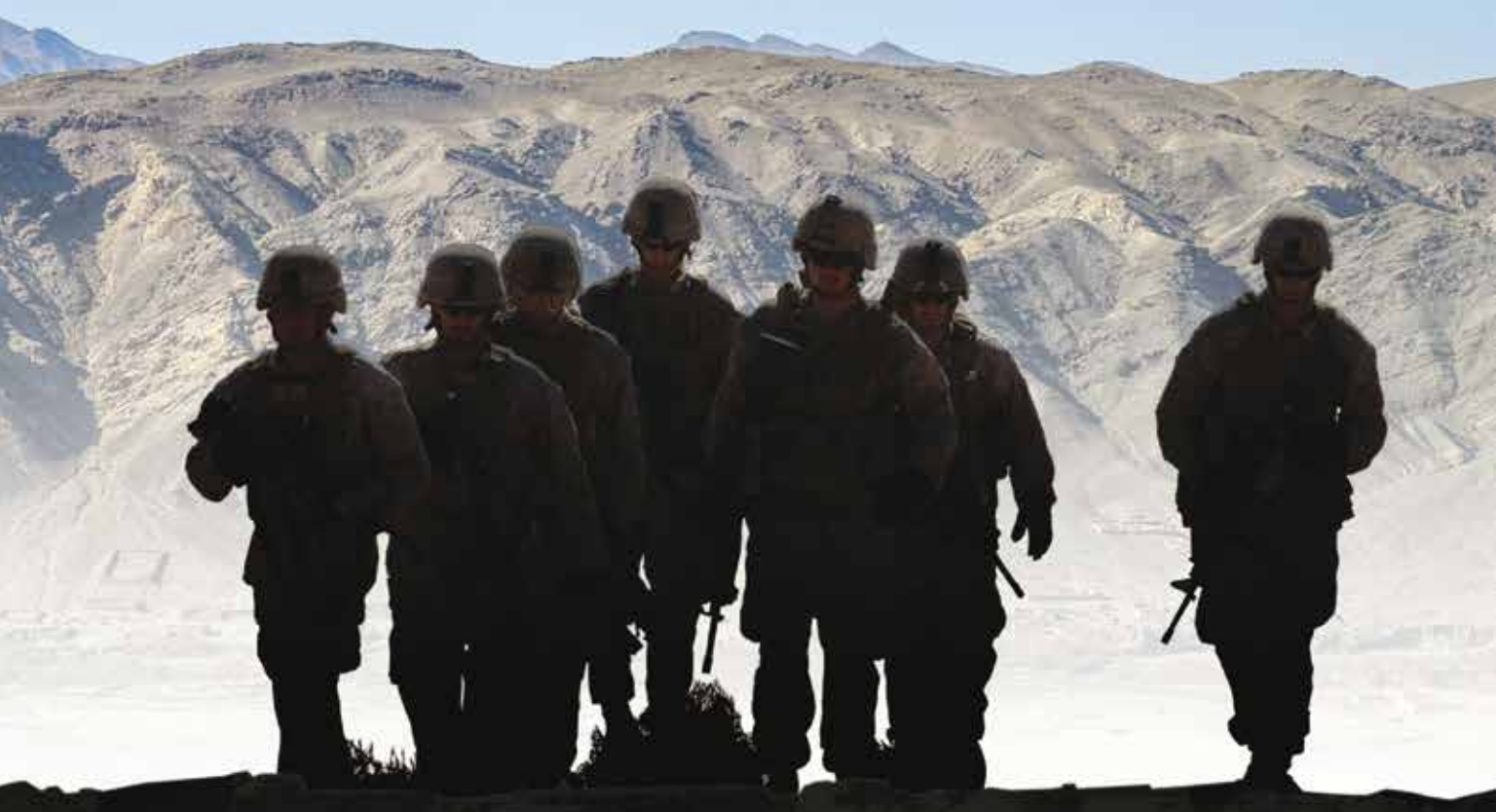

Best Value Strategy

Raising Special Ops Mobility

Nathan Meidl

Three years ago, the Special Operations Forces (SOF) identified a shortfall in ground mobility that denied access to austere terrain. In response, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) pursued the acquisition of a unique vehicle to address this capability gap. The culling and clarification of requirements, combined with a unique source selection approach, allowed USSOCOM to compress acquisition cycle time and expedite the acquisition of Ground Mobility Vehicle 1.1.

