

Army's 'Swimming' Truck Sinks

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

If ever a Pentagon project cried out for an official investigation, it is the Army's swimming trucks that sink. Now, it turns out, even on dry land they lurch about so violently that drivers feel like throwing up.

In military jargon, the trucks are known as "GOER vehicles." Each consists of a diesel engine tractor which pulls an 8-ton cargo body, a 10-ton wrecker or a 2,500-gallon tanker.

There are 836 of these clunkers presently in the Army inventory, and the brass hats are planning to purchase 464 more. Cost to the taxpayer: \$90 million.

The GOER was developed by and purchased from the Caterpillar Tractor Co. It was designed to be a rugged, battle-field-worthy truck with a "floating and swimming capability for crossing calm water barriers."

But military test drivers maneuvered the trucks into Maryland's Chesapeake Bay and found themselves in water above their ankles. On one occasion, according to internal test reports, a GOER pulling a tanker unit "swamped and sank."

One report cautioned that "the vehicle [should] be prohibited from swimming until deficiencies . . . are corrected." If they are to be taken into the

water, it counseled, only "well-trained and experienced driver personnel" should be used.

The same batch of tests turned up dozens of other shortcomings, including problems in the brakes, steering system, alternator, transmission, front axle and tractor frame. The personnel heater didn't work, and "the high noise level in the cab" was a "health hazard to both the driver and co-driver."

In December, a unit at Ft. Hood, Tex., conducted additional tests on the GOER. Compared with three other "high mobility" vehicles, it came out looking like a Tinker Toy.

A draft test report, stamped "Distribution Limited," cites these results:

- In one tactical exercise "along a dirt tank trail . . . averaging 25 miles per hour . . . all vehicles kept up . . . except the GOER's which fell 25 minutes behind within 7½ miles. When the GOER's caught up with the waiting column, their crews were suffering from motion sickness and requested to continue on the paved road."

- "The harsh ride qualities . . . were severe enough in many cases to cause loss of complete control of the vehicles. The drivers would bounce vertically and be thrown from side-to-side with such force, velocity, and frequency that their feet could not be kept on the throttle and-or brake."

- The GOER's "exhibited very jerky motions in the hydraulically boosted yaw-steering system [causing] a potential safety hazard."

- "When the vehicles are in all-wheel drive and the steering is yawed toward the limit, either left or right, the rear body tends to crawl over the front power unit . . . At least twice the driver involved felt in danger of tipping over."

In sum, the cantankerous contraptions "ranked at or near the bottom in virtually every area tested."

Indeed, the report recommended they be "returned to depot stock and held in strategic reserve" for use only "in extremely muddy environments."

Footnote: Army spokesmen insist their GOER's have met all the criteria for which they were designed and have "served well in use in the Army." The Ft. Hood tests, they said, were confined to "certain characteristics" and did not take into consideration other qualities of the GOER, such as its ability to swim.

Philippine Funeral: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos refused to guarantee safe passage to the daughter and son-in-law of a dead former friend so they could accompany the remains of her father from the United States to the Philippines.

Eugenio Lopez Sr., once Ma-

nila's most powerful press lord and a Marcos supporter, went into exile here when Marcos became a dictator in 1972. When he was dying of cancer he begged Marcos to let his three sons in the Philippines visit him one last time.

Not only did Marcos deny the request, he refused to promise safe return to the United States for Lopez's daughter, Presy, and her husband, Steve Psinakis. Thus, only Lopez's widow and a fourth, younger son went back to bury Lopez.

Picnic Cover-Up: For more than four months, U.S. marshals covered up the presence of an intruder at a picnic for sequestered jurors who were trying ex-White House aide John Ehrlichman and others for the break-in at Dan Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office.

The interloper was a marshal's wife who showed up at a July 4, 1974 outing for the jurors, an "improper contact" that is supposed to be reported immediately to the judge.

Washington field office marshals covered it up until Marshal Service Director Wayne Colburn learned of it in late October. He quickly notified judges, who met with prosecutors and defense lawyers. Although no retrial was ordered, a Colburn spokesman said that the issue of disciplinary action "is not dead."

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