

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS - 10 MARCH 1987 (Tom Brokaw)

The T-72 is the most sophisticated battle tank in wide use by the Soviet Army, and for years American intelligence officials have been itching to get ahold of one to examine it. Well, they soon will be getting several. According to NBC's Art Kent, a number of captured T-72s are now on a ship headed for the U. S., and sources tell Kent that these tanks were acquired as part of the U. S. arms deal with Iran.

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American officials and U. S. experts on Iran are quoted this morning as saying relations between the two countries have hardened as a result of the Iran Contra affair, and there is little likelihood of improvement in relations. But as National Security correspondent Art Kent reports ~~that~~ ^{the} U. S./Iran relationship has already produced one dividend. The T-72 is the most advanced battle tank widely used by the Soviet Army. For years U. S. military experts have wanted to get their hands on one. According to intelligence sources, the U. S. has now acquired several, acquired with the help of Iran. The sources confirm that sometime the last two weeks of January Iran made the T-72s available, in an effort to keep alive the flow of U. S. arms that was cancelled by President Reagan when the Iran arms deal became public. Shipped through a West European country, the tanks are now enroute to the United States. The U. S. has tried to get a T72 before. Israeli Forces captured several in Lebanon in 1982 but they were too badly damaged to yield much knowledge about Soviet technology. (Stock film of the Erria) This ship, the Erria, was bought by Lt. Col. Oliver North and his associates, Albert Hakim and Richard Secord, to use in secret operations, one of those was the taking of a load weapons and ammunition to Iran in late 1986 to trade for T72 tanks. The Erria waited outside the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas for a month before the deal fell through. According to the Senate Intelligence ^{Committee} Draft Report, the Iranians first offered ~~the~~ T72 at a meeting in West Germany last October 26th. An intelligence source says that the offer was finalized in London at a meeting in December between an Iranian and a CIA officer. Final delivery is now underway. Art Kent, NBC News, Washington