

HOVERCRAFT IN LAND WAR

Part two of a discussion by

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The first part of this two-part article, by a member of the British Defence Staff in Washington who discusses the Army's uses for ACVs, was in our July issue.

OPERATIONAL USES

Reconnaissance In this role it must always work in close co-operation with helicopters; a helicopter/hovercraft squadron making a well-balanced, effective reconnaissance force, as the USN proved in the Plain of Reeds operation described in this journal's January 1967 issue. (For a suggested establishment see below.)

The recon hovercraft will need to be small, with a wheeled/tracked chassis and retractable sides, have an endurance of at least one battlefield day, carry a crew of three or four, be armoured, and be equipped with a quick-firing cannon and machine guns, passive night vision device and radio. (Experts versed in the current state of the art say this can never happen; this does not mean to say it will not, nor that it should not be the aim.) It must be air-portable by strategic aircraft and medium helicopters; be transportable in considerable numbers in an *Intrepid*-type assault ship and able to operate under its own power from the ship's dock. It need *not* have chemical, biological or radiation protection, stabilisation,

complex built-in guided weapon systems, far infra-red detectors or any other bulky, weighty, currently fashionable, sophisticated hindrance.

Weapon and Troop Deployment Vehicle A larger version of the same type of hovercraft should be designed to perform either of these roles, since both imply the provision of a mobile platform, possibly even armour protected, from which infantry or their supporting weapons can engage the enemy or from which they can be dismounted to engage. The infantry would operate in their own hovercraft as they would, in developed areas, operate in their own armoured personnel carriers. Present designs permit the carriage of artillery. Future designs should permit artillery to engage from the hovercraft, at least when settled.

It might be possible to provide a platform on the troop carrier to permit a helicopter to "poise" on it whilst troops transferred from the hovercraft to the helicopter or vice versa.

It should be possible for equipment—anti-tank weapons, howitzers, mortars—to be loaded into or lifted out of the hovercraft by helicopter, for redeployment, or to assist recovery when the hovercraft is confronted by insurmountable obstacles or is a casualty.

Provision might also be made to permit the hovercraft to refuel and rearm quickly from a logistic helicopter poised on the hovercraft platform; and *vice versa*, to permit an operational helicopter to refuel and rearm from a logistic hovercraft.

Command Vehicle A similar type of craft could be equipped as a command vehicle; in which case its superstructure should be designed to form a landing pad for a light observation helicopter into which a commander could transfer when he required, or from which officers attending discussions in the command vehicle could descend.

Logistic Vehicle For economy's sake, a larger size of hovercraft than that used in the troop and weapon deployment and command vehicle role should probably be used in the logistic role.

It should consist simply of a compartment with the facility of loading from the front, the sides, or vertically from above. The floor should be equipped with weight spreaders to enable high-density loads, such as armoured vehicles, to be carried. Bulk fuels could be carried in collapsible plastic tanks from which several hovercraft (or other vehicles) could be quickly refuelled by multiple-output high-pressure pumps. Helicopters could either be refuelled on the

In this suggested make-up for a hovercraft-equipped armoured reconnaissance squadron, [the [abbreviations CVR (W) or (T) stand for combat vehicle, reconnaissance (wheeled) or (tracked)

Armoured Reconnaissance Squadron

