

Artillery ammunitions loading system.

The present invention is relative to an ammunition loading system and, in detail, it is relative to an
5 artillery ammunition loading system.

It is known that artillery ammunition loading systems of the traditional type are designed and configured to fulfill the specific needs of a combat vehicle or a battleship and require a manual operation
10 in order to load the ammunition.

In particular, artillery ammunitions comprise a first part, or projectile, which, in use, is the first one to be loaded into the cannon or howitzer, and a second part, or propelling charge, which is the second
15 part to be inserted following the projectile itself.

Some of the loading operations for loading the ammunitions, i.e. the projectile and the propelling charge, are at least partially performed in a manual manner and, therefore, cause a delay in terms of time
20 and a risk due to the manual handling.

As a consequence, loading operators are exposed to a plurality of risks, which comprise, at least, being subject to overpressure at the moment of the firing and the risk of exposure to contamination from ionizing
25 particles (nuclear radiations), bacteriological or chemical agents, commonly known as NBC agents (Nuclear, Bacteriological, Chemical), as well as the risk of exposure to contaminations due to the handling of propelling material to be inserted into the breech.

Furthermore, loading operators typically work in a turret that supports the carriage of the cannon or howitzer; said turret rises above a hull both of a fighting vehicle and of a battleship. The hull
5 typically guarantees a higher degree of protection than the turret due to the fact that operators are situated at a lower height and, therefore, their position is more hidden.

Furthermore, ammunition loading systems of the
10 known type present great difficulties in loading the cannon or howitzer, if the latter is configured with large elevation angles.

The object of the present invention is to describe an artillery ammunition loading system, which does not
15 present the drawbacks described above.

According to the present invention, an artillery ammunition loading system is provided, which is of the type claimed in the first claim.

The invention will now be described with reference
20 to the accompanying drawings, which illustrate a non-limiting embodiment, wherein:

- figures 1-3 illustrate a combat vehicle provided with a cannon operated through an artillery ammunition loading system according
25 to the present invention in four different operating configurations;
- figure 4 illustrates a prospective view of an ammunition loading system according to the present invention;

- figure 5 illustrates, in a plan view, a detail of an artillery ammunition loading system according to the present invention;
- figures 6-9 illustrate details concerning different operating configurations of the loading system that is the subject-matter of the present invention; and
- figure 10 illustrates a detail of a part of a magazine of propelling charges for ammunitions loaded by the system that is the subject-matter of the present invention.

With reference to figures 1-3, number 10 indicates a combat vehicle as a whole, which comprises a cannon or howitzer 11, which is mounted on a turret 12 that rotates around its rotation axis Z; cannon or howitzer 11, furthermore, can be adjusted in its elevation, i.e. its firing elevation angle, with respect to the attitude of combat vehicle 10.

Combat vehicle 10 comprises, furthermore, a plurality of firing stabilization means 13, which are arranged in correspondence to its front end and its rear end and, in the above-mentioned figures, comprise four legs, two front legs and two rear legs, which can be respectively retracted and lowered during the ride and during the firing operations.

Figure 1, in detail, illustrates a riding configuration of combat vehicle 10, in which the vehicle is ready to move on the ground, while cannon or howitzer 11 is in a rest configuration (with recoiled

mass), in which it is typically turned towards the front part of combat vehicle 10 itself.

Figure 2 illustrates combat vehicle 10 in a configuration in which the turret is being moved
5 towards a firing configuration; in this configuration turret 12 is rotated and firing stabilization means 13 are lowered, thus coming in contact with the ground, so that the entire vehicle has such a statically indeterminate stabilization that guarantees the
10 substantial immobility during firing.

Figure 3 illustrates the combat vehicle in a firing configuration, in which cannon or howitzer 11 is turned upwards with an elevation angle that varies as a function of the distance of the target to be hit and of
15 the range of the ammunition.

On the side of cannon or howitzer 11 there is a pair of elevation linear actuator means 203, which are able to move cannon or howitzer 11 and cause it to rotate so as to vary its inclination with respect to
20 the hull (elevation adjustment).

In particular, the ammunitions that can be fired by combat vehicle 10, and, therefore, can be handled by the artillery ammunition loading system, can be ammunitions of the traditional type, namely of the type
25 comprising a projectile and a propelling charge that, in use, is inserted into the breech of the cannon or howitzer 11 following the projectile itself or, alternatively, ammunitions of a different type, such as, for example, HEFSDS ammunitions (High Explosives

Fin Stabilized Discarding Sabot), which basically are subcaliber, non self-propelled ammunitions having a guided version comprising aerodynamic controls, inertial/GPS navigation and, in some sub-types, a
5 terminal guidance system.

Figure 4 illustrates a detail of the inside of the turret that houses an artillery ammunition loading system 100: said system comprises:

- 10 - a projectile magazine 101, which is substantially arranged aligned with a longitudinal axis of the cannon or howitzer 11;
- 15 - a first mobile projectile loading means 102a, or projectile loading ladle, and a second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b, or propelling charge loading ladle, which are mobile in a sliding manner along an axis that is parallel to a longitudinal axis of cannon or howitzer 11;
- 20 - linear actuator means 103, which are configured to cause the first mobile projectile loading means 102a and the second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b to move along an axis that is transverse or
25 orthogonal to the above-mentioned longitudinal axis of cannon or howitzer 11.

For each firing cycle, the first and the second mobile means, respectively suited to load projectiles and propelling charges of the ammunition, selectively

and at least partially automatically feed said cannon or howitzer 11.

