

MoD looks at 'marinised' Apache

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THE UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) is studying a "marinised" variant of the Westland/McDonnell Douglas (MDC) WAH-64 Longbow Apache helicopter for the Royal Navy, which could provoke an ownership fight between the Army Air Corps and the Royal Navy.

The Apaches would replace the Westland Lynx intended to provide fire support for the Royal Marine 3rd Commando Brigade. Eight of the 64 Apaches on order for the Army Air Corps have always been earmarked to be "dual service". The Navy, however, appears to be reconsidering how it



A "marinised" Apache could lead to inter-service rivalry

deploys these helicopters operationally as part of a combined air arm. Sources close to the Apache

procurement say that the original operational approach would have been to transport the WAH-64s by sea, with the aircraft being operated from forward shore bases.

The RN, however, is now examining the possibility of carrying out combat operations from deck. The MoD says: "We are looking into the requirement of marinisation of the WAH-64, but there is no final decision as to what this will entail." Modifications previously considered by MDC for a sea-going Apache for the US armed forces included a folding main rotor and tail section — but the work was never carried out. The UK would be the only

operator of a naval Apache. The Army is understood to be concerned that any substantial "marinisation" of the eight helicopters would effectively create two variants.

The eight machines intended for Navy deployment would need to be kept together, reducing the pool of WAH-64s upon which the army could draw, possibly leading to the acquisition of further helicopters to fill the gap. The Navy-allocated helicopters would come from the unit assigned to the 3rd UK Division, based at Dishforth.

It is also to be determined as to who would crew the WAH-64s intended to support amphibious operations. The Lynx aircraft now used in this role are flown by Navy pilots. Deliveries of the WAH-64 to the Army will begin in 2000. □ *Additional reporting by Iain Ballantyne.*

