The AH-64 Apache is the New Drone Hunter with Proximity Explosive Ammunition

Published on 24/04/2026

In response to the growing drone threat on the battlefield, the United States Army has ordered a massive increase in the production of XM1225 APEX ammunition, transforming the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter into an even more lethal air defense platform.

A Tactical Shift for the AH-64

The AH-64 Apache is no longer just the ultimate "tank hunter." With the integration of the new **XM1225 Aviation Proximity Explosive (APEX)** 30x113mm rounds, the US Army is formally codifying the helicopter's role as a **Counter-Unmanned Aircraft System (C-UAS)** platform.

Major General **Clair A. Gill**, commander of the Army Aviation Center of Excellence, confirmed during the Nashville summit that the acquisition of these munitions will undergo an

unprecedented acceleration. Northrop Grumman, the system's manufacturer, has increased from an initial availability of only 600 rounds to a production of 1,000 units in the last month, with the goal to **quintuple** the production rate further.

The AH-64 Apache is the New Drone Hunter with Proximity Explosive Ammunition

Proximity Technology: How the APEX Works

Unlike standard M789 HEDP ammunition, which explodes only on impact, the XM1225 APEX round uses a **proximity fuse**.

- **Smart Detonation:** The round explodes when it detects the proximity of an object, releasing a shower of fragments (shrapnel).
- **Targeting:** This feature is crucial for taking down small drones, agile targets that are difficult to hit directly.
- **Versatility:** In addition to drones, APEX rounds are effective against exposed personnel, light vehicles, and small boats.

> *"The APEX round was developed to create a fragmentation pattern in front of the drone, ensuring a takedown even without a direct hit," explained Walter McCormick, a test officer at the Yuma Proving Ground.*

Logistical and Safety Advantages

One of the strengths of the XM1225 is the ease of implementation:

1. **No Hardware Modifications:** The **M230** cannon of the Apache and its targeting systems do not require upgrades to fire the new rounds.
2. **Minimal Training:** The ballistic properties are almost identical to current rounds, allowing pilots to adapt instantly.
3. **Safety (Self-Destruct):** The self-destruct capability of proximity rounds reduces the risk of collateral damage on the ground caused by stray rounds that miss the target.

The AH-64 Apache is the New Drone Hunter with Proximity Explosive Ammunition

The Decisive Test

The acceleration of production follows the success of live-fire tests conducted in **December 2025** in Arizona. On that occasion, the Apaches demonstrated for the first time the air-to-air engagement capability against unmanned aerial systems at various distances, marking a milestone in the aircraft's operational capability.

With the fivefold increase in production, the U.S. Army sends a clear message: the Apache will remain the dominant predator of the modern battlefield, rapidly adapting to the asymmetric threats posed by drone technology.

Key Data:

- **Caliber:** 30x113mm
- **Model:** XM1225 APEX
- **Manufacturer:** Northrop Grumman

- **Platform:** AH-64 Apache (M230 Cannon)
- **Objective:** 5x production increase in 2026.

News link: https://www.twz.com/air/production-of-ah-64-apaches-new-counter-drone-cannon-shell-ammunition-ramping-up