

Marine Corps Aviation Precision Weapons

Discussion

The Marine Corps requires aviation weapons to perform close air support, deep air support, armed reconnaissance, air interdiction, and suppression of enemy air defenses in support of the combined arms concept. The Department of the Navy has established the future aviation weapons roadmap for Naval and Marine aviation. This strategy decreases the different types of weapons in the inventory by necking down to multi-purpose weapons that effectively address the multitude of threats in the 21st century. This modernization effort will emphasize precision weapons that produce maximum effect on intended targets while minimizing collateral damage. In addition to the modernization effort, the Marine Corps is striving to maintain a high level of training for aircrews. Newly revised training and readiness manuals have set a realistic requirement for ordnance needed by aircrews to maintain proficiency and training. For Marine aviation to better support the Ground Combat Element, a procurement strategy has been developed that reduces the aviation weapons inventory types from three to one. Under this new procurement strategy, the Reactive Weapon category is the principle focus. These future weapons will be capable of employment on tactical aircraft and attack helicopters. The aircraft that will employ this weapon include the F/A-18A/C/D Hornet, Joint Strike Fighter, AV-8B Harrier, and the AH-1W/Z Super Cobra. The “road map” to these future precision weapons includes the Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) family (and follow-on improvements to JDAM variants) the Joint Direct Standoff Weapon (JSOW) family and the modernized Hellfire. The JDAM family of munitions is composed of a kit that attaches to a general-purpose bomb body (500/1,000/2,000 pound variant plus a 2,000 pound penetrator) to make it more precise. The kit gives the bomb a GPS/INS guidance capability and provides for day or night, all weather precision delivery. The JDAM family will replace laser-guided bombs and complement general-purpose bombs. Presently, only the 2,000-pound variant is fielded.

Marine Corps Position

The Marine Corps is pursuing innovative aviation weapons that will provide optimum support for Marine ground forces. These weapons will allow the Marine Corps to maintain combat superiority and tactical relevance well into the 21st century while providing the capability to conduct realistic and relevant training for enhanced aircrew readiness.