

Tanks, They Said It Couldn't Be Done

By Bruce Cooper

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During the course of the December 1993 meeting of the FRRS Board of Directors, Norm Holmes brought up, almost jokingly, that we ought to look into getting a tank to put on one of our DODX flatcars. Everybody thought it was kind of funny, but didn't think that it was likely to occur. I told Norman that I would like to take it on as a personal challenge, to see if I couldn't get us a tank for the flatcars.

Well, to make a long story short, it's taken a year and six months, but we now own 2 operational M60A3 battle tanks. These vehicles cost approximately 1 million dollars apiece. One of them has less than 50 hours on it, and the other has approximately 150 hours run time. They are 31 feet long, 11 feet 8 inches wide, 10 feet 7 inches high, and weigh 114,000 pounds each. They are capable of carrying 62 rounds of 105 mm ammunition for the main cannon, and can carry 6,000 rounds of 7.62 mm machine gun ammunition, 800 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun ammunition, and approximately 50 different types of smoke and anti-personnel hand grenades.

We have them here at the Museum, on display. I'm going to turn the gun barrels into time capsules, for PR reasons. I'm working with the City of Portola, Plumas County, and the school districts in order to get information to put in the barrels. They will be registered with the state of California, to be unsealed in the year 2025.

Sue and I went to Washington state, where we went through a training course at Camp Murray, running these machines. Since I have a lot of experience with tracked equipment, it was pretty easy to pick up on it. They will be kept under very strict control, for obvious reasons, especially after the incident in San Diego.

I think they will be quite an addition to the Museum. I am getting calls from all over the country, people and military historians who want to come see them. They are quite a prize, because we are the only organization in the country, outside of the military, that has operational tanks. Even though the guns are disabled, they are still fully operational, as far as everything else goes; most of the sighting equipment has been left with them. I think they're another thing we can use for public relations, to help keep us on the map. I'm getting a lot of response from the news media regarding these tanks.

Some of the organizations I had to do business with were: The Center for Military History, in Washington, D. C.; the Pentagon; Camp Murray, Washington; Fort Lewis, Washington; and the U. S. Army Tank Automotive Command in Warren, Michigan. The influence of a couple of Senators was also instrumental in getting these things donated. At one time, the process hit a snag because there was a person in the Pentagon that was a little leery about letting operational tanks go. It took a few months to overcome that with a lot of letters and phone calls.

They are getting tremendous response. I want

to represent the Museum in the Railroad Days parade by entering one of these vehicles in the parade, and then have the color guard ride the tank.

So, on your next visit to Portola, look me up for a guided tour of the inside of a real battle tank, since I'm the only one with the keys to them, and I'd be more than happy to show you. Once you see these things up close, you'll realize why the military relies so heavily on the railroads to move them around, which is where the idea came from in the first place.



All decked out for Memorial Day 1995 with American Flags flying, our two M60A3 tanks are shown on the flat car on which they were shipped, posing for the camera shortly after their arrival. The top photo shows the tank's front view, the bottom photo shows the gun facing to the rear in the stowed position. Both photos by Ed Warren.