

You remember [Darlene Druyun](#), don't you?

Ms. Druyun—called by her subordinates “the Dragon Lady” because of the way she ran her fiefdom in the US Air Force’s acquisition realm—was sentenced to nine months in prison and fined \$5,000 for her corrupt role in fixing contract awards to The Boeing Company. Boeing’s CFO was fired and its CEO resigned for their roles in the scandal. Boeing [ultimately settled](#) with the U.S. Department of Justice for *\$615 million*

. Almost two years ago, Aviation Week & Space Technology [ran a piece](#) on the sixth anniversary of her guilty plea.

And today, we are reminded once again of the Dragon Lady as we ponder the USAF procurement puzzler that is the recent award of the Light Air Support (LAS) contract. We first wrote about the issues associated with the LAS contract award [right here](#). In that article we had some strong words about the “fiasco,” and pointed the finger at both Hawker Beechcraft Defense Company (HBDC) and the Air Force. We wrote—

The Air Force could have resolved this with some open communication as to why HBDC was excluded from the competitive range. ... Remember, the Commander-in-Chief has promised taxpayers more transparency, and his folks clearly are not living up to his pledge.

HBDC still has to explain (to its Board of Directors and shareholders (if to nobody else) why a critically important piece of correspondence lay unopened for two weeks, letting regulatory deadlines lapse in the meantime. (We would not want to be in that contracts manager’s seat right now....)

Not to mention, of course, why its proposal for such a ‘must-win’ competition was so flawed that the Air Force threw it out as being (essentially) uncorrectable. Did HBDC have the right skill sets? Did they put the company’s varsity team on the proposal? What went wrong?

It is incorrect to posture this story in terms of ‘USA versus Brazil’. That’s not what this is about. What it is about, quite clearly, is having the Air Force act like stewards of taxpayer funds, and explain their decision-making. The Air Force is hunkered-down and lawyered-up, and acting like this is an adversarial relationship. Instead, they need to come clean and make this all go away.

HBDC needs to understand why it screwed-up, so we can get the warfighters the light air support (and reconnaissance) necessary to minimize the loss of life in the war zone.

Soon after we wrote the above, HBDC President Jim Maslowski abruptly announced his retirement. [We told](#) our readers, “The HBDC Board of Directors apparently held Admiral Maslowski responsible for the fiasco we described in our article. His departure was abrupt and

Revenge of the Dragon Lady: Another USAF Procurement Puzzler

Written by Nick Sanders
Monday, 05 March 2012 00:00

unplanned-for, as the company has appointed an interim President while they search for a suitable successor.”

What’s new?

Well, on February 29, 2012, the Air Force [announced](#) that it was terminating Sierra Nevada Corporation’s LAS award (for “convenience” we assume). And not only was it terminating SNC’s contract, but it was also going to “launch an investigation into the original [source selection] decision.” That didn’t sound very good. The official USAF announcement (as published in the AOL Defense article linked to above) read—

Today, the Air Force advised the Department of Justice that it will take corrective action on the Afghanistan Light Air Support contract and will set aside the contract award to Sierra Nevada effective March 2, 2012. Michael B. Donley, the Secretary of the Air Force, said, ‘While we pursue perfection, we sometimes fall short, and when we do we will take corrective action. Since the acquisition is still in litigation, I can only say that the Air Force Senior Acquisition Executive, David Van Buren, is not satisfied with the quality of the documentation supporting the award decision.’ Additionally, General Donald Hoffman, commander of Air Force Materiel Command, has initiated a Commander Directed Investigation into the matter.

Yeah. No, that *really* didn’t sound good. *At all*.

Anytime you’ve got the Secretary of the Air Force commenting on the deficiencies of a contract award, you can be fairly sure there are going to be career-limiting consequences for some body, or bodies.

In a [follow-up story](#) at DefenseNews, Air Force General Norton Schwartz called the LAS contract award situation “an embarrassment” and “a profound disappointment.” The story reported—

The move comes as a damaging setback for the Air Force, which has tried to reform its weapons-buying practices after a drawn-out competition for a new aerial refueling tanker that was plagued by scandal and controversy. ... The four-star general warned of drastic disciplinary action if the investigation reveals the contract was derailed by wrongdoing.

‘I can assure that if it wasn’t an innocent mistake, there will be hell to pay,’ he said.

He said the ‘stakes are high’ and that the Air Force would work hard to remedy the problem. ‘We will work our asses off,’ he said.

The reference in the DefenseNews story, of course, is to the KC-X aerial tanker competition, which has been the subject of several blog articles on this site. During that competition, the Air Force promised to put its best and brightest acquisition professionals on the procurement, so as to forestall problems such as bid protests. Despite the assurances, the KC-X competition

Revenge of the Dragon Lady: Another USAF Procurement Puzzler

Written by Nick Sanders

Monday, 05 March 2012 00:00

stands out as a poster child for what not to do.

Let us all hope that there is a new generation of Air Force acquisition “best and brightest” who can quickly get to the bottom of this fiasco and correct the situation. Apparently, the old guard ain’t cutting it.