

# Scott Ritter: Abrams Tanks Will Become 'Mobile Steel Coffins' for Ukrainian Crews

23 hours ago



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**The United States has reportedly begun delivering M1A1 Abrams main battle tanks to Ukraine. These tanks are part of a 31-tank package approved by the Biden administration earlier this year which has seen a significant delay in delivery.**

The delay in delivering these tanks is attributed to the need to train Ukrainian crews on how to operate and maintain the 68-ton vehicles, each of which is crewed by a four-person team.

Around 500 Ukrainian soldiers have undergone an intensive ten-week course on the operation and maintenance of the M1A1 at the US Army's Grafenwöhr training facility in West Germany. This course is derived from the "Black" phase of the M1A1 operator course conducted at Fort Benning, Georgia, that is designed to train soldiers for the 19K military occupational specialty (MOS), Armored Crewman.

The 19K training includes significant motor pool time, where the trainees are instructed on how to conduct what is known as ten-level (organizational) maintenance, namely the kind of work performed by an operating unit on a day-to-day basis in support of its own operations. This includes lubricating, cleaning, preserving, tightening, replacing, and performing authorized adjustments. The Ukrainians, however, will not be instructed on intermediate-level maintenance, including diagnosis and fault isolation. **Such maintenance will be done at a depot facility** outside of Ukraine (most likely in Poland).

Once the Ukrainian trainees know the basics of how to perform day-to-day maintenance of the M1A1 tank, they are taught about what is expected of them as tank drivers and what steps and actions they must take to prepare the M1A1 for operation. As part of this training, the soldiers will spend many hours in the Tank Driver Simulator (TDS), a full-scale mockup of the M1A1 driver's station that gives the trainee a "feel" for how the tank handles before they actually drive one.

After time in the TDS, the trainee advances to the Basic Drivers Course, where he learns how to drive an actual tank in road conditions. Once the trainee is qualified to drive the M1A1 tank, he receives training on how to operate the breech and load the 120mm ammunition used by the M1A1. They also learn how to operate the radios and communications system of the M1A1. At the end of the "Black" phase, the trainee will take what is known as the Armor Crewman Test, which covers the tasks involved with preparing the driver's and loader's stations. The trainee is also tested on basic maintenance and safety drills.



**Military**

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28 September, 17:46 GMT

Select Ukrainian trainees will be given additional training so that they can operate as tank gunners and tank commanders.

Ukraine's M1A1's are ex-US Marine Corps Firepower Enhancement Package (FEP) models. The FEP system includes a second-generation thermal sight, the Far Target Locate (FTL) capability, and an eye-safe laser rangefinder. The FTL provides tank crews with accurate target location to 8,000 meters. The FEP/FTL capabilities, however, represent another layer of complexity for the Ukrainians, who will already find themselves overwhelmed by the challenges associated with maintaining the Honeywell AGT1500 gas turbine engine which enables the M1A1 to reach speeds of up to 45 miles per hour. The US is providing Ukraine with a significant package of spare parts that will be needed to keep the M1A1 serviceable and combat-worthy.

The M1A1 used by the US Marines made use what is called "heavy armor" or "special armor," developed under a top-secret program known by the code name "Green Grape." The "special armor" consists of steel "pockets" located on the front of the turret and hull of the tank, which are in turn filled with depleted uranium. This armor, however, remains highly classified. Before the tanks can be shipped to Ukraine, the depleted uranium must be removed from these pockets and replaced with tungsten, which possesses the same density level (19 grams) as depleted uranium (steel, by comparison, has a density level of eight grams.) Whether the tungsten armor represents a downgrade to the depleted uranium armor is unknown.



**Russia's Special Operation in Ukraine**



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27 September, 19:14 GMT

The Ukrainian soldiers trained by the US Army will possess only the most basic skill levels associated with the M1A1 Abrams. They will lack any tactical or operational skill when it comes to the employment of the tank in combat. **Their gunnery skill will be rudimentary** (they will more than likely miss their target on the first try, a kiss of death in modern combat), and they will lack the experience and skill necessary to troubleshoot the range of complex malfunctions that occur in the tank turret, electrical, hydraulic, armament, and fire control systems that come with the kind of intensive operations experienced in combat, but not during basic training.

The M1A1, when crewed by an experienced team of soldiers, is a lethal weapon. When crewed by Ukrainians possessing only basic skills—especially when going up against veteran Russian soldiers equipped with modern tank-killing weapons—the M1A1 is little more than a death trap, a mobile steel coffin for the four men inside. This was the case with the German Leopard 2A6, with the Swedish Strv 122, and the British Challenger 2. And it will be the case with the American M1A1.