The M1A1 Abrams Tank in Egypt

By

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Egypt—a land famous for its great Pyramids, the Sphinx, vast deserts, oases, the Nile River, and the best trained tank crews in the Arab world.

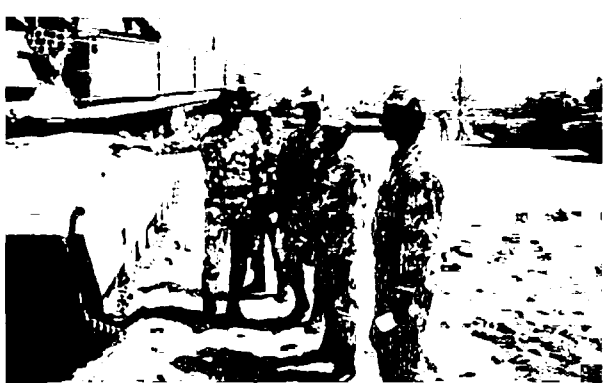
The United States supports the Arab Republic of Egypt with financial aid and security assistance. One of the largest efforts in the U.S. security assistance arena is the co-production and fielding of the M1A1 Abrams, the U.S. Army's main battle tank, by the Egyptian Land Forces (ELF).

Along with the co-production of 524 M1A1's, is the fielding, New Equipment Training (NET), and follow-on support for the Egyptian Army. This is the mission of the U.S. Army M1A1 Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT). The M1A1 TAFT was originally set up in 1989 to assist the Egyptian Land Forces in preparing for the introduction of the tank into their combat units. Once fielding began in June 1993, the team was expanded to eleven members to provide hands-on technical assistance.

The M1A1 TAFT supports two aspects of the fielding—On the Job Training (OJT) for the tank crews, and hands-on assistance with maintenance of the tank and related equipment. The TAFT is headed by a U.S Army Armor Branch Lieutenant Colonel, with two M1A1 Master Gunners to oversee the crew training portion of the mission. A maintenance team of an Ordnance Corps Major, two Warrant Officers, and four NCO's provide training and advice to the ELF maintenance personnel assigned to the M1A1 units. The support covers all maintenance activities from Organizational Level to Intermediate General Support, and assists in the set up of all maintenance facilities for the tank.

Along with the Americans who serve on the TAFT, there are Egyptian Army counterpart TAFT members who have a very significant role in the fielding process. Together, the American and Egyptian counterparts share in the fielding effort, learning a great deal from each other in the process.

M1A1 TANK CREW TRAINING



Egyptian Land Forces Soldiers Receiving Operator-Level Maintenance Training on the M1A1 Tank

The underlying philosophy for all training in the Egyptian M1A1 program has been "Train the Trainer," where the U.S. Army trains the cadre of Egyptian instructors, either in the U.S. or in Egypt. Once they are qualified, the responsibility for training the new M1A1 units shifts to the ELF cadre. The M1A1 TAFT assists by validating the quality of the instruction, advises on how to improve, and helps ensure that standards are maintained.

The New Equipment Training (NET) on the M1A1 takes five months for each battalion, a substantially longer time than that required by a U.S. Army battalion. The American unit goes to M1A1 NET as an experienced, trained, cohesive team. In contrast, the Egyptian battalion is 75% new soldiers, just out of basic training, with a core of older sergeants and officers. The unit is formed up just prior to NET. Significantly, the Egyptians are using the M1A1 to introduce the concept of long serving volunteers (five years minimum enlistment time) into an Army that was previously all conscripts.

