Names are great. Nothing has more power to rescue military equipment from the ignominy of historical obscurity than a good, punchy, colloquial name. Historical examples from the Army’s past are myriad. Ask someone about the ‘U.S. Rifle, Caliber .30, M1’ and you’ll get a blank stare, but that same person will be able to recognize a Garand. Same goes for the ‘Rocket Launcher, M1A1’, more commonly known as a bazooka.

America’s British allies realized the ease of naming when they were inundated with U.S. lend-lease equipment during the Second War World. Instead of memorizing countless different and illogical number/letter combinations (everything started with M1 be it a tank, rifle, hand grenade or entrenching tool), the British attached nomenclatures. Thus the ‘Light Tank M3’ became Stuart, the ‘Medium Tank, M4’ became Sherman, and the ‘105 mm Howitzer Motor Carriage M7’ became Priest. Even the Roman legions called their ubiquitous light catapult an ‘onager’ after its kick being similar to a wild donkey.

Nowadays it is equally as important to save new air defense equipment from hideously bland and clinical acronyms, reducing complex weapons of war to a mere job description. This fate has already befallen C-RAM (Counter-Rocket, Artillery and Mortar), JLENS (Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System), IFPC (Indirect Fire Protection Capability), and THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense). Once so-called, the acronym sets in place like concrete and is practically impossible to remove.

Thus, now that new weapons systems have been approved it is important to have a vetting process in place to establish proper names for IMSHORAD (Interim Maneuver Short-Range Air Defense), and upcoming MSHORAD. Such a process must be transparent and able to lend an ear to the will of the vox populi. The Air Defense branch should hold an open poll with a list of good, strong names for both new systems within the year. Such an action would not only drive enthusiasm within the branch for the heralded return of SHORAD, but also provide excellent public exposure outside to the Army at large and the civilian world.

Some humble suggestions from the author:

The IMSHORAD recently approved for production is a Stryker variant made by Leonardo DRS equipped with both Stinger and Longbow Hellfire missiles, M230 chain gun and the 7.62 mm coaxial"
machine gun. An excellent name for this particular vehicle would be the Sergeant Stout for two reasons. First, the name honors the only Air Defender ever to receive the Medal of Honor. Secondly, the naming convention also serves to help obliterate the $1.8 billion mistake known as the M247 Sergeant York. Alternatively, in the same way that the M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle was equipped with Stingers to become the Bradley Linebacker, so too could the Army carry on its legacy by calling the new IMS-HORAD vehicle the Stryker Linebacker.

As for the all-new MSHORAD, the Air and Missile Defense modernization director and former ADA commandant, Brig. Gen. Randall McIntire, has said that it will be “less about missile technology” and have “more of a directed-energy focus.” That means that along with missiles, the new MSHORAD (whatever its chassis) will be equipped with a 50 kw laser. The best possible name for such a machine would be Cyclops. In ancient Greek mythology, the cyclops were a race of giants with one great eye in the middle of their foreheads. The word kyklopes literally means “circle eyed,” a very appropriate term for the wide reflective lens of a weaponized laser. This Greek name also carries on the convention started by the Nike Ajax, Hercules and Zeus. To make matters even better, the name Cyclops also belongs to a famous fictional and copyrighted superhero who shares an affinity for lasers.

So then, what’s in a name? A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but calling a rose a Photosynthetic Air Fragrance Integrated Delivery System (or PAFIDS) is an affront to the English language and basic human decency. If the Air Defenders of the future are to fight with these systems, let us at least give them the opportunity to tell war stories to their grandchildren without having to hear the inevitable questioning response: “But Grandpa, what do those letters stand for?”

Capt. Peter Mitchell is an air defense battery commander at Fort Sill, Okla. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army, Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.


A Stryker is equipped with a Mobile Expeditionary High Energy Laser system. (Courtesy photo)