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Tank that swims

New weapon gets test

By Lyle Nelson
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Island soldiers of the 29th Brigade at Schofield Barracks jumped into their M-551 "tanks" Monday for a spin and a swim.

"Only they are not tanks," said Maj. Dan Brewer of the Army's Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois.

The Sheridan weapon system looks like a tank, runs like a tank, has tracks and guns and is painted dark green.

"But it's not a tank because it doesn't have any armor," Brewer said. "Its thin sides are made of aluminum."

Wouldn't an anti-tank shell go through it?

Brewer said an armor-piercing shell could stop any vehicle, but in the case of the M-551 it moves so fast that "anyone hitting it will have to be an awfully good gunner."

The Sheridan's proper title is "Armored Reconnaissance/Airborne Assault Vehicle Full Tracked, 152mm."

It's a pretty clever weapon because it can:

1. Be dropped from an airplane.
2. Cruise at 4 miles an hour on water.
3. Go 45 miles an hour across the country, rice paddies, ditches, anything else in its path and turn on a dime.
4. Fire either a conventional shell or a missile.

The missile is a Shillelagh, a heat-seeking explosive that has an amazing accuracy record, the Army says.

The Sheridan is a great night fighter also because it carries a system that magnifies starlight so that the vehicle can race with ease after targets on dark nights.

In addition, it has eight grenade projectors, four on either side, that can shoot out smoke bombs to hide it or lethal grenades to a distance of 100 yards.

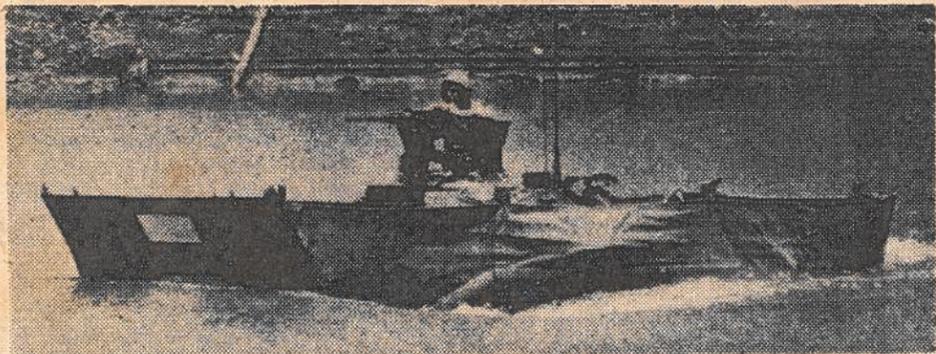
Each "tank" carries four men. It has been attached to five Army units at continental U.S. bases plus Alaska and now Hawaii but none has been shipped to Vietnam yet.

It has been tested in the Arctic, Panama, England and Australia, Brewer said, plus six gruelling months in Thailand.

Will this machine, that costs \$235,000 each, win the war in Vietnam? Brewer declined comment, with a smile.

And will the 29th Brigade be taking this sophisticated weapon to Vietnam?

No one is talking, or no one knows.



VERSATILE "TANK"—The Army's M-551 Sheridan is shown taking a swim in a ditch near Schofield Barracks. The canvas sides are up to prevent waves from coming in on the driver who looks through the square in front.