

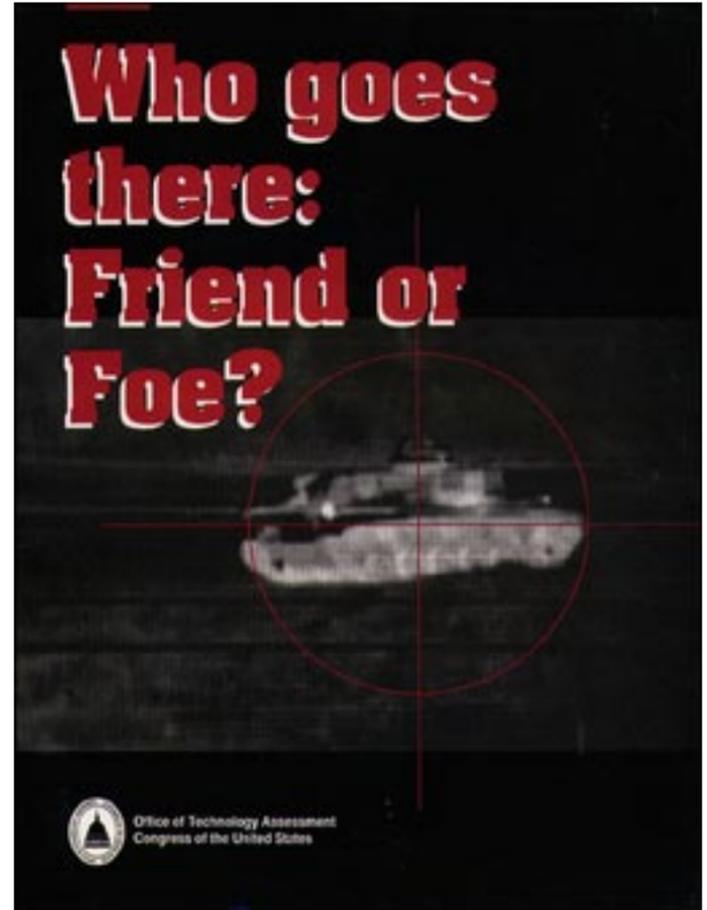
Who Goes There: Friend or Foe?

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Foreword

The recent Persian Gulf War focused attention on the problem of fratricide, or “friendly fire” casualties among combat units. Twenty-four percent of U.S. combat fatalities in that conflict were due to friendly fire. The House Armed Services Committee requested that OTA assess the technology and techniques available to reduce this tragic loss of life. Although friendly fire has often been dismissed in the military literature as an insignificant contributor to overall combat losses, in those few historical cases for which good data are available, estimated friendly fire losses have accounted for at least 10 percent of total losses. Friendly fire has been an important-and under-appreciated-source of combat deaths.

Combat is confusing, complex, and deadly. Friendly fire casualties can probably never be eliminated, but several measures can reduce them. Application of new and existing technology can make identification of friendly forces on the battlefield more reliable; improved communication can reduce confusion on the battlefield; and better training can help military personnel make crucial, rapid decisions under the extreme stress of combat.

Congress faces several decisions related to reducing friendly fire. These include:

- the choice of best technical approaches to pursue;
- the allocation of resources between systems that are devoted exclusively to reducing friendly fire and other systems—for example, better navigation and communication devices--that may reduce friendly fire in indirect and less visible ways;
- the best mix of near-term deployments and longer term research and development; and
- the need for cooperation and coordination among the military Services and with allies.

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Roger C. Herdman, Director

Project Staff

IVAN OELRICH
Project Director

Alan Shaw
International Security and
Commerce Program Manager

Peter Blair
Assistant Director, OTA
Energy, Materials, and International
Security

Lionel S. Johns
Assistant Director, OTA
(through May 5, 1993)
Energy, Materials, and International
Security

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Jacqueline Robinson Boykin
Office Administrator

Louise Staley
Administrative Secretary

Madeline Gross
Contractor

CONTRACTORS

Elizabeth Sheley
Editor

Richard R. Muller
Air University
Air Command and
Staff College

John C. Lonquest
Department of History
Duke University