

SwitchBlade-Elite

FLIGHT MANUAL

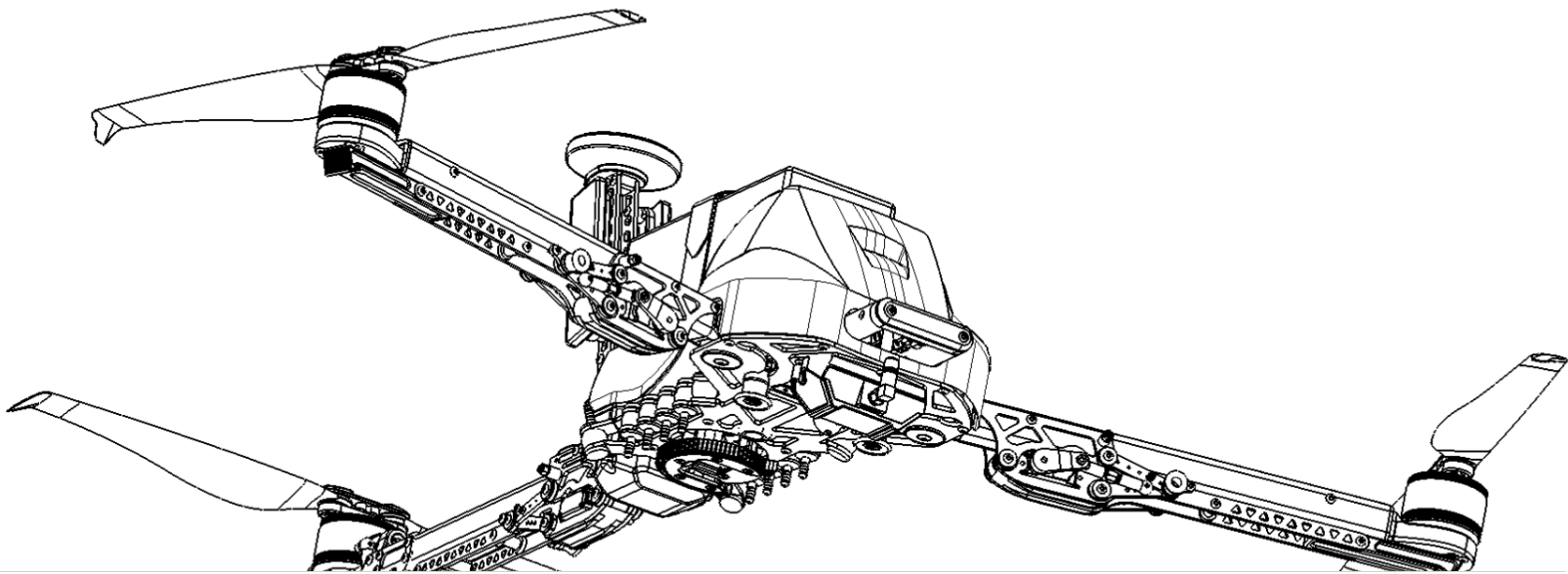
REVISION E.4 | April 2025

REVISION HISTORY

Revision	Date	Description
A.0	March 2017	Initial Release
B.0	January 2018	Updated Images & Flight Modes
C.0	May 2021	Updated for Mark 2.0 Release
D.0	December 2022	Updated for Mark 2.3 Release
E.1	October 2024	Updated for mark 2.4 / 2.5 Release
E.2	February 2025	Updated Inspection Process
E.3	March 2025	Updated Battery Positioning Procedure
E.4	April 2025	Added GCS A and D button descriptions

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SwitchBlade-Elite Overview

DISCLAIMER AND WARNING

Please read this disclaimer and warning carefully and review the SwitchBlade-Elite manual prior to flight.

By using the SwitchBlade-Elite, you acknowledge that you have read, understand, and agree to this disclaimer. You agree that you are solely responsible for your conduct while using SwitchBlade-Elite, and for any direct or indirect consequences that may result from its use. You agree to only use the SwitchBlade-Elite for proper purposes that are in accordance with all local, state, and federal rules and regulations.

The SwitchBlade-Elite is not a toy and should be operated with extreme care, as improper operation can cause damage to property, serious personal injury, or death.

As with any multi-rotor aircraft, the SwitchBlade-Elite is a precise and technical machine. Novice pilots should invest sufficient time on a flight simulator and seek training from an experienced pilot before operation. The SwitchBlade-Elite manual and a flight simulator are no substitute for training with an experienced pilot, particularly when it comes to learning how to safely operate the SwitchBlade-Elite. Novice pilots should never fly without the supervision of an experienced pilot.

