France to double military vehicle order, asking for multiple variants

By: Pierre Tran 2 days ago



The Light VBMR weighs 15-17 tons, can reach a speed of 100 kph and has a range of 600 kilometers. (Nexter)

VERSAILLES, France — France is to double its order for the Light VBMR reconnaissance vehicle, a key element in the French Army's €10 billion (U.S. $12 billion) Scorpion modernization program.

An additional 420 Light VBMR units are to be ordered, taking the total to 978, according to Erwan, the director of the Scorpion modernization program at Direction Générale de l'Armement procurement office. Erwan, whose last name is not used for security reasons, spoke to the press May 16.

A first delivery of the Light VBMR is due in 2022, with 489 shipped by 2025.

In addition to the highly equipped 489, there will be a further 200 units ordered, with the latter more lightly equipped units, according to the annex of the draft multiyear military budget law for 2019-2025.

That raises the total of Light VBMRs to 689 delivered by 2025.

After 2025 and out to 2032, there will be a further 978 ordered for Scorpion, and 1,060 ordered outside of the program, with a total of 2,038 for that period.

A first delivery of an armored personnel carrier version of Light VBMR is due in 2021, a reconnaissance model in 2022 and a communications variant in 2023.

A wide spectrum of missions will be covered, as there will be 16 versions of the vehicle, with 10 of the APC, two for recon and four for comms.

Nexter will design, build and service the vehicles, while Texelis will supply the chassis and driveline.

Nexter's factory at Roanne, central France, will build the Light VBMR, adding to the workload generated by orders for the Griffon troop carrier and the Jaguar combat and reconnaissance vehicle.

The Light VBMR weighs 15-17 tons, can reach a speed of 100 kph and has a range of 600 kilometers. That weight compares to the French Army's initial requirement for a 10-ton vehicle, before industry called that unrealistic.

One of the vehicles can be airlifted on a C-130, while two can fit on the A400M transport aircraft. Regarding the latter, the vehicles can be fully equipped for combat and still be successfully loaded.

The vehicle is armed with a remote controlled 7.62mm machine gun, a minigun at the rear and self-protection with a Galix smoke dispenser.

The vehicle can carry 10 people — eight troops, a driver and a gunner.

France is also to order an upgrade for 200 Leclerc main battle tanks, with a first delivery of a modernized tank in 2021, Erwan said. Sensors and the Bull SICS battle management system, or Scorpion Information Communication System, will bring the tank into the Scorpion's so-called collaborative combat concept, which seeks to heighten teamwork on the ground and with commanders at the regimental level.

An order for the Griffon multipurpose troop carrier is to be raised to "a target" of 1,872, up 150 units from a previous total, Erwan said. A first delivery is due by the end of the year, with certification in the second quarter of 2019. Some 936 units are due by 2025.

Contracts for those increased orders are expected to be signed later this year after the French Parliament formally adopts the draft military budget law, expected in July.

That boost in orders follows the Army's call for a speedy introduction of the new armored vehicles, to replace an aging fleet of VAB troop carriers. There is a 2,700-strong fleet of VABs, which are some 40 years old.

The briefing by Erwan was on a press trip organized by Gicat, the French trade association for makers of land weapons, ahead of the Eurosatory trade show, which runs June 11-15.