

New Boeing Apache Ammunition Loading System Enters Service

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Loading ammunition for the next generation AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter's 30mm cannon has been simplified thanks to an innovative loading system that cuts the time and effort needed to do the job.

Ordnance engineers at The Boeing Company in Mesa, Ariz., recently developed the Sideloader™ 30mm loading system, a unique new system that is being installed in the Apache Longbow, the world's only fourth-generation combat helicopter.

The AH-64D Sideloader unit and its magazine controller recently entered service with the U.S. Army's 1-227th Attack Battalion, which became the Army's first combat-ready AH-64D Apache Longbow unit in November. The Sideloader unit, a mechanical system that is built into the aircraft, was delivered and fielded as a distinct part of the Apache Longbow's gun system.

Boeing in Mesa produces the Apache Longbow and its gun system, which features the 30mm M230 Chain Gun automatic cannon.

The Sideloader system enables soldiers to load 11-round strips of bulk ammunition directly into the 30mm gun system. The Sideloader unit is located in the right forward avionics bay.

Using the new system, one soldier now can load 1,075 rounds into an Apache Longbow in less than 15 minutes, compared with the AH-64A, which takes three soldiers more than a half-hour using ground support equipment.

The system also simplifies downloading of unused ammunition.

"The goal was to improve the arming and refueling turnaround time and keep the Apache Longbow in the fight," said Thomas Johnston, integrated product development team lead for the Sideloader program.

"We cut the rearming time in more than half and support requirements by more than two-thirds," he said. "It's simpler. One soldier can handle the loading just about anywhere. Everything the soldier needs to load is now with the aircraft."

The AH-64D Apache Longbow is the U.S. Army's next generation version of the combat-proven AH-64A. The AH-64A and AH-64D aircraft are in service with defense forces around the world.

The Sideloader is being produced by Signaal-Hollandse Signaalapparaten B.V. in The Netherlands and The Boeing Company in Mesa as part of an industrial participation agreement with The Netherlands, which has ordered 30 AH-64D Apaches from Boeing. Under the agreement, Signaal will provide 30mm Sideloader systems for all AH-64D aircraft.

Signaal, the prime contractor, produces the Sideloader unit and magazine controller system, and the loader assembly ammunition handling subsystem. Boeing performs final assembly and aircraft testing.

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