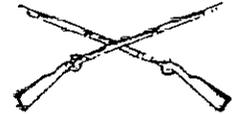




# Commandant's NOTE



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## AAWS-M

In the September-October 1986 issue of *INFANTRY*, I outlined the Infantry School's plan for antiarmor systems. The light antiarmor weapons and the medium and heavy antitank weapons of the future are critically important to the effectiveness of the combined arms team. In this issue, I would like to focus attention on one of these systems, the Advanced Anti-tank Weapons System—Medium (AAWS-M).

AAWS-M is the system that will replace the Dragon in all Infantry units. It will provide our forces, both heavy and light, the essential capability to kill tanks with a highly lethal man-portable system. In doing so, it will fill the void between our light armor and bunker-busting weapons, which are not true tank killers, and our heavy vehicular system, TOW, and its follow-on systems.

The AAWS-M will significantly improve the dismounted Infantry's tank killing ability. It will kill the newest threat tanks at nearly twice the Dragon's range, day or night. Nevertheless, the total system will weigh roughly 45 pounds, which is lighter than the complete Dragon. AAWS-M also will be able to be fired from within bunkers and other enclosures, enhancing the gunner's survivability on an increasingly lethal battlefield.

In Europe, we face the potential of the largest armored battle the world has ever seen. The thousands of Warsaw Pact tanks include hundreds that employ the latest technological advances in armor, designed to defeat the most lethal antitank systems of today. This armor will be continually improved on newer tank models, and older models will be retrofitted where possible to increase their protection levels. AAWS-M gives the Infantry the mid-range lethality it needs to overcome

these advances in armor.

The need for such a capability elsewhere is also clear. Considering the various environments in which our different Infantry units must operate, the first realization is that significant armor threats exist worldwide. Today, more than 100 countries have tanks and armored vehicles. Although many of these are older vehicles, all can be significantly upgraded, both in terms of better armament and through the use of various types of add-on armors that are readily available. Thus, we face a range of scenarios—from low intensity conflicts to conventional war—where tanks and armored vehicles will certainly play major roles.

To counter these threats, we need effective tank killers. Our tanks and TOWs will do the majority of the killing when they are available. However, AAWS-M is a critical part of the anti-tank equation, both as a complement to our heavy systems and in situations where only man-portable systems can be employed.

It is important as a self-defense weapon against tanks, a contributor to the overall enemy tank kills on the antiarmor battlefield. Of most importance, however, is its role as a facilitator of enemy tank destruction. The AAWS-M's capability to stalk to close range puts enemy tanks at such risk that they must move, thereby destroying the integrity of their tactical formation and entrenchments and making them easy prey to friendly tank, TOW, aviation, and artillery kills. In the final analysis, AAWS-Ms may kill only a few systems, but without their contribution, few of the many other kills would occur. This is the nature of combined arms action, and, fortunately, the NTC experience is bringing this action to fruition better every day.

All Infantry (mechanized, motorized, airborne, air assault, light, etc.) must be capable of performing basic tasks. These include fixing the enemy, suppressing him, clearing obstacles, breaching fortified positions, assaulting to seize terrain and destroy enemy forces, fighting in restricted terrain and built-up areas, and conducting close overwatch. In heavy battalions (Bradley and M113), long-range fixing and suppressing are generally the responsibility of the fighting vehicles. The dismounted squad will have primary responsibility for clearing, breaching, assaulting, and conducting close overwatch, especially in restricted or urban terrain. The AAWS-M is the tank killer for this dismounted element. It gives these soldiers both the antitank protection and the offensive punch they need to eliminate enemy opposition on key terrain. Although the contributions of AAWS-M may be smaller than the numerous kills expected from the heavy systems, it is no less decisive when applied at the critical point and time.

In defensive situations, the availability of a manportable system will thicken antitank defenses, providing the increased number of dug-in, protected weapons necessary to defeat vastly superior numbers of threat tanks. Again, our heavy systems should take the heaviest toll on the enemy. Dismounted elements equipped with the AAWS-M will have responsibility for flank protection, covering more restricted avenues of approach, and engaging enemy tanks that have penetrated our main engagement areas. Within our primary engagement areas, the AAWS-M can be employed to cover the multiple mid-range avenues of approach where heavy vehicular systems either cannot be employed or cannot take advantage of their long-range fires. The mix of heavy and medium systems is the important ingredient. In wargame simulations and in training exercises at the National Training Center (NTC), a mix of medium and heavy systems generally proves even more effective than an increase in the number of available TOW systems.

For light infantry, the AAWS-M contribution is of even greater importance. More than half of our Infantry divisions will be light by 1990. Our light divisions have a special role

being extremely transportable for rapid deployment and operational flexibility. Once deployed, the light infantry must

be able to perform all Infantry missions. Because of the emphasis on strategic deployability, a light battalion has only four HMMWV-mounted TOWs. AAWS-M will be the light infantry commander's primary antitank capability. Light infantry will optimize its capability by fighting in MOUT or restricted terrain where its mobility and firepower, in most cases, is better than that of heavier units. While this terrain also restricts the enemy's use of tanks, those present will pose an even greater threat to mission completion. The manportability of AAWS-M will give the light infantry unrestricted use of the best terrain available for employment of its antitank systems. This tactical versatility will be essential in allowing light units to overcome their firepower disadvantage when facing enemy armor.

A final note pertains to the critical role of the medium systems in contingency operations. Our special purpose forces require a tank killer that is suitable for parachute operations so that these units will have an immediate antiarmor capability in the early stages of forced entry and similar missions. As we learned in Grenada, even a few relatively obsolete armored vehicles in such situations present a significant threat to mission accomplishment.

All antiarmor systems (light, medium, and heavy) function in crucial roles for the Infantry. I have highlighted the importance of AAWS-M in this article because I feel that a manportable, tank-killing system is an absolute necessity for us, and it represents our number one combat developments priority.

That's why our Armor, Artillery, and Aviation components have come on board and supported us on replacing the Dragon. And that's why we have finally won our case with the Department of the Army, the office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Congress. Money has been made available, and three firms are now bending metal to develop three AAWS-M prototypes using different techniques. We will select the best of these based on tests and put it into the hands of our soldiers as quickly as possible. This will ensure that not only the Infantry but the entire combined arms force maintains a robust antitank deterrent and warfighting capability that will take us into the next century.

