TOW Position
An Alternative

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For a TOW missile squad, an important part of dismounted operations is the construction of a fighting position that provides overhead cover and adequate space in which to operate, as well as storage space for the missiles.

The current TOW fighting position, as described in STP 7-11H24-SM, Task #071-316-2603, falls short of meeting these requirements. The prescribed position, as shown in Figure 1, is basically a 60" x 44" rectangular hole, 24" deep, with small extensions cut out of the rectangle to accommodate the legs of the TOW system. The spoil from the hole is used to build up the berms that surround the position and support the overhead cover. (A below-ground cutaway view of the back of the position is shown in Figure 2.)

In practice, this position has several serious shortcomings:

• **It is too tall.** Even if the diagram in the manual is correct (and with the night-sight tracker mounted, I'm not sure it is), with adequate overhead cover this position will stick up at least 38 inches above its surroundings. Even this would be a best-case situation, considering the need to construct a kneeling fighting position that a crew can function in and then adding 18 inches of overhead cover. A more realistic figure is 42 inches or even 48 inches above the ground.

• **It does not have room for a full TOW squad.** The position has room for two people, the gunner and the assistant gunner, but no room for the other two members of the TOW crew. This presents the squad leader with a problem: Does he take the gunner's place and control the weapon, take the assistant gunner's place and give fire commands, or dig a hole nearby and rely on shouting fire commands to the crew? He may elect to leave one soldier with the squad's carrier (M901, M220, M998), or he may have the extra crewman dig in to provide security for the position. Whatever his choice, these crewmen can play no active part in the operation of the system. In addition, he must consider where to put the squad's radio. The logical place is in the actual TOW position, but this adds another burden to the two men who are trying to function as an entire TOW crew.

• **It provides no protection for the missiles.** The diagram in the manual shows no room for missiles, nor does it specify where to put them or how to dig them in. The only reference to protecting the extra missiles is the statement, "Improve position by adding overhead cover

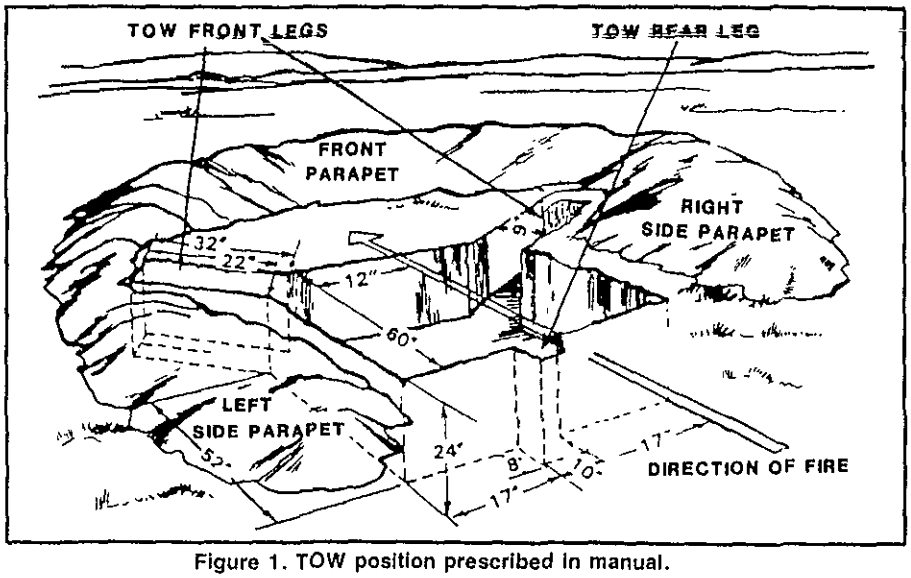

Figure 1. TOW position prescribed in manual.

