

# Bomb Loader Converted To Mobile Pruning Platform

When Randy Thompson retired from farming, he wanted a way to continue to generate income from his farm but he wanted to escape the depressed peanut and cotton business. What he settled on was Paulownia trees.

The fast-growing Asian trees develop marketable logs in just a few years but they need regular pruning. Thompson had no desire to drag a ladder from tree to tree.

He could have purchased or rented a cherry picker, but he couldn't justify the cost. So he looked around and found a surplus U.S. Air Force bomb loader. He figured there probably wasn't a more stable machine anywhere, so he bought three for \$450 each. He sold one, kept one for parts, and converted one into a mobile tree-pruning scaffold.

The loader had an air-cooled V-4 Wisconsin gas engine that was practically new and a Sunstrand hydrostatic transmission and hydraulics system that Thompson says was over-engineered, even for loading bombs.

Thompson figured the narrow machine might be a little tippy in the field so his first step was to remove the machine's small wheels and narrow axles and install a new frame made of 3 1/2-in. sq. tubing. He fitted it with the rear drive axle and front steering axle off a salvaged 1 1/2-ton Ford truck. He removed the drive shaft and mounted a 48-

tooth sprocket on the differential. A chain from a 9-tooth sprocket on the loader's hydrostatic motor drives the differential.

He put low-profile lugged tires on the rear wheels and ribbed implement tires on front.

The bomb loader had a small platform on back where the operator stood to control the machine. Thompson added a driver's seat and then extended the steering wheel and other controls.

The bomb loader lift arms are designed to raise a bomb while keeping it in a horizontal position. Thompson mounted a platform atop the arms to take advantage of this design, resulting in a working area with a level floor no matter how high or low it is. He added 30-in. high rails to the platform.

He says it takes three people to operate the machine: one to drive and two on the platform to prune. "This way, we can move slowly between the rows, pruning on both sides, without having to stop," he explains.

In addition to pruning trees, Thompson says the loader can be used for painting, roofing, or other high reach jobs.

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Thompson figured there probably wasn't a more stable machine than an Air Force bomb loader so he bought one and converted it into a pruning platform.



Thompson uses three people to prune trees - one to drive and two to do the pruning.

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