The Wolverine: An Update

By Major J. Gary Hallinan

The Wolverine is back for fiscal year 2001. While the Army is transforming to become lighter and more transportable, support to the legacy maneuver force continues. The Product Manager Wolverine, Deputy for Systems Acquisition (DSA), U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (USATACOM), Warren, Michigan, will field 12 Wolverines to the 588th Engineer Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Fort Hood, Texas, by January 2001—just in time to participate in the First Digitized Division Capstone Exercise at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, in March 2001.

The fielding of the Wolverines is the direct result of several things: restored fiscal year 2000 funding for low-rate initial production (LRIP) increment three, a congressional plus up in fiscal year 2001 to procure 12 additional Wolverines on the current LRIP contract with General Dynamics Land Systems, and the Wolverines' successful demonstration during the Limited User Test conducted earlier this year. Now, maneuver-brigade commanders will have a true military load class (MLC) 70 gap-crossing capability up to 24 meters that can keep pace with and is as sustainable as its supported force.

Several milestones still must be met in order to complete the production and fielding of the remaining Wolverines. The system must go through an initial operational test and evaluation in late 2001 at Fort Hood. This test will formally evaluate the entire system—its qualitative reliability, availability, and maintainability as well as the soldiers who interact directly with the Wolverine. Pending successful completion of this test, the Wolverine program will be scrutinized during the Milestone III decision, which is scheduled for the second quarter of fiscal year 2002. The deciding authority (DSA, USATACOM) will base its decision on several criteria to determine if the program is ready to move on to the next phase of its life cycle—full-rate production.

It is clear why the Army decided to restore the Wolverine after its near termination from Program Budget Decision 745. The Wolverine, the Engineer Regiment's only digitized platform, has commonality with the current legacy force since it is based on an M1A2 System Enhancement Program (SEP) chassis that has been modified to transport, launch, and retrieve an MLC 70 Leguan bridge across gaps up to 24 meters wide. The Wolverine will provide the Army with responsive assault-bridging capability, enabling freedom of maneuver on the digitized battlefield. The Wolverine is a one-for-one replacement for the armored vehicle-launched bridge (AVLB). A significant improvement over the older existing technology, the Wolverine brings the following capabilities to Force XXI engineers:

- Improved force readiness.
- Improved force mobility. The Wolverine is as mobile and as agile as the supported maneuver force, a key requirement for flexibility of maneuver.
- Improved gap crossing. The Wolverine can cross 73 percent of gaps theater-wide, compared to the AVLB's 54 percent.
- Caution-free MLC 70 crossing at 24 meters.
- Reduced logistics footprint. The Wolverine's chassis is 90 percent compatible with the M1A2SEP.

The path forward is clear. Although the First Digitized Division Capstone Exercise is not a formal test of the system, the performance of the Wolverine and how it interacts as part of the heavy maneuver, digitized brigade is critical to the future of the program and the role the Engineer Regiment will play in the first Digitized Division.

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