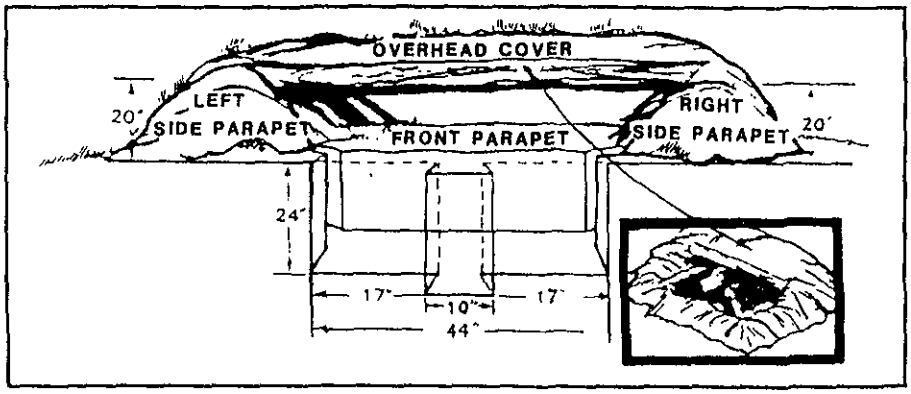

Figure 2. Below-the-ground cutaway view of back of position.

for crew and missiles." There is no mention of *where*, and the illustrations do not support it.

• **It is not deep enough.** A two-foot hole, even with overhead cover, is vulnerable to air bursts. Although this shallow depth is necessary to accommodate the minimum ground clearance for missile launch, it still reduces the amount of protection offered by the fighting position.

In short, the current position won't take the whole crew; it doesn't have room for missiles; even if dug to standard, it still leaves plenty of holes for air-burst shrapnel to get in; and if dug to standard, it is highly conspicuous. If further improved upward and sideways, it takes on the aspect of a parked Winnebago.

I would like to suggest an alternative position that looks something like the one in Figure 3. This position differs from the prescribed TOW fighting position in the following ways:

• **It is split level.** Soldiers stand, instead of kneeling, to operate the TOW system, which stands on a pedestal two feet high (Figure 4). This makes it easier for the soldiers to manipulate both the TOW system during tracking and firing and the machineguns in testing the system, and it also offers the crewmen the protection of a deeper hole.

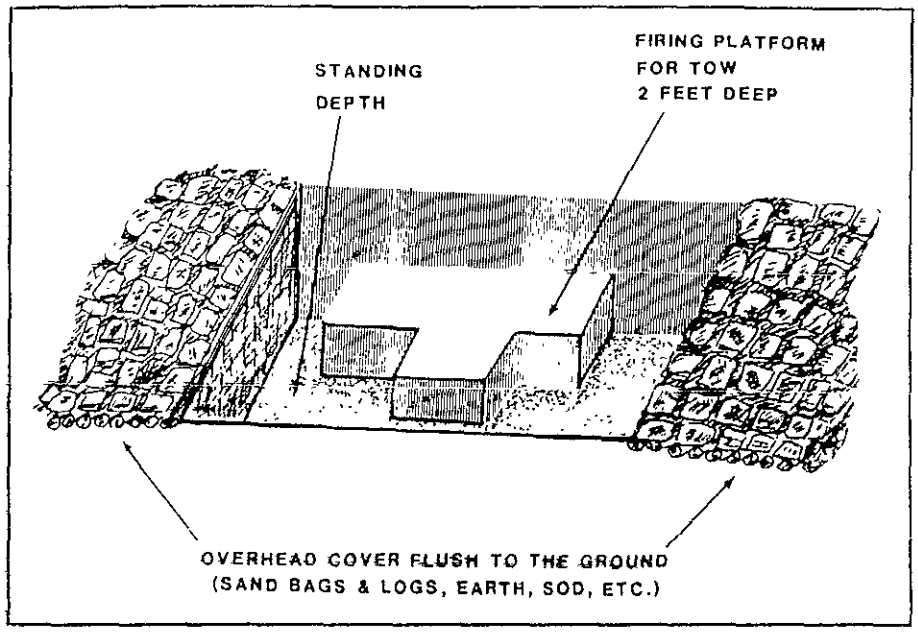

Figure 3. Alternative position.

• **It has positions for all the squad members (Figure 5).** This allows the squad leader to communicate and acquire targets without actually being involved in crew duties. It also allows the crew to prepare and fire missiles faster.

