

Commandant's Note

MAJOR GENERAL WALTER WOJDAKOWSKI

SMALL ARMS STRATEGY: TRAINING AND MODERNIZATION

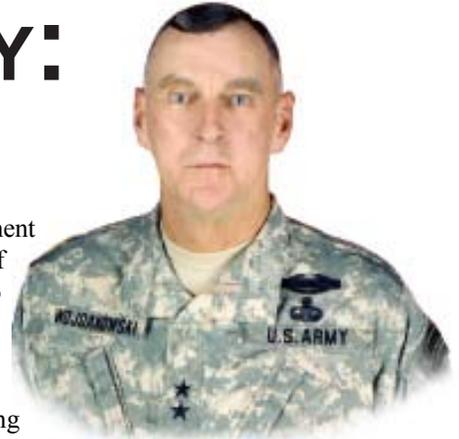
In January, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff approved a new small arms strategy which lays out our goals for the near, mid, and far term concerning weapon systems 40mm and below. The strategy emphasizes training, sustainment, and modernization.

The most important aspect of our new strategy is training. The Army recognizes that every Soldier is a rifleman, and it has increased the frequency of weapons qualification to twice per year and provided the ammunition necessary to support this change. To increase realism, TRADOC now requires all Soldiers to qualify wearing body armor, and it has switched from a foxhole-supported firing position to a kneeling firing position when qualifying. We at the Infantry Center will continue to update rifle marksmanship training doctrine, reflected in Field Manual (FM) 3-22.9. This FM was updated in 2003, and now includes detailed advanced rifle marksmanship information. Change 4 to the FM will be published this year with the new qualification standards as well as other advanced topics. We are also updating training aids to more accurately reflect the way Soldiers fight and we will specifically focus on updating the Engagement Skills Trainer (EST 2000).

You have told us that most of the weapons you are using perform well and do not need replacing. Therefore, the second part of the small arms strategy will focus on sustaining our current fleet to ensure its continued performance; the M249 SAW will be the top priority. Contributing to the sustainment effort, the Army Materiel Command has developed an aggressive refurbishment plan to enable units to rapidly refit their weapons on return from deployment. AMC will pick up M249s from units, overhaul and return them, or replacement weapons, within two weeks. This is in addition to small arms inspection and repair teams that are available to assist commanders in assessing and improving small arms readiness.

Soldiers continue to hold the M4 in high regard. Army units want more M4s and we are increasing our efforts to meet this desire. In fact, the Army recently made a decision to pure fleet deploying Brigade Combat Teams with M4s in "next to deploy" order. Additional M4s will be provided to theater as "theater provided equipment" for non-BCT units. Our current M4s will also receive some product improvements. These improvements include sights and accessories such as the 4x rifle combat optic (ACOG) and improved PEQ-2. Other systems will continue to be product improved as part of the sustainment strategy. This includes the development of a lightweight M240 and product improvement of the M2 .50 caliber machine gun to a fixed headspace and timing

variant. These sustainment efforts will be the focus of effort over the next two years, with product improved systems such as the improved .50 caliber beginning fielding during that time.



The Army will use emerging technology to modernize the force. Some of these efforts are currently underway. A new modular grenade launcher with an improved sight, a modular shotgun, and a semi-automatic 7.62mm sniper rifle are all in testing. These weapons could begin fielding in the next 12 to 18 months if testing is successful.

Our modernization efforts will emphasize key capabilities. We will focus on the light machine gun capability with product improvement of the M249 SAW and an improved personal defense weapon (PDW) capability.

This improved PDW capability includes focus in two areas – compact carbines and pistols. The compact carbine will be a weapon with longer range and greater lethality than a pistol. It will also be shorter and more maneuverable than either a rifle or a carbine. This weapon is intended specifically for vehicle drivers, aircrews, armored vehicle crews, engineers, construction teams, and other Soldiers whose primary duties require them to fight within smaller spaces, replacing the pistols or M16s these soldiers carry. The M4 serves in this capacity now for some Soldiers, though the ultimate goal is for a more portable weapon than even the M4. Pistols will remain in the force, and part of modernization will include improvement in capability for those Soldiers still carrying pistols. The Future Handgun System (FHS) is an ongoing Soldier Enhancement Program initiative that is intended to improve lethality, ergonomics, and reliability over the current M9 pistol.

For the future, we will develop lighter, more lethal and more supportable systems. These systems will employ emerging developments in airburst and counter-defilade munitions, non-lethal technology, and caseless ammunition. I am truly excited about the potential this emerging technology has to dramatically reduce the Soldier's load while making Soldiers more lethal. We will continue to keep the force informed of developments in this area.

The new small arms strategy will ensure that our Soldiers will remain the best trained, best supported, and most lethal force on the battlefield.

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