Sikorsky, Rheinmetall Unveil Plans for German Heavy-Lift CH-53K



Sikorsky and Rheinmetall submitted a bid for production and operation of the Sikorsky CH-53K King Stallion heavy-lift helicopter. Photo by Sikorsky

Koblenz, Germany – Sikorsky and Germany's Rheinmetall submitted a bid for the production and operation of the Sikorsky CH-53K King Stallion as the Bundeswehr's new heavy-lift transport helicopter for its Schwerer Transporthubschrauber (STH) program, Lockheed Martin, which owns Sikorsky, said in a release.

"Our entire team is pleased to offer the CH-53K, the most efficient, capable and intelligent helicopter that will deliver the best long-term value to the Bundeswehr through the 21st century," said Beth Parcella, CH-53K's international business development director.

Sikorsky and Rheinmetall formed a STH project team of more than 10 German companies, which includes MTU Aero Engines, Autoflug GmbH and Hydro Systems.

Parcella stressed that it was important "to build a strong German industrial team early on and to capitalize on the know-how of the German teammates for the STH project." This will ensure the quality of the offer and subsequently the high availability of the CH-53K in the German air force, she said.

"German companies will play a significant role in the success of the CH-53K program," said Mike Schmidt, managing director of Rheinmetall Aviation Services. "For the industry, this means the creation of many new, long-term jobs for highly

qualified employees and an important transfer of know-how. Sikorsky and Rheinmetall prepared the application together over a long period of time – this has strengthened the bonds within our team."

The CH-53K's avionics and digitized flight control systems are designed to accommodate future software upgrades, and its internal payload capability may be increased substantially with relatively simple modifications. An integrated sensor system enables the aircraft to predict and prevent problems at an early stage and thus drastically reduce the maintenance effort, which is key for high availability rates of the fleet.

Additionally, the CH-53K is equipped with air-to-air refueling fully interoperable with Lockheed Martin's KC-130J tanker aircraft, which the Bundeswehr is planning to operate and which is already being used by France.

The CH-53K easily accommodates the same air transport pallets, enabling fast cargo handling between it and fixed-wing transport aircrafts such as the C130-J and the A400M. This means that the helicopter can be used particularly in areas where these aircraft cannot land.

The CH-53K can be used for the tactical transport of personnel and material as well as for disaster relief, humanitarian missions, medical evacuation or combat search-and-rescue operations. For example, no other heavy-lift helicopter can transport more water to fight fires and simultaneously carry material and personnel. The CH-53K features fly-by-wire flight controls, reducing the pilots' workload and allowing pilots to anticipate limits while keeping their eyes outside.

If the bid is successful, Sikorsky and Rheinmetall intend to set up a logistics hub and a STH fleet support center at Leipzig/Halle Airport. The two are in talks with representatives of state government, local companies and the

airport operator.