

# Unusable Tank Is Said to Cost \$1 Billion Plus

By Robert C. Maynard  
Washington Post Staff Writer

At least \$1 billion—and possibly much more—has been spent during the last 10 years by the Army on a tank system with no present military value, a Congressional inquiry revealed yesterday.

The tank system, the Sheridan, had been intended by the Army to be the Rolls-Royce of tanks, but the General Accounting Office told a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee that so far the machine has had more problems than the Edsel.

And the Army, insofar as the public record is concerned, has maintained a stony silence, insisting the matter is classified and not to be discussed in public.

Rep. Samuel S. Stratton (D-N.Y.), chairman of the investigating subcommittee, closed the hearings to the public just when the details were about to emerge.

#### Secrecy Questioned

Denying that any national security would be jeopardized, Stratton said the Army insisted that certain details—some of them already public—had been classified. The Army also has said it would not allow its representatives to testify in public.

"I can understand that many of the details of this case are indeed embarrassing to the Army, but I have not honestly though they involved national security," Stratton snapped.

Going further, he said, "For the most part, the nature of the information which has been classified by the Army is such that one might reasonably conclude that this censor-

ship is indeed an attempt to hide bumping ineptness."

#### 'Sorry' Affair

With that, the hearing in the Rayburn Building was closed to all of those without top security clearance. By that time, though, much of what Stratton called "a sorry" affair had already oozed onto the public record.

The disclosures included:

- The total cost, according to Elmer Staats, comptroller general of the U.S., is \$1.3 billion for the Sheridan system to date.

- The problem is ammunition. The vehicle is designed to shoot a small missile or a special conventional 152-millimeter shell whose casing is supposed to be combustible. So far, the ammunition hasn't worked.

- Despite that fact, the Army has continued procuring a tank with no weapon, likened to a watchdog with no teeth.

- The United States and West Germany were to develop a tank together starting almost six years ago. More than \$150 million and only two working models later, Germany gave up on the project

as too rich for that country and too obsolete to be much use in Central Europe, where better tanks are already in the hands of her Cold War adversaries. The U.S., Stratton said, was "left high and dry."

At this very moment, the Army is still building Sheridan training simulators that don't work. The simulators each cost \$5000 extra to be made workable. So far, \$1 million would have to be spent on modifications, but the things are still rolling off the assembly line.

- GAO told Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara in late 1967 that there were serious problems with Sheridan, but it continued to be made.

#### Army Rules Violated

Although the Army conceded within its own councils that the Sheridan was in deep trouble, it put the weapon into production, in violation of its own regulations Stratton charged.

He read a letter from Gen. William B. Bunker, deputy commanding general of the Army Materiel Command, saying that if the problems were admitted to, the money for the program would be withdrawn.

Stratton said he concluded from that that the Army's reason for hanging on to the program was precisely for that purpose—to prevent loss of the budgeted funds for Sheridan and its missile component, the Shillelagh missile.

The Sheridan/Shillelagh system was to have included sophisticated features such as high speed, about 10 miles an hour faster than the M60 tank, which now can travel at 32 miles an hour.

It was also to have had a suspension system that would have allowed it to fire its weapons while moving, air conditioning that would filter out radioactive fallout, missile capability and—from the same tubes—fire a conventional shell with a casing that burned up at each firing and did not need to be ejected.