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Digital information and photographs of finished parts now give assembly workers at The Boeing Company a clearer look at parts they build for the AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopter in Mesa, Ariz.

The effect of the pictures is to reduce both the assembly time and the chances of part defects.

"The pictures reduce the possibility of defects because assemblers can easily see how assembly should look. That eliminates interpretation," said Bruce Wright, manufacturing engineering manager of Apache assembly at The Boeing Company in Mesa. "That brings new flexibility to managing the work force," he said. "With the photos as guides, operators can build and install components for the Apache Longbow without detailed training on a particular assembly."

Two new systems are under way in Mesa.

The first, promoted through a corporate initiative called Shop Floor 2000, displays work instructions, engineering data and photos on a computer that assemblers can access near their work areas. The computer also provides assembly assignments.

The second system is a series of picture books with simply written instructions and clear and colorful symbols of each assembly point.

"We like the new system," said Matt Blanchard, an Apache manufacturing technician. "It's much easier to put things together after you view a picture and see how it is supposed to be. It makes the work go faster." Some of the parts that come with accompanying photos include the fire extinguisher, nozzles and louvers. The AH-64D Apache Longbow is the newest version of the combat-proven AH-64A Apache.

Boeing is producing the world's most advanced combat helicopter for the U.S. Army and defense forces in The Netherlands and the United Kingdom at a rate of six helicopters a month.

Production will increase to seven a month in September 2000. The Mesa facility is designed to accommodate 12 aircraft a month in peacetime operations.

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