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## GROUND TEAMS KEEP V CORPS ATTACK AVIATORS IN FLIGHT AND IN THE FIGHT

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**GRAFEHNWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany --** The AH-64D Apache "Longbow" attack helicopter can easily be called one of the most feared and revered aircraft in the world. With a payload of 16 laser-guided Hellfire missiles, 76 70mm rockets, or a combination of both, and up to 1,200 rounds of 30mm high-explosive ammunition, the machine is a force to be reckoned with.



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Soldiers of V Corps' 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry working at a Forward Arming and Refueling Point wait for the rotors of an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter to stop turning before they approach the helicopter to service it, during a gunnery exercise at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area July 7.

Yet for all of its cutting-edge technology, the Longbow wouldn't even leave the ground if not for the efforts of a small army of skilled Soldiers on the ground: helicopter avionics specialists, mechanics, fuel handlers and armament technicians, to name a few. Indeed, keeping the Longbow up and running takes skill, knowledge and practice, all of which Soldiers of V Corps' 6th

Squadron, 6th Cavalry, 11th Aviation Regiment displayed while manning a Forward Arming and Refueling Point during an ongoing gunnery training exercise at Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area.

The exercise, the first in which the "Six Shooters" the 6/6th have taken part since their redeployment from Iraq, all starts at the FARP, as five- to seven-Soldier teams work to fuel and arm each bird in preparation for its turn on the gunnery range.

As each Apache flies into the FARP it is directed to a different cement pad where a team made up of two fuel handlers, two armament specialists and a pad chief or supervisor, are waiting. Once the bird has landed and the rotors have stopped turning, the pad chief attaches a ground cable to the helicopter and plugs his headset into a port on the Apache's wing so that he can communicate with the pilots inside.

"The pilots tell the pad chief what armaments they need for their next gunnery exercise and also report any problems they may have felt with the helicopter," said Staff Sgt. Christiaan Johnson, the exercise line chief who supervises all the FARP's pads.



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At a Forward Arming and Refueling Point, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Patrick Boardman of V Corps' 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry, unpacks rockets that will be loaded into the rocket pods of a waiting AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopter, during an ongoing gunnery exercise at Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area July 7.

Before the other members of the pad team approach the helicopter, the pad chief places chock blocks around the aircraft's tires. Then he unhooks the gun cannon plug and places the wing storage jettison pins to ensure that the weapons won't discharge or jettison while on the ground. After his tasks are complete and the area is safe, the chief signals the rest of the team to begin.

Like an Indy 500 pit crew, the team turns the pad into a frenzy of action. As the fuel handlers refill the helicopter's tank, armament technicians test and load the rocket pods, load the 30mm gun and mount any missiles or missile simulators that may be

needed. At the same time the pilots inside ensure that the helicopter recognizes all the ammunition and ordnance that has been loaded and run the Apache's sophisticated automation through system initialization checks. Throughout the process the pad chief stays in constant communication with the pilots, passes information back to his team, and ensures that everything on the pad runs safely and smoothly.

Once the weapons are loaded and the Apache is refueled, the pad chief ensures all the systems he blocked or shut down for safety are reactivated, and the Apache is ready to train – or fight -- again.

The process may sound simple on paper, but it is actually quite intricate, said Johnson. "There are so many different systems on an Apache, It can take years to learn everything," he said.



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Soldiers of V Corps' 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry work simultaneously to quickly re-arm and refuel one of the squadron's AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopters at a Forward Arming and Refueling Point during an ongoing gunnery exercise at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area.

Luckily, the newer members of 6/6th's FARP team are ready and eager to learn and their more veteran peers are ready to teach. All are eager to get back into a steady flow of work after the rigors of war in Iraq and say they're looking forward to applying the real-world lessons they learned while keeping the Apaches in action there.

"Everybody's hyped to be here, practicing our jobs and getting back into the routine of doing everything," said Sgt. 1st Class Jamal A. Sharif, a 6/6th platoon sergeant. "Everything's so much more relaxed than it was in Iraq, and we're able to just do our jobs without worrying about things like guard duty and 24/7 operations. This is the 'bread and butter' of what we do, and I love it."

Spc. Canaan Boswell, a 6/6th ammunition specialist, agreed. "It's much more relaxed here. There are no mortars going off at night when we sleep. 'Downrange' is different – everyone is working so hard just to function that you lose a lot of the 'everyday' things. It's important that we get those tasks back into practice. Besides, this training is a lot of fun."

Though it may be fun, the exercise is serious business, with a serious purpose – to keep the Longbow fighting and keep Soldiers alive, added Sgt. Eric Nash, a 6/6th pad chief.

"'Downrange' is different because aircraft are on mission 24/7 and you have to keep them up constantly. Here it's training rounds, while there it's live and a lot more dangerous," he said. "We have a lot of new guys and it's important to get them trained in how things work before they have to face something like that – it's all about making sure that when they do get out there, they also get back home safe to their families."

