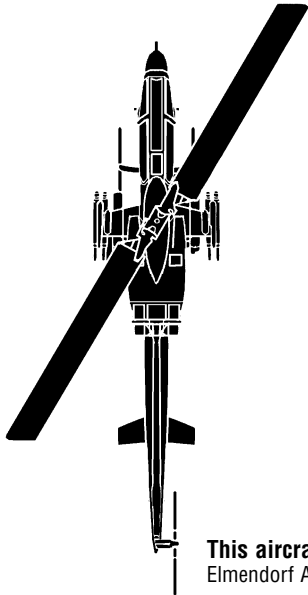


## AH-1 Cobra



The sleek, menacing-looking AH-1 Cobra gunship was for three decades the backbone of the Army's attack helicopter force. This two-bladed, single-engine aircraft, an offshoot of Bell's iconic UH-1 Huey utility chopper, did yeoman work in Vietnam and many locales afterward, providing armed reconnaissance, anti-tank attack, fire support, escort, anti-shipping attack, and more. Its speed and lethality revolutionized helicopter warfare.

In producing the Cobra, Bell recycled the basic engine, transmission, rotor system, and tail boom of the Huey, but put them in a streamlined, low-profile fuselage. Stub wings provided lift as well as stations for a wide variety of weapons. High-and-low tandem seating gave maximum visibility for the crew. Seated high in the rear, the pilot could better maneuver; the

gunner, low and in front, could concentrate lethal fire on the enemy. Aircrews loved it, even though its rotor and low operating altitude precluded use of ejection seats or parachutes. The Cobra had twice the speed and three times the loiter time of the Huey and was also far more maneuverable.

Cobras first saw major combat in 1968 during the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam. In that war, they were used in "hunter-killer" teams in which a single OH-6 chopper would troll for enemy fire and Cobras would blast the newly revealed target. They also supported ground forces in traditional ways. Speed, agility, and powerful armament kept the Cobra at the fore of Army airpower until the arrival of the AH-64 Apache. Much upgraded twin-engine versions remain in service today with the US Marine Corps.

—Walter J. Boyne

**This aircraft:** Army AH-1G Cobra helicopter—#69-16440—as it looked in 1975 when deployed to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. It carries high-visibility markings for cold weather operations.



### In Brief

Designed, built by Bell ★ first flight Sept. 7, 1965 ★ crew of two (pilot, copilot/gunner) ★ one Avco Lycoming T-53-L-11 turbo-shaft engine with "540" broad-chord rotor ★ number built about 1,400 ★ **Specific to AH-1G:** max speed 175 mph ★ cruise speed 166 mph ★ max range 360 mi ★ armament 7.62 mm mini-gun and 40 mm grenade launcher in chin-nose turret; XM-159 or XM-200 rocket launchers and 20 mm XM-35 cannon in stub wings ★ weight (max) 9,500 lb ★ span (rotor diameter) 44 ft ★ length 53 ft ★ height 13 ft 6 in.

### Famous Fliers

**Notables:** Gil Acheson, Hamilton Howze, James Lusinski, George Seneff, Ali Akbar Shiroodi, John Thompson, Randy Zahn. **Test Pilots:** Donald Bloom, Roger Huffaker, Joseph Mashman, James McCullough, Timothy Mouw, Thomas Post.

### Interesting Facts

Flew some one million hours during the Vietnam War ★ nicknamed "Snake" ★ called Tzefa ("Viper") in Israeli service ★ played key combat role in Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), Iraq (1991, 2003), Somalia (1993), and Haiti (1994) ★ made first flight only eight months after Bell decided to build prototype ★ suffered 300 losses in Vietnam ★ used by Israel in operations in Lebanon and Pakistan against rebel forces in Balochistan ★ used today to fight fires in United States as "Firewatch Cobra" or "FireSnake" ★ aced out by armed Hueys in the famous "Apocalypse Now" attack scene.



USMC photo by Sgt. Sean P. Murphy

A USMC Cobra fires rockets during an exercise in 2008.