

NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Helikites Prove Effective at Protecting US Troops in Afghanistan.

For the last few months a new type of miniature, high-altitude aerostat has been used to protect US troops in small isolated bases in Afghanistan. A number of 75m³ "Desert Star Helikites", made by Allsopp Helikites Ltd in England, have been lifting high fidelity, very-steady, gyro-stabilised, video cameras high into the Afghan sky. The cameras are capable of spotting Taliban fighters from miles away during both day and night. The cameras also give the exact position of the insurgents allowing effective action to be taken against them.

The new Helikites have now had significant time in theatre and have proved successful. The Taliban have learnt to keep well away from areas protected by Helikite cameras, allowing troops to control the area more easily and reducing incoming fire. More Helikites are now being bought. This should lead to fewer casualties and ease the strain on the troops.

In large US bases, huge aerostats of conventional design, that are over ten times the size of the Helikite, are normally used to do this job. However, they are too large, expensive and unwieldy to be operated in small fire bases. Also, their helium requirement is too great. So, until now these small bases have had no persistent airborne surveillance - a fact that the Taliban have exploited for many years. So, in 2012 the US Army Rapid Equipping Force bought Helikites renamed as the "Small Tactical Multi-Purpose Aerostat System (STMPAS)" via Carolina Unmanned Vehicles Inc. The cameras were integrated by Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI).

Helikites are not simple balloons, but high performance kite/balloon hybrid aircraft. Originally patented for scientific work by Sandy Allsopp, they have the capability of exploiting both wind and helium for lift in a stable aerodynamic way. Helikites are therefore able to flying thousands of feet high in the thin atmosphere of the Afghan mountains. They can also cope with winds up to gale force, dust storms, and heavy rainfall without the complexities of ballonets or vulnerable fins. Only two trained personnel are required to operate Helikites, compared with up to 14 personnel for the old type of large aerostats.

Helikites never shot down. The large traditional aerostats are often shot, because they are huge and relatively low for their size – so an easy target. Also, their winches are very slow. In contrast, so far Helikites have never been shot. This is because they are one tenth the size, fly relatively higher and have high-speed winches, so they are a much harder target to hit. Also, a small puncture has no immediate effect on the Helikite and the noise of the shot gives away the snipers general position - allowing the Helikite cameras to locate him exactly. So shooting at Helikites does not seem to be a generally viable activity. In fact, it can be effectively exploited as a way of flushing out the Taliban.

No Interference with helicopter operations. Before deployment, some staff expressed concern that Helikites would interfere with helicopter traffic. These fears proved groundless. In reality, US helicopter pilots have had no problems with Helikites (or other aerostats) flying in their area of operations. On the contrary, they appreciated the high-visibility Helikites, using them as handy navigational aids when hopping from one fire base to another.

Long-Range Radio Comms

The other use for Helikites in Afghanistan is for radio-relay. Persistent, broadband MANET or 4G communications can be easily and reliably provided over thousands of square miles, within a few minutes of a Helikite arriving on site.



75m³ Desert Star Helikite in Afghanistan being inflated for Base Protection and in Flight

About Allsopp Helikites Limited

Allsopp Helikites Ltd is a design house and manufacturer of advanced lighter-than-air, miniature, all-weather aerostat systems. The company delivers a full range of products including Helikite aerostats, Helibases, Helikite winches, flying line, video surveillance cameras, aerial photographic equipment, radio-relay systems, Jungle Marker Helikites, balloon cut-down devices, helium, and aerostat trailers. Allsopp Helikites Ltd is a privately owned SME operating from its aerostat test flying base in Damerham, Hampshire, England.

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