US Navy
airship
on hold

again
WASHINGTON D.C. ~

The US Navy has delayed yet
again its decision on a winner
of its airship low-level target
surveillance programme. It
now wants Goodyear and
Airship Industries/Westing-
house to respond to a series of
technical questions concern-
ing their respective systems,
and says the programme deci-
sion will be made in late April
or early May, reports Julian
Moxon.

Press reports that the
entire programme is in danger
were described by the US
Navy as "pure speculation".
"The programme is intact,"
the Navy tells Flight. "We
simply want amplification
of a number of safety and
technical matters. This
programme started from
scratch, and the Navy wants
to be sure it has a complete
understanding of the tech-
nical issues."

The unofficial line,
however, is that the Navy
is planning to shelve the
airship programme altogether
after the departure of
Navy Secretary John Lehman
in the spring. Lehman
strongly supports the use
of airships for defending
battle groups from cruise
missile attack. But dollars are
tight, and there are few
uniformed proponents of
airships to counter the power-
ful fixed-wing, lobby in the
Navy.

The Navy had originally
planned to award the
contract, said to be worth
around $200 million, last
October, for development of a
proof-of-contract airship to
prove the system works. The
48-month programme would
be followed by a full com-
petition for production of
up to 50 systems, in the
1990s.

In its latest edict, the Navy
asked contractors to respond
to a series of technical ques-
tions by March 23, and to be
ready to discuss the issues
raised the following week.

Flight understands that one
of the areas raised is the type
of material used in the
envelope, because of its effect
on radar signature, and
weight. Both manufacturers
use composite materials, and
this is an area in which the
Navy has had little
experience.

The industry teams remain
outwardly confident that the
programme will go ahead.
"We still intend to win," says
a Goodyear spokesman. "We
have 200 people assigned to
the programme, and we're
pursuing the contract with all
vigour." Westinghouse was
unavailable for comment, but
Airship Industries (which has
just started dealing stocks on
the New York market), also
said it thought the programme
was secure.

Lockheed

questions

US Navy's

ASW plans
WASHINGTON D.C. ~

The US Navy's intentions for
competitive procurement of
an advanced anti-submarine
aircraft to replace the P-3
Orion have led to criticism
from its long time P-3
supplier, Lockheed, reports
Julian Moxon.

The request for proposals,
due to be issued on May 1, will
specify that derivatives of
other transport aircraft as
well as a heavier, longer
range derivative of the P-3C,
called the P-3G, will be
considered.

Lockheed wants to keep the
P-3 production line open, to
enable it tp meet possible
contracts from overseas, esti-
mated by the company to be
worth some $5 billion. The
Navy plans to close the line
after this year's buy, however,
opening it again after a three-
or four-year,gap if Lockheed
wins the competition.
It would cost about. $400
million more to re-open the
line to manufacture 125
upgraded P-3s, says Lock-
heed, rather than keeping the
line open, and introduce the
improvements gradually. The
president of Lockheed-

California Richard Heppe
estimated that unit cost of the
P-3G (which is still largely
undefined by the Navy) would
be around $48 million. He
claims this would still be at
least $30 million less than the
cost of modifying a transport
aircraft, however.

Lockheed is openly scep-
tical of the plan to include
commercial transport aircraft
derivatives in the RFP. The
conversion would require
major structural changes,
including a bomb bay,
military cockpit, and airframe
improvements to enhance
manoeuvrability. It notes that
Congess did not accept the
need for improvements to the
P-3 airframe last year,
although it was in favour of
funding the Update IV pack-
age.

Boeing and McDonnell
Douglas are reportedly inter-
ested in responding to the
RFP, Boeing with an airframe
derived from the 757, McDon-
nell Douglas with an MD-80
derivative. These two com-
panies, along with Rockwell,
were originally involved in the
Navy's failed effort to com-
pete P-3C production. In
February, the Navy persuaded
Lockheed to turn over key
technical data to pave the way
for competitive procurement,
but the three potential
competitors concluded that
they had little chance of
matching Lockheed's price,
given its production experi-
ence with the P-3.

Pilot's

parachute
lines cut

by seat
RAF BINBROOK

A Royal Air Force Lightning
pilot was killed after he ejec-
ted and the parachute with-
drawal line was cut by the
ejection seat's guillotine unit.
The accident occurred on
March 6, 1985, over the North
Sea. Two British Aerospace
Lightning F.6s from RAF
Binbrook were engaged in air
combat training some 20 n.m.
north-east of Skegness. The
sortie went as planned until
the second engagement, when
the one aircraft was seen to

DEFENCE

make a climbing left turn and
then reverse this to a
descending right turn. The
Lightning levelled at about
11,000ft, still in a right-hand
turn, but shortly afterwards it
yawed positively to the left
and started to spin.
The pilot transmitted that
he was spinning, and the
pair's leader told him to check
his height. He then trans-
mitted "I am going out." A
bright flash was seen as he
ejected; approximately lOsec
later the aircraft hit the sea.
The leader transmitted a
Mayday on Guard and then
went to low level, where he
observed the pilot floating
50m from some aircraft debris
and an oil slick. An SAR heli-
copter recovered the pilot
35min after ejection, but when
examined in the helicopter
he was found to be dead, with
his parachute still in its
pack.

Although approximately 85
per cent of the aircraft,
including the ejection seat,
was salvaged, no conclusive
reason could be established
for the aircraft entering the
spin. Although mishandling
may have been the cause,
the possibility of a struc-
tural failure or a malfunc-
tion in the flying control
system could not be dis-
counted.

An exhaustive specialist
investigation was conducted
to determine why the pilot
died. Examination of the ejec-
tion seat, the salvaged cockpit
area, and the pilot's flying
equipment revealed that the
ejection seat had operated
correctly, except that the
parachute withdrawal line
had been cut by the guillotine
mechanism before releasing
the parachute.

The guillotine unit, which is
used to separate the pilot from
the ejection seat if the auto-
matic sequence fails, normally
only operates when the pilot is
clear of the seat, or if he oper-
ates the manual separation
lever. In this accident the
reason for the unit's operation
could not be positively deter-
mined, although the gyrations
of the seat after ejection could
have moved the parachute
pack forward, away from its
container, which would in
turn have activated the guil-
lotine unit.

As a result of the accident
the ejection seat is being
modified, and some changes
have been made to the Light-
ning training syllabus.

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