



Longbow Radar Key to British Apache Ops in Afghanistan

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British army Apache attack helicopters in Afghanistan are the only Apaches in the country that fly with the mast-mounted Longbow radar installed -- and that is giving them a distinctive edge in the NATO-led operations against Taliban and other opposing militant forces, the commander of the unit says.

Lt.Col. Jon Bryant, commanding officer of the Apache-equipped No. 3 Regiment (Army Air Corps) at Wattisham, Suffolk, says that the Longbow radar is "extremely useful in airspace deconfliction terms."



British army Apache Longbow, the radar can be seen on top of the main rotor mast. Photo: Rolls-Royce

"When on patrol, we are sharing the airspace with other Apaches, Chinooks, Lynxes, fixed-wing aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles," says Col. Bryant, who recently returned from a tour as commanding officer of Britain's Joint Helicopter Force (Afghanistan) at Kandahar Air Field, southern Afghanistan.

Especially at night, the radar helps pilots to build up situational awareness and to prevent getting dangerously close to other aircraft during tactical maneuvers.

"The Longbow radar is a very useful command & control tool for the attack helicopter patrol commander. It is also very useful to sweep large areas of flat desert area. At least once we managed to talk down a Chinook to deliver troops on a target that he could not see himself despite using his night vision goggles," Col. Bryant recalls.

He recently briefed some 200 attendees at the Shephard Heli-Power conference in The Hague about British Apache operations in Afghanistan.



American and Dutch Apaches in Afghanistan fly without the radar. This is an AH-64D operated by the Royal Netherlands Air Force. Photo: Netherlands MoD

Apaches from other nations, notably the Netherlands and the U.S., do not use the Longbow radar in Afghanistan -- the Dutch have chosen to buy their AH-64Ds without the radar while the Americans prefer to fly without the equipment because of its extra weight.

But according to Col. Bryant, the British version of the Apache has the power to lift the radar because it is uniquely equipped with different, European-developed RTM-322 engines.

Other unique features of the British Apache are its Hidas integrated self-protection

system and the Canadian-supplied CRV-7 unguided rockets that is used alongside the standard 30-mm. chain gun and the Hellfire precision-guided missiles.

"Typically, we take off armed with 300 rounds of 30-mm. ammunition, 16 CRV-7 rockets (the FL-7 flechette version) and two Hellfires. Because we carry extra internal fuel tanks, our endurance has been extended to 2 hrs 45 mins, but the drawback is we can't take more than 300 rounds of ammo. In recent ops we found that the gun is the most-often used weapon; 300 rounds per mission is not enough so we may change out the extra tanks for more ammo," Col Bryant says.

During the time that Bryant was in the theater, the British Apaches fired some 21,000 rounds, 800 FL-7 rockets and 72 Hellfires.

Most of the eight British Apaches in Afghanistan operate out of Camp Bastion, a large forward base in Helmand province. This is located at 3,000-ft. elevation. Temperatures typically range between 35-48 deg. C.

Bryant: "Running takeoffs are routine in order to carry all the fuel and armament that we need for our missions."

"Demand continually outstrips supply," says Bryant, "we exceeded our flying hours by 20-30% in the first three of my four months in the theater."

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