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Your Army

US Army names air defense system after soldier killed in Vietnam

By **Jen Judson**

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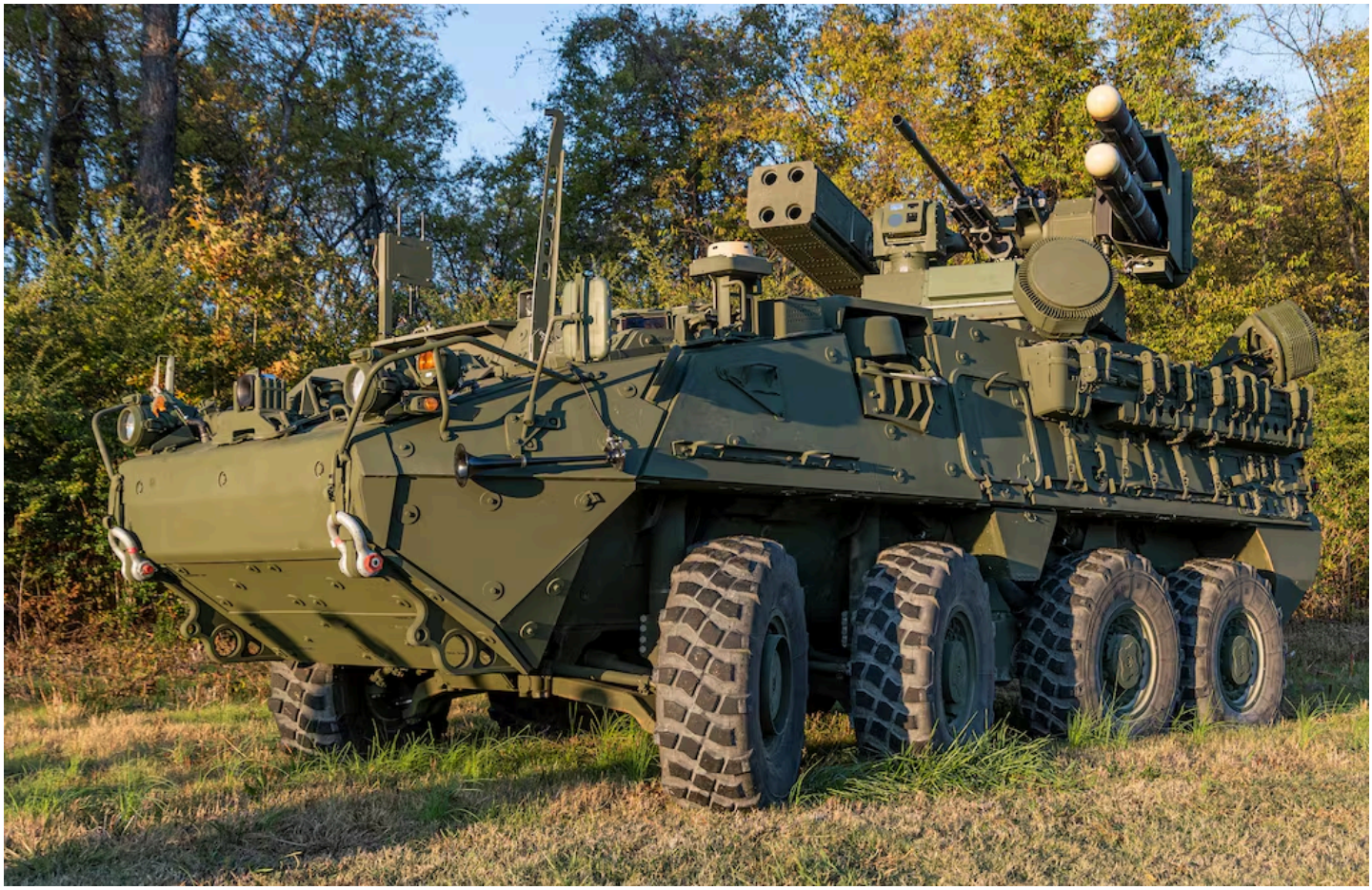

The U.S. Army's new Maneuver-Short Range Air Defense system is named after Sgt. Mitchell William Stout. (Courtesy of the U.S. Army)

In Vietnam, on March 12, 1970, U.S. Army Sgt. Mitchell William Stout grabbed an enemy grenade thrown into his bunker and used his body to shield the blast from his fellow soldiers. Now the service's new Maneuver-Short Range Air Defense system will take his name.

Stout's bunker position came under heavy enemy mortar fire and ground attack, the Army's acquisition chief told reporters during a recent press briefing.

