BOEING, SIKORSKY MAKE PITCHES FOR GERMAN HEAVY HELO NEED

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Boeing and Sikorsky and have laid out their pitches for an expected German procurement of heavy-lift helicopters.

Both the Boeing CH-47F Chinook and Sikorsky CH-53K King Stallion are the prime candidates for the much-anticipated €3 billion ($3.35 billion) German Heavy Transport Helicopter Program (STH). The new aircraft will replace Germany's aging fleet of license-built CH-53D Sea Stallions, which have been in service since the late 1960s.

The German defense ministry has yet to formally release details of its requirements. But it has approached both manufacturers about pricing and is expected to make a request for proposals in the next year. A selection could be made in 2018. German defense officials have previously suggested that first deliveries probably could begin in 2022.

Boeing has strongly pushed the Chinook at this year's ILA Berlin air show here, with U.K. Royal Air Force and U.S. Army aircraft participating. Boeing is suggesting the extended-range version of the CH-47F—with enlarged fuel tanks and a refueling probe—may meet Germany's needs. Germany

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wants at least some of the future fleet to be able to perform the combat search-and-rescue mission. It also wants the selected future platform to be capable of aerial refueling, something both the competing aircraft can be equipped to perform.

The CH-47F represents a “low-risk and proven capability,” said Michael Hostetter, director of vertical programs for Boeing in Germany. Choosing the Chinook would allow Germany to work even more closely with other NATO countries and neighbors that already operate the type, he said.

Hostetter said the company was ready to work with German industry if that is what the program’s requirements dictated. He also suggested that German work could be extended beyond the Chinook into other Boeing programs. He added that the company has already been exploring the potential of reserving production slots for Germany to ensure they are available if the CH-47 is selected.

Sikorsky is hoping the CH-53’s reputation and its status as the incumbent will give the company’s new CH-53K its first export customer. With the U.S. Marines buying 200 helicopters, Sikorsky is hoping to sell as many as 100 additional aircraft during the planned 11-year production run, with the capability to build as many as 32 aircraft a year, including a peak of 24 annually for the service beginning in 2026.

It was recently reported that Naval Air Systems Command has provided pricing for 41 King Stallions.

Meeting a 2022 delivery date would mean Germany receiving aircraft from a Low-Rate Initial Production (LRIP) batch of aircraft. But Michael Torok, vice president for the CH-53K program at Sikorsky, said accommodating German aircraft even into LRIP batches would not be an issue. Torok said the company would be open to working with German industry as it has done in the past on the CH-53 program. Germany’s CH-53s were built in country by Dornier, and more recently Sikorsky has worked closely with Airbus Helicopters in supporting and upgrading them.

The CH-53K has the benefit of being somewhat of a known quantity through Germany’s experience with the CH-53. But its selection would give Germany a three-engine helicopter, with a resulting increase in direct operating costs over the existing twin-engine model.
The aircraft is also currently only available through the Foreign Military Sales program, an option which Germany rarely if ever undertakes, preferring direct commercial sales with manufacturers. But the CH-53K’s large size means it would be able to accommodate several German armored vehicles, including the Fennek armored reconnaissance vehicle, as well as the Wiesel (Weasel) air-portable light tank, which is regularly transported on German CH-53s.

Boeing claims the Chinook can also carry the Wiesel internally, but has not tested this ability. Several other vehicles would have to be carried externally due to limited cabin space.

Boeing officials point out that Germany could also be an early beneficiary of the aircraft’s Block 2 upgrade, which includes the Active Parallel Actuator Subsystem. APAS helps make the Chinook easier to fly closer to its limits, increasing payload capability and performance. The Block 2 upgrade makes changes to the main rotor blades, cabin floor loading system and fuel tanks. U.S. Army MH-47Gs are will be the first to benefit from the Block 2 upgrade followed by standard CH-47Fs.

Germany has been discussing how to replace the CH-53 for a decade. For several years Eurocopter, now Airbus Helicopters, worked with Boeing on a tandem helicopter concept called the Future Transport Helicopter (FTH), which may have also fulfilled a Franco-German

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requirement for a heavy-lift helicopter. Risk-reduction work resulted in the building of small sections of fuselage and would have given the aircraft a wider cabin than the CH-53K and C-27JSpartan fixed-wing airlifter, so that vehicles and equipment could be carried internally rather than externally. The two countries were concerned that carriage of external loads affected survivability. But the FTH program was shelved due to a lack of budget in both countries.

The German air force currently operates 60 CH-53s—20 in the CH-53GS configuration and 40 CH-53GA. The GA is the latest version of the helicopter, fitted with new modern avionics, an automatic flight control system and four-axis autopilot by Eurocopter. The last of the 40 will be delivered to the German air force by year's end.

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