No contest: The trials and tribulations of the US Army’s OMFV competition

In attempting to develop a successor to its Bradley Fighting Vehicle the US Army has already had a couple of false starts with the cancelled Future Combat Systems and Ground Combat Vehicle programmes. As Ashley Roque reports, however, the service’s latest such effort is also running into problems.

In late August Raytheon and Rheinmetall made a temporary decision: the team would not submit its Lynx infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) as a candidate to replace the US Army’s M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, due in part to an aggressive schedule.

The decision meant that the service’s pool of potential Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle (OMFV) bidders had dwindled from six to one. Under pressure to show a level of competition for the multi-billion-dollar effort, roughly two weeks later the service convinced the Raytheon-Rheinmetall team to move forward and submit what it could.
Just weeks later, at the start of October, when Raytheon Rheinmetall Land Systems submitted its written OMFV bid but not its bid sample, the service moved swiftly to cut the Lynx from the prototyping competition, leaving General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS) as the sole candidate.

“We have been exceptionally consistent and open with [the] industry, for better than a year and a half, [with] what it is that we need, when bid samples are due, and we had a competitor who did not make that,” Army Futures Command (AFC) head General Mike Murray told reporters on 14 October. “So it really put the army in a hard place because we can either delay and then face the possibility of a protest or we can just stick with what we’ve been saying for a year and a half.”

This decision, however, is just one example of the growing divide between the acquisition community, which is looking to insert competition into modernisation programmes, and the AFC’s bid to go fast, potentially at the peril of competition.

**Moving out**

Nearly two years ago the US Army announced plans to accelerate its timeline for acquiring and fielding a replacement for the Bradley: an ageing vehicle it said could not keep pace with the burgeoning technologies entering the battlespace. Under an aggressive plan the service was aiming to begin fielding an OMFV fleet in 2025.

To get there the army released a draft request for proposals (RFP) in January this year and sought industry feedback on the pending requirements. A spokeswoman for the army’s Program Executive Office for Ground Combat Systems reiterated that at the time the service took industry’s requirement concerns seriously.

“On multiple occasions prior to the release of the OMFV RFP in March 2019 the Next Generation Combat Vehicle (NGCV) Cross Functional Team (CFT) leadership and requirements developers met with members of industry,” she wrote in a 29 October email to *Jane’s*. “The CFT took industry’s feedback from those engagement sessions seriously and used the information to inform the OMFV RFP.”

Just before the final RFP came out in late March the director of the NGCV modernisation effort, Brigadier General Ross Coffman, briefed reporters on a few of the difficult requirement decisions the army had made to ensure that its OMFV goals were not too lofty when it came to balancing lethality, survivability, and mobility.

“In each of those areas the collective industry said, ‘We can do anything you ask in this draft RFP individually, but when you put it together we’re not going to be able to meet the transportability of this system,’” Brig Gen Coffman explained in March at the AUSA Global Force Symposium & Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

Since the service envisages transporting two OMFVs in a C-17 airlifter, it had to revisit its armour requirements and ended up requesting armour add-on kits, also called ‘coupons’.
“If you pushed the survivability standard so high, then you need incredible armoured protection; you need incredible height of the vehicle,” Brig Gen Coffman added. “So we’ve had to really sharpen the point on those three areas [lethality, survivability, and mobility] to ensure that it meets the weight so that we can move these vehicles to wherever in the world we need them with the appropriate assets.”

When it comes to lethality the service also provided industry with the flexibility to determine what size cannon to fit on its OMFV and ended up setting a 30 mm weapon as a threshold requirement with a 50 mm cannon as an objective requirement.

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