

Sikorsky lands \$3B Aussie Navy contract

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Sikorsky Aircraft and its partners in the MH-60R Seahawk, General Electric Co. and Lockheed Martin have landed a \$3 billion Royal Australian Navy contract, giving the U.S. companies a lift right before the Paris Air Show starts on Monday.

The Australian Defense Force and the U.S. Navy announced on Thursday the RAN will be flying Sikorsky MH-60R Seahawks beginning in 2014. The sale of 24 aircraft will be carried out through a U.S. government foreign military contract and the value is an estimated figure. This is the first time the MH-60R, a subhunting helicopter, has been sold to another country, though Australia already flies Seahawks of a different variant.

"It's a very nice win. They were up against heavy competition," said Richard Aboulafia, vice president and aerospace analyst with Virginia-based Teal Group.

The primary competition for the contract was the NH-90, built by three of the biggest names in European aviation: Eurocopter, AgustaWestland and Fokker Aerostructures.

The Australian newspaper reported on its website that Europeans were stunned by the decision after the companies had invested heavily in Australia, noting that Sikorsky will build the aircraft in America. The Seahawk production line is in Connecticut.

Shares of Sikorsky's parent company, Hartford-based United Technologies Corp., rose \$1.08 to \$84.35 in Thursday trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Aboulafia said the win Down Under is a big boost for Sikorsky heading into the Paris Airshow.

"The Australians are highly respected for their professionalism," he said, and this adds a key stamp of approval for Sikorsky and its partners.

Sikorsky, Lockheed and Fairfield-based GE will all be exhibiting in Paris when the show opens Monday. It's one of the premier events for the aerospace industry and usually generates a slew of contract announcements among the big aircraft makers.

For Stratford-based Sikorsky, and its competitors, it's a chance to tout wins and show off some advances.

Sikorsky will display its S-70i Black Hawk, a new international version of the one made in Connecticut. It will also be displaying the CH-148 Cyclone, the first military variant of Sikorsky's S-92 to go into production.

Canada bought the Cyclone, but was slammed last year by the Canadian government for making changes to the vehicle specifications that created cost overruns and delays. Sikorsky was also flogged for failing to deliver the first helicopters in 2008 as the contract originally called for.

"Displaying the Cyclone at the Paris show is a way for Sikorsky to say that it is confident in the program, despite the schedule delays with the Canadian acquisition.," said Ray Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst with Newtown-based Forecast International. "It is also part of a marketing push for the helicopter. Sikorsky has proposed the Cyclone for a 30-helicopter acquisition by the German Navy to replace Sea Kings in its fleet. For this contract, the Cyclone will be competing against the NH90 and possibly AgustaWestland's AW101."

The Paris Show lasts until June 26.

Read more: <http://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Sikorsky-lands-3B-Aussie-Navy-contract-1428090.php#ixzz1PpMrENzD>