

RFP delayed until June 9

COMPETITORS FOR SMALL TACTICAL DRONE PREPARE FOR FLIGHT DEMO

At least four known competitors will demonstrate their offerings next month to meet the Navy and Marine Corps' small tactical unmanned aerial system (STUAS) requirements, a capability the services are currently filling with leased drones.

STUAS is intended to be an unmanned aircraft — also known as the Tier-II UAS — that would provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support for Marine Corps land forces, Navy amphibious ships and Naval Special Warfare Command. Right now, the services lease the ScanEagle drone from Boeing and Insitu.

Both the Navy and Marine Corps will procure the same system to meet both ship-based and land-based ISR needs, according to Rear Adm. William Shannon, the program executive officer for unmanned aviation and strike weapons.

The upcoming flight demo will take place two weeks after the final proposals are submitted by competitors. The original deadline for the RFP submissions was May 19, but has since been postponed until June 9.

"Once we have the proposals, about two weeks later we start the demonstration," Shannon said in an interview earlier this year. "The demonstration is not a downselect or fly-off, it is used to gather information that we'll use as part of an assessment of technical risk. If we get a proposal that says one kind of system will be developed — a very sophisticated system — but we see a very primitive system in the demonstration, that would indicate there's some significant technical risk given the short schedule that we have. We assume that our offerors have a relatively mature system when they provide their offers."

The event will take place in Yuma, AZ.

There are four known competitors for the STUAS: AAI and Textron Systems; Boeing and Insitu; General Dynamics Armament and Technical Products and Elbit Systems of America; and Raytheon Missile Systems and Swift Engineering.

Raytheon is offering the KillerBee UAS, a blended-wing design that looks like a kite and has a payload of 5,800 cubic inches.

"KillerBee, being a blended-wing design, provides us the ability to be able to carry a larger payload, both in volume and in weight," Gary Letterman, senior manager for advance programs for Raytheon, told *Inside the Navy* in an interview earlier this month. "It's just inherent in the airframe, it has very good lift-over-drag capability."

The drone is recovered in a net, Letterman explained.

"The net sways back and the aircraft absorbs into the net," he said. "We have been test flying with that net out in Yuma [AZ] now for a year plus. It took a little bit of refinement, but once we got it right, we don't damage the aircraft at all."

The design leverages open architecture to allow for the integration of payloads from other contractors, according to Letterman.

"What we're going to offer to the government is all the data rights to the interfaces such that if you have another contractor that comes along that says 'I have a different payload that I want to integrate into your aircraft,' here's the interface control documents," he noted.

The technology uses an adaptation of an existing launcher and along with the recovery net can be "easily" set up in the desert or aboard a ship, Letterman said.

"It can be easily assembled, it can be set up in an unapproved site in the desert or it can be set up on the deck of a ship," he explained. "We have done just about everything humanly possible to make the design common so that wherever you launch it from or wherever you recover it from, the equipment you're using is basically the same."

GD Armament and Technical Products and Elbit Systems of America will offer a derivative of the Hermes 90 system. A similar drone is used by Israeli and British forces to provide ISR.

"We've been working toward this particular opportunity for some 12 months," Doug Tobiassen, GD's president of UAS dynamics, told *ITN* May 18. "We think the Americanized version [of the Hermes 90] will provide operational

advantages as well as growth potential to the Navy and Marine Corps.”

Tobiassen declined to reveal any specifics of the UAS due to the ongoing competition.

Boeing and Insitu will offer a version of its ScanEagle drone currently leased by the Navy and Marine Corps. A company spokesman would not provide further details about the company’s STUAS bid.

“We are very pleased that the RFP has been released and our team is diligently reviewing the requirements and preparing a response,” Vic Sweberg, Boeing’s director of unmanned systems said in a statement provided through a spokesman last month.

AAI and Textron are offering the Aerosonde Mark 5 UAS, according to a January company statement. The Aerosonde Mark 5 UAS had its first flight at Yuma Proving Grounds in Arizona earlier this year.

An AAI spokeswoman declined to offer further details about the system last week due to the ongoing RFP submission process. — *Zachary M. Peterson*