

AeroVironment Unveils Improved Version of Switchblade One-Way Attack Drone



The larger Switchblade 600 can engage with bigger targets and has a longer endurance. AEROVIRONMENT INC.

ARLINGTON, Va. – Unmanned aircraft maker AeroVironment has developed a bigger, badder version of Switchblade, its man-portable, tube-launched, loitering small aerial missile system.

The Switchblade 600 has greater capabilities for engaging larger, hardened targets with multi-purpose anti-armor ammunition at longer distances than the original Switchblade, now called Switchblade 300, AeroVironment officials said Oct. 1.

Both versions of small loitering missile, or loitering munition, are unmanned aerial vehicles designed to engage fixed and moving ground targets beyond line-of-sight with an explosive warhead. While launched from a tube like a mortar shell, they can “loiter” in the air for an extended period of time before striking, giving the operator time to decide when and what to attack.

Switchblade 600 comes with a patented “wave-off” feature that allows operators to abort the mission at any time if non-combatants are spotted too close to the target. If the situation changes, the feature allows operators to re-engage either the same target or others, avoiding collateral damage.

Larger than the back-packable 5.5-lb. (2.5 kg) Switchblade 300, the 600 model, weighing 50 lbs. (22.7 kg) is still

considered to be portable and takes about eight minutes longer to set up than the two minutes for the smaller version. Both platforms are deployed via the launch tube in which they are transported. The new version has greater endurance, 40 minutes of flight time versus 15 minutes for the 300. It also comes with a high performance electro-optical/infrared gimballed sensor suits, precision flight control and a touchscreen, tablet-based fire control system with the option to pilot the loitering missile manually or autonomously.

The \$76 million contract awarded recently for Switchblade 300 procurement and support as part of the U.S. Army's Lethal Miniature Aerial Missile System (LMAMS) program "is a testament to its battle-proven track record," said Wahid Nawabi, AeroVironment's president and CEO. Since 2012, Switchblades have been fielded by the Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Command.

AeroVironment has been developing the Switchblade 600 with several Defense Department customers, said Brett Hush, senior general manager of Product Line Management for AeroVironment's Tactical Missile Systems. "But the only one that we can talk about publicly at this point in time is the U.S. Marine Corps," where AeroVironment is one of the competitors in a program that will hold a fly off in January to down select to a single supplier.