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VtMd news
Britain to buy 30 Chinooks

AFTER a 14-year on-off flirtation the
RAF is finally to get its Medium Lift
Helicopter in the form of 30 Boeing
Vertol Chinooks, to be bought direct
from the American manufacturer. In
a written answer in the Commons on February 1, Defence Secretary Fred Mulley disclosed that Britain is nego-tiating with Boeing Vertol to buy the CH-47 twin-rotor transport helicopter. RAF Ghinooks will be fitted with British avionics.

An Intent to Purchase (ITP) was signed by Treasury officials from the British embassy in Washington and representatives of the US company in Philadelphia on January 31. The deal, worth $200 million at 1978 prices, calls for deliveries to begin in 1980 and be completed in the following year. One or two Chinooks may be delivered in advance for service assess-ment at the UK's Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establish-ment at Boscombe Down. The agree-ment calls for offsets to the value of 25-30 per cent to be negotiated over the next ten years. The offsets need not necessarily be associated with the CH-47s, and could apply to other pro-grammes, including perhaps the AV-8B.

The possibility of licence produc-tion at Westland was dismissed be-cause costs would have been too high and the timescale too long, according to the Ministry of Defence. It is understood that in any case West-land's capacity is almost completely tied up in Lynx, Sea King/Commando and Gazelle production, and that manufacture of the large Chinook air-frame would have called for extra factory space and plant.
The same arguments also apply to the acquisition of three Chinooks by British Airways Helicopters. An order for these aircraft, the first commercial derivatives of the CH47, was expected earlier this week. A Westland spokes-man says that the company may bid for some structural and transmission components on the RAF aircraft. Britain's Ministry of Defence originally approached Agusta sub-sidiary Meridionali, which bought a Chinook licence from Vertol in the 1960s and which builds the standard CH-47C at a rate of one a month. Contracting for high-technology pro-ducts with an EEC partner would have been politically desirable, and there are clearly some regrets in Whitehall that these discussions foundered on an RAF requirement for a number of improvements which the Italian company could not implement under its agreement with Vertol.

Britain has agreed to take an im-proved version of the CH-47C with a number of features planned for the later CH-47D, and has an option on othe r improvements — glassfibre blades, for instance—at a later date. The aircraft will be basically the same as the CH-147 Chinook built for Canada, and will have an autoflight control system (AFCS), stability aug-mentation system (SAS) and a triple cargo hook. The RAF helicopters will be cleared for operation at 50,0001b at ISA sea level, compared with the 44,0001b of the US Army CH-47C. The triple-cargo hook will carry 28.0001b against the 20,0001b of the earlier air-craft.

The CH-47D is a derivative planned to enter US Army service in about 1982 or 1983. The RAF will therefore have, at least for a short while, a Chinook variant superior to anything flying in the West.

Britain first began to consider acqui-sition of a medium helicopter in the mid-1960s. In March 1967 the British

Agusta subsidiary Meridional'! has orders for more than 100 CH-47C Chinooks, of which this one for Iran is an example. The company was considered as a supplier to the RAF, but Britain's Chinooks will now be delivered from America. They will be nearly equivalent to the CH-47Ds planned for the US Army in the early 1980s

Government ordered 15 CH-47B Chinooks at a cost of £18 million, only to cancel them eight months later at a cost of £500,000 in cancellation fees. Plans to buy an MLH were revived in 1969-70, and the RAF assessed the CH-47 and the competing CH-53. The programme was shelved in August 1971.

Since then, the increase in Warsaw Pact strength over the past five years has so worried Nato strategists that several countries are now planning to improve their facilities for rapid
mobility. The US Army, for example,
is to treble its establishment of heli-copters in Europe, and now Britain is
to buy twice as many medium heli-
copters as originally planned.

France and Germany discuss civil projects
FRENCH President Giscard d'Estaing
and German Chancellor Helmut
Schmidt met in Paris earlier this week
for talks on aerospace matters.
No details of the discussions have

been given as Flight closes for press, but the future of the 200-seat Airbus Industrie A300B10 is known to have been on the agenda, as was the pro-posed European twin-CFM56 family.

U S MLS inquiry seeks "plain truth"
REPRESENTATIVES from the US and
Britain last week testified before the
US House of Representatives' trans-
portation subcommittee, which is
investigating accusations that the
Federal Aviatio n Administration deliberately misled the Icao all-weather operations panel about micro-wave landing system (MLS) perform-ance. The claim was made by Britain following the discovery of errors in computer simulations of Doppler MLS performance, and taken up by sub-

committee chairman John Burton.

US witnesses on the first day in-cluded Barry Goldwater Jnr, and FAA and Lincoln Laboratory repre-sentatives. On the British side were witnesses from the Civil Aviation Authority and Plessey. Bendix, manu-facturer of the US time-referenced scanning beam MLS, also had a rep-resentative at the inquiry. Burton has insisted that the subcommittee will not judge the technical merits of the British and US systems.