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Tiny, Suicidal Drone/Missile Mashup Is Part of U.S.' Afghanistan Arsenal

By Spencer Ackerman

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The six-pound foldable mashup of missile and drone known as the Switchblade is part of the U.S. arsenal in Afghanistan. Photo: AeroVironment

U.S. troops may be winding down their war in Afghanistan, but they're now also operating one of the most bleeding-edge lethal drones available.

Afghanistan is the trial by fire of the Switchblade, AeroVironment's much-hyped miniature mashup of drone and missile. Most killer drones are designed like aircraft and fire missiles at a target. The Switchblade *is* the missile.

Unveiled to much fanfare in 2011 — it even got its own weird Taiwanese animation — as of last fall, Army soldiers in Afghanistan had yet to use the six-pound Switchblade they paid some \$10 million to procure. But the U.S.-NATO military command there says they're loving what they're seeing from it.

"Switchblade is in use in Afghanistan and has proven to be a very effective tool in our campaign," the 3rd Infantry Division's Lt. Col. Ben Garrett, a spokesman for U.S. troops in southern Afghanistan, confirms to Danger Room.

But that's all the military will confirm. It's not saying anything about "deployment, effectiveness, distribution or tactical employment" of the system, Garrett says, beyond an assurance that the Switchblade is "very effective." Nothing about how many times it's been operated; nothing about the breakdown between its surveillance missions and its lethal ones; and certainly nothing about its accuracy.