Upon identification of the capability gap, USSOCOM convened a requirements working group which rapidly crafted the Capabilities Production Document (CPD) for a SOF-unique Ground Mobility Vehicle (GMV) 1.1 tactical ground vehicle. The Key Performance Parameters (KPPs) included internal air transport in a CH-47 rotorcraft, tractive effort to climb a 60 percent grade, rollover protection for the crew, net ready, and operational availability of 95 percent. Modular in design, this vehicle has the operational flexibility to support a wide range of lethal and non-lethal Special Operations missions and core activities. USSOCOM approved the CPD and established a procurement ceiling of 1,297 trucks to replace the existing HMMWVs (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles) used by SOF, and

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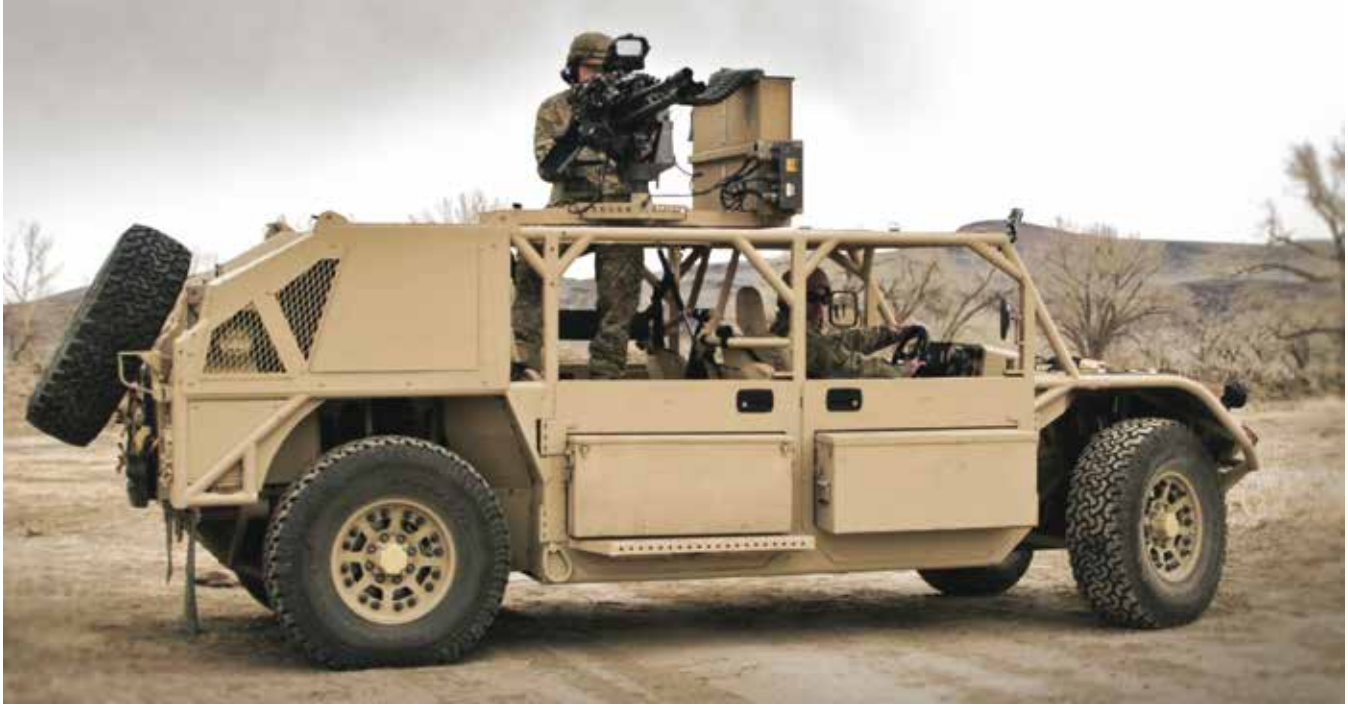
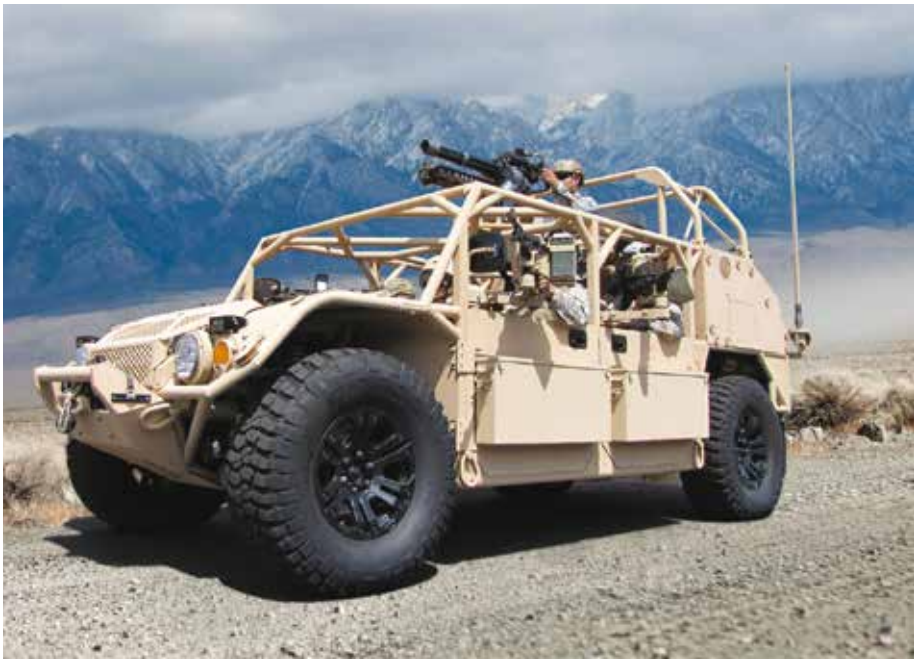


