites and more.

Returning to the question is the Abrams main battle tank dead, the answer is "No." Will it go on forever? Again, "No." General Shinseki admits that he does not know how long the M1 will be around, "whether it's 2025 or 2018, I don't have a good number..." Advances in technology and an ever-changing threat will drive the train and force weapon systems to evolve; it would be foolish and short-sighted to deny this fact.

The first issues of *The Cavalry Journal* discussed the relative merits of the saber and revolver as weapons for the mounted soldier. The journal also included tips, techniques, and procedures for taking care of horses. Mounted warfighting has come a long way. Armor and cavalry are more than branches and those who wear the brass must look forward rather than grow comfortable wedded to a particular system or way of doing business. We must be open to new ways and means to get about the business of mounted warfighting. As we enter a new year, new decade, new century, I invite you to the fray. Let's discuss the future of mounted warfighting. This is an exciting time that demands a professional dialogue as creative and as thought-provoking as that which took place among our predecessors. Topics such as the limited conversion division, the brigade cavalry troop, the future scout and cavalry system, the future combat system and the medium weight brigade should all spur discourse. We are standing by. "Over."

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