

Carolina Unmanned Vehicles Contract for a New Aerostat System

Carolina Unmanned Vehicles, Inc. (CUV), Raleigh North Carolina, announces a contract for a new version of the Lightweight Aerostat System (LAS) with Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, NM. Sandia is a multiprogram laboratory operated by Sandia Corporation, a Lockheed Martin company, for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration.

The contract will develop and deliver a communications relay version of LAS, called LAS-CR, to carry a Sandia supplied communications payload and a camera system. The system includes a Carrier, a 35 cubic meter (1235 cubic feet) Helikite aerostat, and a stabilized camera payload. The Carrier, built by Carolina Unmanned Vehicles, is a trailer with helium tanks, winch and launch equipment for the Helikite. It mounts all the handling equipment in one small trailer towed by an SUV or pickup truck. Many comparable aerostat handling systems are five to ten times as large, and require multiple trucks for carriage.

Allsopp Helikites Ltd., Hampshire, Great Britain, builds the Helikite. Smaller and more versatile than comparable units, the patented Helikite supports more payload for its size than any ordinary aerostat and operates in much higher winds than traditionally shaped blimp designs, improving system utility and capability in adverse weather. It has lifting surfaces to support the blimp in winds which drive traditional designs into the ground by wind drag. The LAS-CR will be able to be launched in 30 mph winds and to continue operations in 40 mph wind.

The camera payload by Hood Technology, Hood River, Oregon is a stabilized turret system originally built for Insitu Corporation's SeaScan UAV and currently being used on Boeing's ScanEagle UAV. It is also used on the SeaFox Unmanned Surface Vessel, which is being prepared for shipment to Iraq. Its gyro stabilized mounting allows detailed surveillance of people and vehicles around the LAS deployment, out to several miles. It is ideally suited to securing base areas in Iraq, and for homeland security missions in the US.

Versions of LAS are suitable for surveillance / security, communications relay and research missions. It operates for weeks at a time at a fraction of the cost of comparable aircraft or Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAV). It requires only two technicians, not highly trained pilots or UAV operators. It meets all FAA regulations and is readily operated in FAA controlled airspace, unlike most UAVs.

Carolina Unmanned Vehicles is a small woman-owned company focused on autonomous and remotely operated sensor platforms, primarily UAVs. They provide both developmental work and technical support and analysis of UAV systems and related components.

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