

The Royal Navy's Sea King Mk7 Force have completed their 1,000th operational mission in Afghanistan. Sea King helicopter squadrons from Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Culdrose have been operating from Camp Bastion since 2009 and have contributed to the confiscation of significant amounts of IED-making equipment, arms and drugs, and the detainment of suspected insurgents. Following their help, on a recent vehicle interdiction, ground forces seized over 1,200kg of unprocessed wet opium with a street value of around £1.9m. Royal Navy Airborne Surveillance and Control helicopters operate like 'flying radar stations', detecting enemy aircraft, ships and even vehicle movements over land. Their job is primarily to provide Royal Navy ships with protection against low-flying enemy aircraft and missiles, using radar to detect enemy aircraft, feeding the information back to the ship for investigation, and, if necessary, directing the aircraft sent to intercept them. However, the helicopters are currently proving equally effective operating over land, providing wide area surveillance in Afghanistan. Being based on-scene at Camp Bastion, aircrews are able to react swiftly to events on the ground, directing coalition aircraft and ground forces to investigate, and in some cases destroy, suspected enemy targets. Two RNAS Culdrose-based squadrons take rotating one-year tenures in theatre. During their time in theatre, 854 and 857 Naval Air Squadrons have enabled the discovery of significant amounts of IED-making equipment, arms, drugs and suspected insurgents. They have regularly directed ground forces to vehicles laden with fertiliser, electric wiring and batteries, all of which are used to make explosives. Their actions have directly helped to save the lives of Afghan citizens and coalition troops. Operating in desert conditions in temperatures ranging from minus 10 to 45 degrees Celsius, and, with the ever-present threat of enemy action, the helicopters have had a number of enhancements fitted. They have improved engines and different rotor blades, are night-vision-capable, and carry a sophisticated defensive aids suite. To maintain the core maritime skills of our Sea King crews, the 'off watch' squadron embarks upon various Royal Navy warships to hone their maritime skills, ensuring that they remain fully capable of protecting UK forces at sea.