• **It allows for overhead cover without being conspicuous.** It is better to have usable overhead cover at hand (literally a step away), than to have overhead cover that sticks up like a phone booth. The proposed position is virtually indistinguishable from the surrounding terrain until the

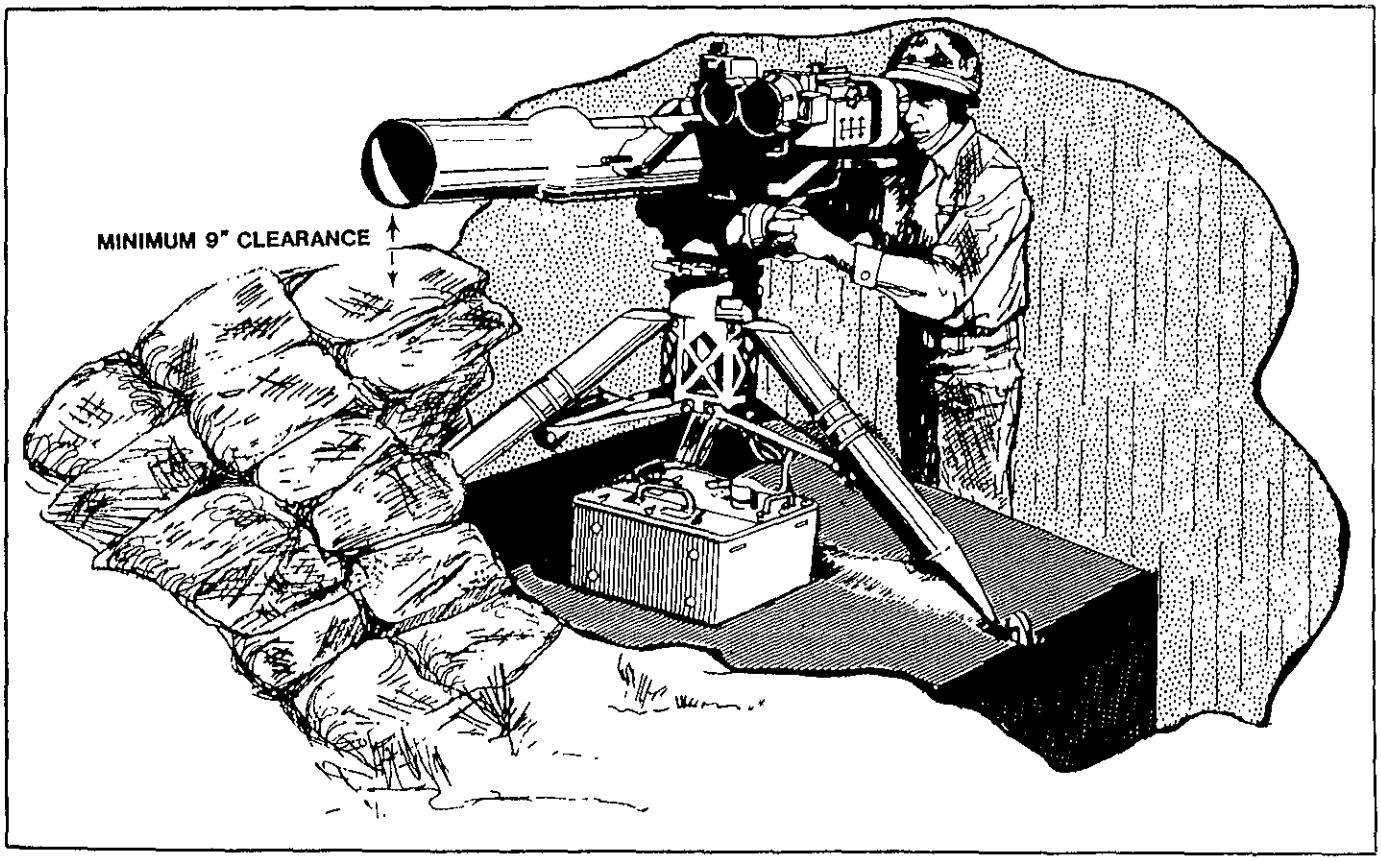

Figure 4. Two-foot high pedestal for TOW system.

