The Army’s leadership has made a major warfighting decision about Army aviation for today and tomorrow. This Torchbearer Alert explores the background, technology and warfighting features of this new reconfiguration to revitalize Army aviation. After extensive study that included both lessons learned from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and an analysis of future operational environments, the acting Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff announced on 23 February 2004 a major restructuring of Army aviation coinciding with the cancellation of the Comanche helicopter program. While the cancellation of that major program may have come as a surprise to most, the reinvesting of Comanche’s program dollars across the entire aviation program will significantly improve Army aviation as a whole, today and in the foreseeable future.

DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

The Cold War battlefield of the 1980s looked very different from the battlefields the Army faces today. While U.S. Army aviation technological superiority remains unmatched, vulnerabilities still exist: In Operation Iraqi Freedom, 32 Soldiers and nine aircraft have been lost, emphasizing the continuing need for more aircraft survivability equipment (ASE). Across the force, the Army is operating with both an aging fleet and a higher operational tempo than has been seen in decades. More and newer helicopters and more parts for modernization and recapitalization are needed for both active component (AC) and reserve component (RC) aviation units. As the reserve component mission increases, the RC is struggling with the potential choice of making aviation units smaller or equipping them with sub-optimal aircraft. The new initiative transforms RC aviation so those units will be able to “plug and play” with the AC forces. Planning is underway for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and a light utility helicopter to replace the Vietnam-era Kiowa. When the Army compared what the Comanche would have provided six years from now to other urgent needs in aviation, the choice, while difficult, was the right one.
The funding will also finance the upgrade and modernization of existing attack, utility and cargo helicopters as well as bring a new observation and scout/attack helicopter to the force, replacing the Vietnam-era UH-1 Iroquois (better known as the “Huey”) and the OH-58D Kiowa. Using existing technologies and airframes with...
modifications, the Army will replace the aging Hueys and Kiowas with a light utility helicopter (LUH), a variant of such helicopters currently used in the commercial world. The Army also will rapidly acquire several hundred armed reconnaissance helicopters (ARH) to replace the older OH-58D Kiowa Warriors.

Fixed-wing aviation benefits as well. The Army plans to develop an acquisition program for a cargo fixed-wing aircraft (CXX-Cargo) to comply with intratheater needs and to replace the Army’s existing C-23s and C-12s. These new fixed-wing planes will work with Air Force platforms and will be configured to meet the challenges of the new operating environment.

The Army will get more than just aircraft with aviation dollars. It will also be able to procure ground support equipment, including towing, ground electrical and hydraulic power units, engine analysis, de-icing systems, maintenance shop sets and avionics upgrades. More simulators, rockets and munitions are also on the list. The UAV has proven a great asset on the battlefield, providing intelligence and scout capabilities as well as firepower (see Torchbearer Issue Paper Army Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Systems: A Cost-Effective Combat Multiplier, April 2004); $54 million in the proposed FY 2005 budget amendment has been earmarked for acceleration and improvement of these technologies in tactical and small UAVs.
The restructuring initiative will complete all parts of the aviation transformation plan by the end of the decade. All Soldiers (active, Army National Guard and Army Reserve) will benefit by receiving upgrades and improvements to current aircraft, both fixed- and rotor-wing. They will also receive enhanced training and simulation. The Army will gain almost 800 new aircraft and recapitalize 1,400. The new face of Army aviation will facilitate modularity, bring multifunction aviation brigades to the force and enhance RC capabilities. Army aviation will emerge more joint, tailorable, rapidly deployable and sustainable in standardized formations. With these initiatives, Army aviation provides protection and power to Soldiers on the battlefield today while staying on track with transformation for tomorrow’s operations.

**WHAT IS NEEDED**

Army aviation plays a role in almost every area of military operations. The fleet is operating at up to four times its peacetime tempo in extremely harsh environments, which has taken a toll on the fleet. Maintaining the readiness of Army aviation while modernizing and recapping is a major concern. The Army has taken the initiative to fix aviation by identifying the challenges and responding with solutions, but the restructuring and revitalization plan’s future is not secure.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

AUSA fully supports funding initiatives to maintain the first-rate capabilities of Army aviation for today and into the future (AUSA 2004 Resolutions 04-07, 04-14, 04-15). It is in the hands of Congress to follow through on the President’s and the Secretary of Defense’s assurances that Comanche funding will stay in Army aviation as codified in the FY 2005 budget amendment. Approval of the amendment will ensure that Army aviation can remain a priority and play a main role in transformation.

To get the latest information on Army aviation and the President’s budget submission, click on the Legislative Action Center icon on the AUSA homepage at www.ausa.org. Should you wish to contact your elected officials, just follow the instructions.