Above: A GMV1.1 conducts a Special Operations Forces user jury test for mobility.



Right: A GMV1.1 conducting Weapon integration and live fire testing.
USSOCOM Photos

to allow infiltration and exfiltration from previously denied austere terrain.

Once the requirement for the GMV1.1 was approved, the Special Operations Research, Development, and Acquisition Center (SORDAC) tasked its program executive officer for SOF Warrior to assign acquisition management responsibility to the program manager for the Family of Special Operations Vehicles (PM-FOSOV). PM-FOSOV immediately set out to assess industry's ability to meet an aggressive acquisition schedule by releasing a Federal Business Opportunties (FEDBIZOPPS) sources sought and questionnaire. In addition, the PM-FOSOV team conducted two industry conferences to convey the requirement to U.S. and international vehicle manufacturers and ascertain the technology readiness of existing solutions. The net result led SORDAC to conclude that nearly 10 vendors had material solutions to achieve the GMV1.1 requirement. Without the need to develop and mature the underlying technologies, SORDAC pursued a best-value acquisition strategy to make the necessary tradeoffs between technical capability, cost, and past performance to choose the best platform for SOF operators.

Armed with the users' daunting requirement for a highly mobile vehicle capable of carrying a crushing payload, USSOCOM used the published sources sought and industry-day events to convey the urgency of the requirement and articulate what best value meant for SOF. The technical priorities, coupled with a short acquisition schedule, demonstrated the need for a nondevelopmental item (NDI) instead of a build-to-specification vehicle. With that point hammered home, PM-FOSOV conveyed the importance of mature producibility of the vehicle. The timeline and need to deliver a mature NDI, build-sample-test product forced some potential vendors to make the tough decision to back away from the GMV1.1 competition, because their solutions were not anywhere near the required technology readiness level (TRL), and they had no existing production line. Put simply, their trucks were still in development.

