Corps Asks Industry for Longer Range, Mobile Fires Technologies for LAR Battalions

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Marine Corps is asking industry to show which technologies could be ready shortly to give its armored scout units a long-range, precision, on-the-move fires capability that could include unmanned aerial sensors, loitering guided munitions and command-and-control systems.

“We’re looking to give the Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) battalions this capability. What does industry have out there with range from 7,000 meters out to 100 kilometers?” Lt. Col. Bradley Sams, program manager for fires at Marine Corps Systems Command, said Feb. 25.

The Corps wants something with greater range and precision than the 81mm mortars that are carried by one version of its light armored vehicles (LAV). “Whether that [is] loitering munitions or a missile,” Sams told reporters in a conference call. “We’re asking industry to tell us what they have now or in development.”

The program, called Organic Precision Fires-Mounted (OPF-M), would be integrated into LAR battalions, probably co-located with the 81mm mortars company, with the weapons mounted on a LAV, a lightly armored, highly mobile eight-wheel vehicle that comes in multiple variants, said Jeff Nebel, the fires team leader. The new system would “take advantage of the sensors that already exist in the battalion. But we’re also interested in exploring other sensors that could support this capability.”

The combined systems “would support the LAR platoons up

forward," Nebel said.

The weapons employed by the OPF-M system could include loitering munitions, which are tube-launched, small rockets with optical or other sensors that can stay airborne for limited periods while the controller finds a suitable target. Later munitions might feature artificial intelligence and target-recognition capability to search for and strike defined targets, Nebel said.

Systems Command has issued requests for information (RFI) and an invitation to attend industry days March 13 and March 14 at Mary Washington University's campus in Dahlgren, Va.

"We are looking for what's in the realm of possibilities, what's available in the next year, year and a half," to help them clarify the requirements and the concepts of operations, Sams said.

The RFIs and industry days are "kind of a transition from work that's already been done on the capabilities side" at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL), which has been doing some experiments and demonstrations the last couple of years, he said. "This is a hand-off from experimentation to acquisition."

Sams said the U.S. Army has been working with the warfighting laboratory and has been helpful in sharing some of its developments in precision fires.

The current plan is to award a contract in the first quarter of fiscal 2020, with a demonstration of the proposed technologies eight to 12 months later, leading to low rate production and fielding an initial capability in the first quarter of fiscal 2022, Nebel said. Then an incremental approach would be followed to field newer technologies to enhance and upgrade the system, he said.

Marine Corps Systems Command said in a statement that the

program was part of Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller’s emphasis on rapidly fielded, longer-range precision fires in preparation for a conflict with a peer competitor, such as Russia or China.