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NNSA Dismantles Last Nuclear Artillery Shell **Battlefield Weapons were retired by President George H. W. Bush**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has dismantled the last nuclear artillery shell in the U.S. nuclear stockpile, eliminating the vestiges of a type of battlefield nuclear weapons that comprised a key element of America’s Cold War arsenal.

Employees at NNSA’s Pantex facility in Amarillo, TX dismantled the last W-79 warhead earlier this year. Pantex officials will hold a ceremony at the plant today to mark the achievement.

“This administration is committed to reducing the threat of nuclear weapons worldwide,” said Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. “We have completed dismantlement of another class of nuclear weapons – weapons that were a very important deterrent during the Cold War.”

“Eliminating the last nuclear artillery warhead marks the end of an era in U.S. defense policy that included ground-launched battlefield nuclear weapons,” said NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks. “This completes a historic step begun by the United States in 1991. I congratulate our employees at Pantex who were involved in this piece of history.”

The United States introduced artillery-fired atomic weapons in its defense arsenal in 1957. Six types were deployed over the years. The W-79 was designed to be fired from an 8-inch artillery piece. These weapons strengthened deterrence by improving the capability of NATO battlefield commanders to stop a Warsaw Pact armored thrust into Western Europe.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush announced his decision to retire artillery-fired atomic weapons in the U.S. stockpile. The President made his decision unilaterally, apart from any arms control agreement with the former Soviet Union. The weapons, including all W-79s, were returned to NNSA for dismantlement at the Pantex plant.

The Pantex Plant plays a critical role in the surveillance of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Each year approximately 100 weapons from the active stockpile are sent to Pantex where they undergo a comprehensive diagnostic exam. While most of the weapons are reassembled and returned to the military services, the remaining weapons are subject to destructive evaluation, providing us additional insights into the health of the stockpile. Pantex also refurbishes nuclear weapons in the current stockpile as part of the Stockpile Life Extension Program. The dismantlement of the W79 and other weapons took place over the years as scheduling permitted.

NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency of the Department of Energy. It enhances U.S. national security through the military application of nuclear energy, maintains the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, promotes international nuclear nonproliferation and safety, reduces global danger from weapons of mass destruction, provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion, and oversees its national laboratories to maintain U.S. leadership in science and technology.

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