

General: Replacements for Marines' Cold War-Era Assault Amphibious Vehicles Are on Track and on Budget



U.S. Marines with Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, disembark from an Amphibious Combat Vehicle during an integrated training exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, April 7, 2021.

U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Jamin M. Powell

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps' new Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) is on track, both for performance and cost, with the first two platoons of replacements for the aging Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) prioritized for duty with forward-deployed Marine Expeditionary Units, a top general told a congressional panel.

In its fiscal 2022 budget request, the Marine Corps is seeking to procure the second full-rate production lot of 92 ACVs, 20 more than in fiscal 2021. The ACV is an advanced eight-wheeled armored ship-to-shore connector craft, providing improved lethality against dismounted enemy troops and increased force protection and survivability from blasts, fragmentation and kinetic energy threats, according to budget documents.

"We're on track for the production numbers that we anticipated seeing," Lt. Gen. Eric M. Smith, head of Marine Corps Combat Development Command told the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces June 7. "We've produced the first two platoons of those vehicles," said Smith, who is also deputy commandant of the Corps for Combat Development and Integration, adding that each platoon can carry a company of Marines. The first two of those platoons are at the Marines' desert training base at Twenty-Nine Palms, Calif, Smith said,

adding, "Their readiness is good."

Changing from the tracked AAVs to wheeled vehicles "required a little bit of adjustment for our drivers," Smith said, but they made the change and met their objectives for the initial operating testing capabilities. "So, we did declare initial operating capability."

Calling last year's Amphibious Assault Vehicle mishap that drowned eight Marines and a Sailor "100% preventable and 100% inexcusable," Smith said the remaining AAVs won't go in the water for training without water-tight seal inspections and accompanying safety boats.

A Marine Corps investigation into the sinking of an AAV off the coast of California on July 30, 2020, concluded in "a confluence of human and mechanical failure caused the sinking of the mishap AAV and contributed to a delayed rescue effort ..."

"There's a pretty robust checklist for everything from training to the actual seals on the vehicles to make sure that those vehicles that do enter the water – with safety boats for training – are completely viable and safe," Smith told the House panel.

He added that the ACV "has a completely different hull form that has fewer penetration points so that water cannot get in and accumulate," as it did in the July 2020 AAV mishap.