The debate about which final evaluation was truly the best value for USSOCOM allowed the SSEB chairman and evaluation factor leads to convey their differing opinions and priorities in making an argument for Vendor A as opposed to Vendor B.

Given tight time constraints, USSOCOM took an aggressive and innovative approach to build a diverse team of the most experienced program management, engineering, logistics, legal, contracts and operator professionals from component commands to streamline the initial bid-sample source selection. The team took nearly 600 performance specifications from the capability sponsor and reduced them to the top 30 critical requirements to drive source-selection planning. This allowed the team to shift the focus to those specifications related to the KPPs and to evaluate more mature vendor solutions. The intent was to acquire a "best value" solution for the SOF operator while meeting an aggressive procurement schedule within the program's appropriated budget. For those performance attributes deemed unaffordable or technically immature at the program's initiation, the FOSOV team prioritized and built a funding profile to address these as future Pre-Planned Product Improvements (P3I) throughout the life cycle of the vehicle. This strategy resulted in a Better Buying Power (BBP) technique in the areas of control costs and achieve affordable programs, demonstrating SOF compliance with the Department of Defense (DoD) initiative.

In order to validate that KPP-focused source selection criteria and relative weighting of the evaluation factors would allow for a true best-value decision, the USSOCOM team deliberately wargamed the source-selection plan. The team started by using market research data from industry conferences and inserting the various capabilities and shortfalls into mock proposals. To better test the process, they ensured that proposals represented every combination of tech versus cost versus past performance. Once mock proposals were completed, the integrated product team brought the entire Source Selection Evaluation Board (SSEB) to USSOCOM in Tampa, Florida, and conducted in-depth training sponsored by contracting and legal personnel. The training familiarized the evalutators with all the required forms, parameters and limitations of the information that can be evaluated.

Armed with the source-selection plan, training and the evaluation forms, the board was provided with the mock vendor proposals and asked to perform the arduous task of rating and rolling up evaluations. What surprised evaluators in the source-selection wargame was the difficulty in discerning between a weakness versus a significant weakness, and compliance versus strength. The exercise forced the evaluators to return repeatedly to the definitions of weakness and significant weakness, making the process second nature before the team progressed to the actual source selection. This unique source selection training proved to be an invaluable schedule saver for the SSEB. Furthermore, the debate about which final evaluation was truly the best value for USSOCOM allowed the SSEB chairman and evaluation factor leads to convey their differing opinions and priorities in making an argument for Vendor A as opposed to Vendor B. This exercise was critical both in giving the team confidence that the request for proposal (RFP) was structured properly to allow sufficient evaluation of proposals to determine a best-value decision and, what was equally important, ensured all evaluators shared a common definition of best value. As always, the more realistic the training, the greater the value to the mission.

The wargame tested the Source Selection Evaluation Plan and drove the strategy to require a bid sample truck from each vendor. This provided industry with an opportunity to demonstrate its vehicle's technical maturity and ability to meet stated KPPs. Bid sample testing entailed focused evaluation of dimensions for internal air transport, horsepower/tractive effort, and human factors involving space for personal gear and payload. The RFP was released for full and open competition on FEDBIZOPPS. Based on a Best Value decision, USSOCOM awarded a seven-year indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract to General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems).

The magnitude of the $562 million GMV1.1 contract, combined with the current shrinking DoD budget for tactical wheeled mobility, made for fierce competition. As is often the case, several unsuccessful offerors challenged the government's decision. The wargame exercise proved extremely beneficial as it sharpened the source-selection team and kept it focused on following a well-defined source selection plan. In every case, the government's award decision was upheld. Much of the credit goes to the rigorous wargaming process the source-selection team followed.

In the case of GMV1.1, the keys to success were clearly understanding the marketplace, managing and stratifying requirements in affordable increments, building a solid source-selection team, wargaming the source-selection plan and involving users early in the process. The team achieved BBP principles by building an affordable vehicle on an aggressive schedule with as much of the performance as was affordable within its requirements. The BBP principles were a natural extension of the team's efforts to get maximum return for our taxpayer dollars.

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