

TacAir's Jordanian F-5s Ready To Rumble

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James Drew



Tactical Air Support

One of the private firms competing for “Red Air” services contracts with the U.S. government has finished importing the Royal Jordanian Air Force’s divested fleet of Northrop F-5s.

Tactical Air Support (TacAir) received approval from the U.S. State Department in late 2016 to import 21 of the retired military aircraft. The company now reports it has received all 21 aircraft: 17 by ship and four aboard a Boeing 747 freighter.

The company provides consulting services to the U.S. military and is now targeting the market for privately owned and operated aggressor squadrons for fighter combat training.

TacAir has operating locations in Reno, Nevada, and St. Augustine, Florida, and is vying for sizable contracts with the U.S. Air Force and Navy for adversary aircraft services. The company also has ambitions to expand internationally, with the largest single contract opportunity being in the UK.

James Dormer, TacAir assistant vice president and business development executive, says the F-5s arrived in the U.S. earlier this year and the company now counts 26 in its inventory. The firm also has one early-model F-5B “Freedom Fighter” and four former Royal Canadian Air Force twin-seat Canadair CF-5Ds, originally built under license in Canada.

Dormer says all 21 single and twin-seat F-5E/Fs imported from Jordan are being reassembled and inspected by the original manufacturer, Northrop, at the company’s F-5 depot in St. Augustine. Of those aircraft, about half have

been fully refurbished and painted. They arrive in one of two aggressor paint schemes: arctic white or desert brown.

The F-5s are TacAir's answer to the Air Force's and Navy's call for privately operated aggressor aircraft, with two massive long-term service contracts up for grabs.

The nearest contract opportunity is the Naval Air Warfare Center's 4th-Generation Fighter Jet Services program, which seeks contractor-operated supersonic aircraft capable of replicating the flight profile of modern-day opponents.

The Navy and Marine Corps already operate F-5 Tiger IIs in this role, flying against their F/A-18s and AV-8B Harriers. TacAir feels well-positioned for the competition now that most of its Jordanian F-5s are assembled and ready to fly.

Dormer confirms that TacAir has responded to the Navy's request for proposals with F-5s, and says a contract announcement is expected in the next couple of months. The winner would start flying for the Navy in December 2018.

Looking further ahead, the company is eyeing a program to provide Red Air services to Air Combat Command. Draken International is the incumbent for this work, flying radar-equipped A-4K Skyhawks at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

The new program for Air Combat Command is called Combat Air Forces Adversary Air (CAF ADAIR). It will provide contractor services at Nellis and several other bases where fighter aircraft train.

The final RFP had been expected later this year, but a contract notice published by the Air Force in early October indicates that the RFP for CAF ADAIR has slipped to April 2018. A contract award is now anticipated in May 2019, with flight operations starting in June 2019.

TacAir will propose its F-5 fleet, but the company faces tough competition. Other firms vying for this contract include Draken International, Discovery Air Defense and Textron Airborne Solutions/Airborne Tactical Advantage Company.