The Egyptian NET closely follows the same training plan used by the U.S. Army, and was in fact developed by Fort Knox to support several Mobile Training Teams deployed during 1991 and 1992. The training is standards, not event, oriented. The TAFT Master Gunners, both Egyptian and American, closely monitor the training to ensure that the standards are maintained. The culmination of the NET is a rigorous month long tank gunnery exercise that results in tank crew qualification and acceptance as a member of the newly formed M1A1 battalion. The U.S. Army's tank gunnery manual, FM 17-12-1, is the baseline document that sets the tasks, conditions, and standards to be achieved. Crews that fail to qualify are sent back to the NET Training Center for additional training. The training is considerably more demanding than what the ELF Armor Force is used to, but the target hits on the range prove that Egyptian soldiers, even though young and inexperienced, can meet standards when they get proper training.

An Egyptian General and an U.S. Army NCO Inspect Tank Gunnery Target Hits at the Completion of the Net Gunnery

TRAINING M1A1 MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL

Maintenance training for support of the M1A1 is a combination of on-site training in Egypt through the use of Mobile Training Teams (MTT's), and CONUS training at U.S. Army schools. Three MTT's have been used to train a cadre of ELF officers and mechanics, and numerous Egyptian officers have attended U.S. Army schools. They return to make a significant impact on the maintenance units in which they serve. In addition, many serve as instructors in the various training centers in Cairo where the ELF learns to maintain the M1A1.

Along with the M1A1 TAFT, in-country Field Service Representatives (FSR's) support the M1A1 Tank Program. These knowledgeable, experienced technicians play a key role in assisting the ELF maintenance personnel learn the tank.

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There are great challenges as the Egyptian Army learns to properly operate and maintain the Abrams Tank and its support equipment. The battalions that are now receiving the tank had been equipped with the Soviet built T-62, an antiquated tank at best. So far, the Egyptian Army remains largely committed to Soviet imposed tactics and out moded training methods which do not take advantage of the M1A1's capabilities. Also, the Egyptian Army differs from the American Army in that a soldier is expected to serve as a welder, recovery vehicle operator, track vehicle repairman and machinist at the same time. Further, ELF mechanics are trained to perform all levels of maintenance, organizational through depot. This makes it difficult for the ELF to understand and accept U.S. Army maintenance doctrine. However, a great strength of the ELF mechanics continues to be their determination to learn how to maintain the vehicle.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EGYPTIAN M1A1 EXPERIENCE

Combat service support (fuel and ammo trucks, shop vans, recovery vehicles, and service ammunition) are not adequate for maximum effectiveness of the M1A1 units. Recommend: "Total Package" to achieve operational capability should be mandated by the USG in the initial FMS case.

U.S. training and tactical doctrines which enable M1A1 units to achieve full operational capability must be fully embraced by the FMS customer. Recommend: The U.S. service proponents for the weapons system work before the equipment is delivered to establish a close relationship with the customer to influence adoption of the necessary doctrinal changes in tactics and training by leaders, units, and school houses.

Continuing follow-on support (technical assistance, training, repair and return, spares) of fielded systems must have higher priority than new acquisitions. Recommend: USG mandate sufficiency of follow-on support for the long term before new FMS cases approved.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The assignment of U.S. Army officers and NCO's to the TAFT is a tremendous opportunity, from both a personal and professional stand point. Serving in Egypt, we are able live and work in a different culture and learn from our experiences. Here in Egypt, we work alongside fellow soldiers of an extremely important ally in the Middle East region. The M1A1 program is an important part of Egypt's military capability, and our successful fielding of the M1A1 tank helps to further strengthen the military relationship between our countries.

It will be several years before the M1A1 Abrams Tank is fully fielded to all the ELF battalions designated to receive it. We already see from the first fully fielded battalions that this new addition to the ELF's fighting forces can serve as an effective combat multiplier. However, the ELF must be adequately funded to sustain the necessary training OPTEMPO, and to fully maintain the vehicle at the required readiness levels. Full capability will also be a function of how much of the U.S. Army's tactics, training doctrine, and maintenance techniques the Egyptian Army will adopt.

Our goal is to make the units which own and maintain the M1A1 self sufficient. Our mission isn't complete until they demonstrate the ability to move, shoot, communicate, maintain, fight, and win in battle.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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