

Modified Tanks Improve Safety, Precision

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An M1-A2 Abrams tank is in a warehouse being upgraded for Soldiers in the 1st Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division - Baghdad, at Camp Taji, Feb. 16. Civilian contractors with General Dynamics are currently modifying these tanks with the Tank Urban Survivability Kit, which increases the level of safety and precision making these tanks more effective in the Silver Lions' current area of operations. Photo by Pfc. April Campbell.

CAMP TAJI — Technicians are modifying M1-A2 Abrams tanks to make them more effective in the dense, urban Baghdad environment.

For Multi-National Division – Baghdad tankers in the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division these equipment modifications are taking place in the form of the Tank Urban Survival Kit being added to their M1-A2 Abrams tanks.

In each of the Striker Brigade's two previous deployments it operated in more rural areas of Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces.

These TUSK additions include an increase to the Soldiers' safety and the tanks' effectiveness in operations in this area north of Baghdad. They are currently being installed in Abrams tanks throughout MND-B by General Dynamics, a government contractor responsible for fielding, issuing and maintaining of these systems.

The modifications include a new driver's safety seat, improved tank armor and vision enhancements, as well as an attached sniper rifle, said Shawn Safford, a Gatesville, Texas, native, who works as the senior tank systems technician in MND-B for General Dynamics.

Sgt. 1st Class Sean Rinder, a Colorado Springs, Colo., native, who serves as the platoon sergeant for 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd BCT, operated these tanks during the unit's previous deployment in the Diyala province.

"Last time I was here, I had to reload the (.50-cal. machine gun) while I was in contact," he said. "I had to expose myself from the waist up to do that."

With the new commander's cupola armor, Rinder said, he would not be as exposed if he were in the same situation.

While he said he has always been confident in his equipment and crew, the modifications will add to that security blanket.

The increased level of security is echoed outside the tank as well. Tankers are able to more precisely target an enemy with a decreased risk to the surroundings because of the gunner's sniper rifle, being added to the tank.

"We're still lethal at long ranges without destroying everything. It mitigates the collateral damage," said 2nd Lt. Frank Simmons, a Colorado Springs, Colo., native, who serves as the platoon leader for the 2nd Plt., Co. C, 1-68 AR.

The new visual aids will also help the Soldiers target enemies with more precision. These devices will assist the tankers in positively identifying enemies, said Sgt. Albert Arca, a San Diego native, who serves as a tank gunner with the 2nd Plt., Co. C, 1-68 AR.

For tankers, such as Arca, the improved safety features will provide a greater piece of mind when conducting missions in sector.

"I'll be able to focus more on the mission," Arca said. "(The new equipment) can save someone's life."