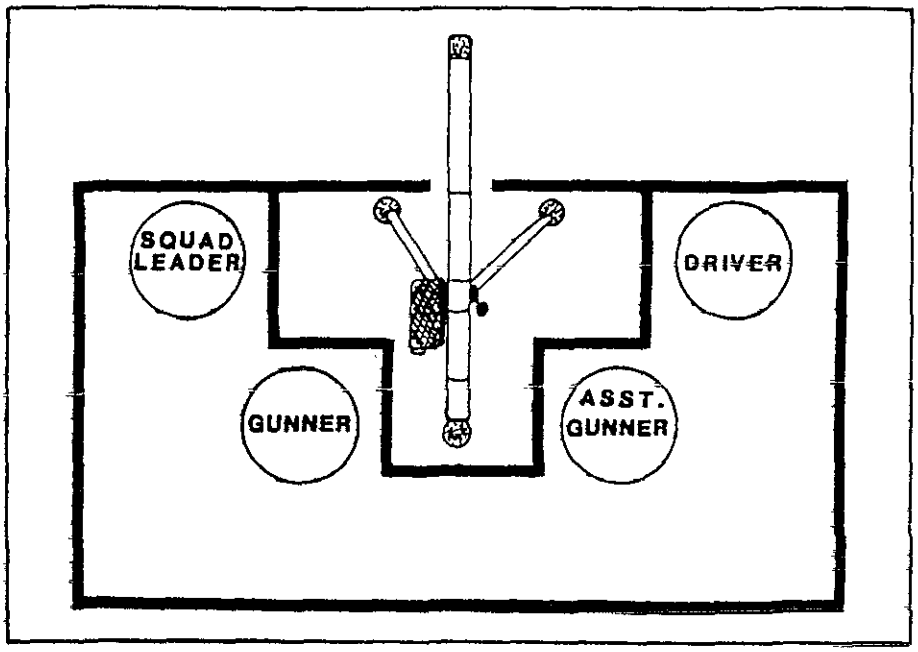

Figure 5. Positions for all the squad members.

crew erects the system to shoot. Even then its signature is only about 18 inches or so above the ground, and this can be easily camouflaged with bushes or blinds.

This position obviously requires more labor than the current TOW position but not prohibitively more. It can still be constructed by the squad members using the basic pioneer tools available with the squad carrier. Since construction may have to be halted at any moment in response to a threat, I suggest the following steps in construction: First the basic hole, then the second level, and finally the side overhead cover.

At times, it may be both possible and desirable to build actual overwatch cover for the system as shown in the manual. But the proposed position offers many more advantages than our current one, and should be considered on its obvious merits.

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Squad Combat Training

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During their frequent chance encounters with the enemy in the Vietnam War, many of our small units failed to react properly and suffered excessive casualties, even though the enemy forces were inferior in number and firepower. These units and their leaders seemed to lack a clear and concise idea of what actions they were supposed to take on chance contact. Too often, this also led a U.S. unit to do exactly what the enemy wanted it to do—divert manpower and firepower from its main objective for extended periods of time.

After 1973, we tended to forget many of the lessons we had learned the hard way in Vietnam. Proper small unit reaction to chance contacts was one such lesson.

In the 1980s, however, with the advent of the light infantry concept, the Infantry School formulated a new model for small unit actions—a combat drill that pulled together the steps a small unit should take when it suddenly found itself confronted with an enemy force.

Fundamental within the drill, which was first announced in Field Circular 7-22, Infantry Squad and Platoon Drills, is the insistence on locating and fixing the enemy force and conducting a flank attack after fire superiority has been gained.

Accordingly, the combat drill provides a framework that, in sequential order, reduces decisions to their most critical points. It also serves as a multi-level model for small unit leaders to follow during their combat training programs. Implicit in the drill is the assumption that small units will be engaged in combat as part of a larger force and as such will take part in a mission—a movement to contact, for example—to find the enemy in order to defeat him.

At one level, that of training, the drill clearly defines what needs to be trained and to what standards. Used as a medium of training, the combat drill improves individual and unit readiness in three ways: It reduces reaction time; it standardizes critical actions; and it ensures that both leaders and subordinates master the skills and tasks required to successfully meet the immediate requirements of a combat engagement.

On another level, that of operational technique, the combat drill clearly lays out the steps that, when practiced by small