Lessons from the IDF

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Some time ago, we had an opportunity to spend several weeks with an armored brigade of the Israeli Defense Force. During that time, we observed and participated in training situations from which we believe the U.S. Army can learn several important lessons about how to protect its soldiers better — in their tanks, in their command vehicles, and in their evacuation vehicles.

First, the IDF conducts drills to teach its tank crews to react quickly to any emergency in the turret. Through these drills, conducted in daylight and in darkness, each tank crew becomes thoroughly familiar with its crew compartment. Whether the announcement is "fire in the crew compartment" or "tank round in the engine," the reaction of the men is unified and well rehearsed.

One thing that helps this training process is standardization. Each tank in the IDF has a load plan that is identical to that of all the other tanks in the Armor Corps. This enables the soldiers to remove wounded or dead crewmen from a damaged tank, complete minimal repairs, and put in a new crew that does not need a long time to become thoroughly familiar with the vehicle's organic equipment.

In conjunction with these crew drills, the Israelis spend additional training periods evacuating crewmen with simulated wounds from all positions within the tank. They try for speed in these exercises, but they also use another interesting indicator to judge the effectiveness of the training. They feel that the crewmen are learning where each item is located in the compartment if there are no grease marks or cuts on their forearms — marks and cuts that might be caused by having to search for something while moving fast. The Israelis feel that if their crewmen are to react quickly in the event of hostilities, each of them must learn the location of his water bottle, extra ammunition, grenades, small weapons, and first aid kit.

The U.S. Army can learn several important lessons from the IDF about how to protect its soldiers — in their tanks, in their command vehicles, and in their evacuation vehicles.

At a time when our own forces in Europe are hamstrung by a lack of funds for large maneuvers, trainers there could use crew drills such as these to familiarize their armored crewmen with particular tasks. And during evacuation drills, medical personnel could teach "buddy first aid" and at the same time familiarize themselves with the crew compartments of the vehicles.

The need for such training has been demonstrated. During the planning phases of one ARTEP in Europe, for example, a unit set as one of its training goals the identification, location, and evacuation of 24 soldiers per day. In actual practice, only two to four soldiers were evacuated per day. This was partly because some of the field medics were unable to read a map properly, but also because the means of evacuation were inadequate for the number of casualties generated.

Obviously, a battalion-sized unit in contact with an enemy force can expect to sustain more than 24 casualties per day. What is needed, then, is not additional training but more intensified training, such as crew compartment familiarization and "buddy" medical skills.

A second lesson we can learn concerns the use of NOMAX fire retardant suits. Almost all Israeli armor crewmen and rear echelon soldiers wear these suits. Our soldiers, too, should have them, and the sooner, the better — and not just those in the front-line units. Even with the NOMAX uniforms, the number of burn casualties generated in a modern-day tank war can quickly overburden the existing medical capabilities.

The Israelis can also teach us something about the size a tactical operations center (TOC) should be. Although they use M113 APCs instead of M577s for their command posts, their brigade CPs are usually no larger than our company CPs. If

there is a war in Europe in any of the proposed variations, our present TOCs will be entirely too large, and, therefore, will be lucrative targets. And commanders who insist on using their jeeps or helicopters for getting around the battlefield, as some still do, will find it difficult not to become targets. In Israel, few commanders at any level ever maneuver in vehicles other than their tanks or APCs.

Another important point is that the Israeli APC has been altered in several ways. The most interesting one has to do with the cargo hatch, which also serves as a map board. This enables the commander and his S3 to work off the same map and still maneuver and advise different subordinate units by radio.

We also need to do something about our present medical evacuation vehicle, which, in Europe, is the M113 identified by a red cross on a white background. One problem is that this vehicle usually carries few of the mandatory items essential to

emergency medical care. Another is that the very noticeable red cross makes the vehicle an easy target, and it has no defensive weapon on board. To make this vehicle more useful and more survivable, we might consider the following changes:

- Add battery- or vehicle-powered onboard suction.
- Provide adequate medical lighting.
- Extend its medical-surgical capabilities, including IV solution.
- Add modern splint sets and litter capabilities.
- Mount a defensive weapon such as the .50 caliber machinegun on it.
- Eliminate the uncamouflaged red cross marking.

Many of the things the Israelis are doing today the U.S. Army did 35 years ago. Unfortunately, we seem to have forgotten most of them.

If we are to maintain combat readiness, we will have to place more emphasis on quality training for protecting our soldiers and leaders, and for training them to protect themselves.

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TOW Tracking Skills

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If he is going to be successful on the modern battlefield, a TOW gunner must be able to track a moving target. Unfortunately, he must get in a great deal of tracking practice if he is going to retain his skill once he has acquired it. And getting that practice is not easy.

One problem is space. Tracking exercises normally require an area at least 300 meters deep and 500 meters wide. In some cases, the depth should even be extended to 3,000 meters; in garrison, such areas are hard to find.

What is needed, then, is a system that will allow for the most tracking time and that can also be employed in a small area, inside or outside. A motorized scale tracking set, such as the one developed by the antitank platoon of the Combat Support Company, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 325th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, is such a system. The set, which consists of an electric train set and scale model tanks, allows a TOW gunner and crew to be placed in simulated combat situations. It can be used in an area less than 10 meters wide and 100 meters deep, a size that is available to most units in garrison. The set also allows a gunner to practice armored vehicle identification and to engage targets moving at realistic speeds toward him, away from him, or across his front.

The set consists of five components: a 1/35 scale model tank, an electric motor, a transformer, some "O" gauge track, and several terrain mockups.

The "O" gauge track provides a stable target platform for the model tank, and the electric motor found in a small locomotive will fit inside the tank model. The only modification necessary is to remove the body of the locomotive, normally held on by