"As the attack subsided, an enemy grenade was thrown into the bunker. Sgt. Stout ran to the grenade, picked it up, held it close to his body and started to get out of the bunker. Upon reaching the door, the grenade exploded," Doug Bush said.

Sgt. Stout is the only Army air defense artilleryman in history to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

"The heroism of this soldier demonstrates the Army's exact need for the Sgt. Stout vehicle," Bush added.

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Record pace

Seven years ago, then-head of U.S. Army Europe, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, was sounding the alarm over the lack of short-range air defense capability on the continent. In an interview flying over the Polish countryside, Hodges told Defense News he was worried about traditional threats but also new ones like drone swarms.

He said air defense was one of the biggest capability gaps and was desperately needed to counter possible threats from an increasingly aggressive Russia.

Some Avenger air defense systems from the U.S. Army National Guard could be spotted around exercises in Eastern Europe in 2016 and 2017, but assets overall were scant, even among the armed forces of European countries.

The Army heeded the warnings from commanders in the European theater, and the Sgt. Stout SHORAD system's development took place in record time. The service identified an urgent operational need in theater in 2016, received the requirement to build the system in February 2018, and then took 19 months to select an integration team and deliver prototypes for testing in the first quarter of 2020.

The first platoon to receive the Sgt. Stout, a Stryker combat vehicle-based platform that includes a mission equipment package designed by Leonardo DRS with Moog's Reconfigurable Integrated-weapons Platform and RTX's Stinger vehicle missile launcher, deployed to Europe in 2021.

The Army is now fielding its third Sgt. Stout battalion at Fort Cavazos, Texas. The first battalion remains in Germany, and the second is based at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

The Army plans to begin fielding its fourth Sgt. Stout battalion at Fort Liberty, North Carolina, in the third quarter of fiscal 2025 and is aiming to complete it by the second quarter of FY26, Brig. Gen. Frank Lozano, the

Army's program executive officer for missiles and space, said in the media briefing.

The service's potential acquisition objective is 361 systems, Lozano said. The Army approved a directive requirement for the first 162 vehicles that outfits the first four battalions and allows for some training battalion assets at Fort Sill, he added.

Another four battalions could eventually be on order for the National Guard, Lozano said. "That will likely occur over the next [program objective memorandum] cycle."

The Army is "now well into production and fielding in a very short time," Bush said. "Those early decisions were made before the war in Ukraine, and it's really good that they were because we now are actually fielding short-range air defense systems that, among other things, provides counter-[unmanned aircraft system] capability to forward forces, which everyone can see are in increasing danger from UAS and other threats. I think we really got this one right, and we did it really fast."

Evolving capability

Two more variants of Sgt. Stout vehicles are coming. The Army has concurrently been working on a 50-kilowatt laser weapon version and deployed a Stryker-based capability to U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility recently.

Bush would not detail how it is performing, but noted there are "challenges" when it comes to putting a high-kilowatt laser on a moving vehicle as opposed to a fixed site. And he said the Army is still considering the right platform and the right power levels to go with the maneuver force.

A decision on what a directed-energy SHORAD capability might look like is expected sometime across the next five fiscal years, he added.

Another variant would focus on providing a next-generation Stinger missile and a 30mm proximity fuse ammunition, which will help gain capability within the counter-drone space.

The service wants the Stinger missile replacement for SHORAD to be faster, survive jamming and more easily hit tougher targets like drones, Lozano told Defense News last fall.

In September 2023, the Army awarded RTX and Lockheed Martin contracts to competitively develop the Stinger replacement.

The Army is conducting efforts for the improved Stinger and proximity fuse ammunition using a rapid prototyping strategy; the service is roughly one year into the program.

The intent is to carry a couple of vendors forward for the next two years to get to a shoot-off, Lozano said. "Then based on affordability aspects that have yet to be determined, we may continue to carry two vendors, or we may downselect to one and go into a three-year, very intense, aggressive developmental effort to try to get to a material solution that I can transition into potentially a major capability acquisition pathway."

The Army anticipates it will reach the decision point for production in the second quarter of FY28, Bush noted.

A fourth increment for the system is also under consideration. The Army released a request for information this year asking for ideas on how to evolve the capability for lighter forces.

"We're really in the infancy of understanding what that program increment might look like," Lozano said, with the goal of making a lighter force more "effective, but also as agile as they need to be on tomorrow's battlefield."

About **Jen Judson**

Jen Judson is an award-winning journalist covering land warfare for Defense News. She has also worked for Politico and Inside Defense. She holds a Master of Science degree in journalism from Boston University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Kenyon College.