In detail, as shown in figure 5, both the first mobile projectile loading means 102a and the second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b are mounted so as to slide on a support and, by so doing, they slide parallel to each other between a first pick-up position respectively of a projectile or of a propelling charge of an artillery ammunition and a position corresponding to a breech 11c of cannon or howitzer 11, which presents an open position and a closed position.

In the open position, breech 11c allows the projectile and, subsequently, the propelling charge of the ammunition to enter the carriage of the cannon or howitzer 11, while, in the closed position, breech 11c allows the ammunition itself to be fired, with the consequent outlet of the projectile from a muzzle 11v of the cannon or howitzer 11.

The loading procedure needed to load a projectile comprises a first step, during which, as shown in figure 6, the first mobile projectile loading means 102a is arranged in a first extreme position in correspondence to projectile magazine 101, from which the projectile is drawn. Therefore, the projectile is housed in the body of the first mobile projectile loading means 102a, which is suited to house the projectile itself, since it is hollow and presents a substantially cylindrical shape.

During the first step, the second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b is arranged in an extreme position as well, which is opposite to the position of breech 11c.

5 During the first step, the first mobile projectile loading means 102a is arranged in a position which is misaligned with respect to the longitudinal axis of the cannon or howitzer 11

Subsequently, in a second step illustrated in
10 figure 7, ladle 11c opens and the projectile is inserted into it. In order to do so, the first mobile projectile loading means 102a is caused to slide on its support and, simultaneously, it is translated along a direction that is transverse to the direction
15 determined by its stroke on the support, this translation being carried out by means of linear actuator means 103, until the above-mentioned means reaches a position that is aligned with the longitudinal axis of cannon or howitzer 11 and until it
20 reaches, in a third step, a second extreme position, opposite to the first one, in which the first mobile projectile loading means 102a reaches a substantial proximity to breech 11c of cannon or howitzer 11, so as to insert the projectile into the carriage of cannon or
25 howitzer 11, figure 8.

Subsequently, in a fourth step shown in figure 9, the second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b picks up a propelling charge from a propelling charge magazine 108. In order to do so, the second mobile

propelling charge loading means 102b is caused to rotate in correspondence to the first extreme position, so as to fall into line with a propelling charge that is vertically housed in propelling charge magazine 108, 5 which is arranged at a lower height with respect to projectile magazine 101.

As shown in figure 10, propelling charge magazine 108 comprises a plurality of rows 109a, 109b of holes, which are parallel to each other and are designed to 10 house a plurality of propelling charges.

After the propelling charge has been picked up, the second mobile propelling charge loading means 102b is rotated again and translated parallel to a longitudinal axis of cannon or howitzer 11, until it 15 reaches the second extreme position in substantial vicinity to the breech, in order to be then translated by linear actuator means 103 to a position in correspondence to the axis of cannon or howitzer 11, so as to allow the the propelling charge to be inserted 20 after the projectile.

Now the ammunition loading procedure is completed and breech 11c can be closed to start the firing procedure.

The system according to the present invention, 25 furthermore, is managed by a numerical subsystem, which controls the automated operations for the loading of the ammunition described above. Said numerical subsystem can rely on a data processing unit, which, if necessary, can be redundant and which is suited to

process, besides the automated operations for the loading of the ammunitions, ballistic and shooting solutions, as well as data exchange concerning operations for the exchange of operating, tactical and
5 logistic information coming from one or more vehicles or men operating on the battle field and, therefore, knowing the exact position of the enemy forces as well as the sources of possible threats.

The advantages of the system according to the
10 present invention are known in the light of the above description. In particular, it allows the person responsible of the weapon to remain inside of the hull, thus placing him/her in a safer position.

Furthermore, the system according to the present
15 invention also guarantees a higher firing rapidity, due to the fact that the loading operations of the projectile and of the propelling charge are automated.

Finally, the loading system according to the
20 present invention also allows both the projectiles and the propelling charges to be loaded with the same effectiveness independently from the variations made to the elevation angle of cannon or howitzer 11.

The device described above can be subject to variations that are obvious to a person skilled in the
25 art, without in this way going beyond the scope of protection provided by the accompanying claims.

CLAIMS

1. Artillery ammunitions loading system (100), configured for loading ammunitions comprising at least a projectile in a cannon or a howitzer (11), the cannon or howitzer defining a longitudinal axis; said ammunitions loading system comprises a first movable means (102a) for loading projectiles and a second movable means (102b) for loading propelling charges alternatively and at least partially automatically supplying said cannon or howitzer (11) for each firing cycle; the system being **characterized in that**:
 - said first movable means (102a) and said second movable means (102b) are mobile in a sliding manner along an axis that is parallel to said longitudinal axis between a respective pick-up position to pick up a projectile or a propelling charge and an insert position for inserting the projectile or propelling charge into the cannon or howitzer;
 - the system comprises linear actuator means for moving said first movable means (102a) and said second movable means (102b) along an axis that is transverse or orthogonal to said longitudinal axis between said pick-up position and said insert position;
 - said second movable means (102b) is configured to rotate in said pick-up position to pick up a propelling charge.

2. Artillery ammunitions loading system (100) according to claim 1, wherein said first movable means (102a) for loading projectiles and said second movable means (102b) for loading propelling charges have respectively a first position misaligned with respect to a longitudinal axis of said cannon or howitzer (11) and a second position aligned with said longitudinal axis.
3. Artillery ammunitions loading system according to claim 2, wherein the movement between said first position and said second position occurs by means of said linear actuator means.
4. Artillery ammunitions loading system according to any of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** it permits the loading of said ammunitions within said cannon or howitzer (11) independently from an elevation angle acquired by said cannon or howitzer (11).