- ✓ Always check the SwitchBlade-Elite and its components prior to operation (see PREFLIGHT section).
- ✓ Always maintain a safe distance from the SwitchBlade-Elite when in use.
- ✓ Never attempt to touch the SwitchBlade-Elite when the rotors are moving.
- ✓ It is strongly recommended not to fly the SwitchBlade-Elite over or around people, near power lines, or any other difficult to see obstacles.
- ✓ Never fly the SwitchBlade-Elite near manned aircraft of any kind.
- ✓ Never fly with any rotors that have visible imperfections or damage.
- ✓ Always keep children and animals a safe distance away from the SwitchBlade-Elite when in use.
- ✓ Only use rotors supplied by Vision Aerial that are designed for use on the SwitchBlade-Elite.
- ✓ Always remove the rotors when making a hardware change to prevent rotor strikes in the event of unintentional motor starts.

SAFETY

It is your responsibility to learn how to safely operate the SwitchBlade-Elite and to adhere to all applicable rules and regulations.

Fly at your own risk.

The SwitchBlade-Elite is a tuned system with custom components selected for each application. Modification to, removal, or substitution of SwitchBlade-Elite components will void the warranty and can lead to unsafe operating conditions.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

IN NO EVENT SHALL VISION AERIAL BE LIABLE TO BUYER FOR ANY INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL DAMAGES, OR ANY DAMAGES WHATSOEVER RESULTING FROM THE USE OF THE SWITCHBLADE-ELITE OR FOR LOSS OF USE, DATA OR PROFITS (HOWEVER CAUSED AND UNDER ANY THEORY OF LIABILITY), EVEN IF VISION AERIAL HAS BEEN ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES. IN NO EVENT SHALL VISION AERIAL'S LIABILITY FOR A PRODUCT (WHETHER ASSERTED AS A TORT CLAIM, A CONTRACT CLAIM OR OTHERWISE) EXCEED THE AMOUNTS PAID TO VISION AERIAL FOR SUCH PRODUCT. NOTWITHSTANDING ANYTHING HEREIN, IN NO EVENT SHALL VISION AERIAL'S LIABILITY FOR ALL CLAIMS ARISING OUT OF OR RELATING TO THIS AGREEMENT EXCEED THE AMOUNTS PAID BY BUYER TO VISION AERIAL FOR PRODUCT IN THE LAST TWELVE (12) MONTHS. IN NO EVENT WILL VISION AERIAL BE LIABLE FOR COSTS OF PROCUREMENT OR SUBSTITUTE GOODS BY BUYER. THE LIMITATIONS SET FORTH HEREIN SHALL APPLY TO ALL LIABILITIES THAT MAY ARISE OUT OF THIRD-PARTY CLAIMS AGAINST BUYER. THESE LIMITATIONS SHALL APPLY NOTWITHSTANDING ANY FAILURE OF ESSENTIAL PURPOSE OF ANY LIMITED REMEDY.

Vision Aerial shall not be liable for damages or injuries incurred directly or indirectly from the use of the SwitchBlade-Elite including, but not limited to, the following situations:

- Failure of the pilot to follow proper instructions and safety warnings.
- Failure of the pilot to follow and comply with local rules and regulations.
- Failure of the pilot to inspect the SwitchBlade-Elite and its components prior to operation.
- Failure of the pilot to properly maintain and/or service the SwitchBlade-Elite through an authorized Vision Aerial service center with genuine Vision Aerial parts.
- Use of third-party products on the SwitchBlade-Elite.
- Use of the SwitchBlade-Elite in a physically or mentally impaired capacity.
- Use of the SwitchBlade-Elite without sufficient training.
- Use of the SwitchBlade-Elite in unsafe conditions, including but not limited to, bad or severe weather, such as rain, wind, snow, lightning, dust storms, etc., or in areas of magnetic or radio interference, such as power stations, broadcasting and cell phone towers, government prohibited airspace, etc.
- Improper operation, misjudgment, or risky behavior while using a SwitchBlade-Elite.
- Infringement of third-party data, audio, or video rights recorded when using the SwitchBlade-Elite.

VISION AERIAL LIMITED WARRANTY

Full text of the warranty: <https://visionaerial.com/legal/#warranty>

NOTES, CAUTIONS AND WARRANTY



NOTE: Key information for best practices and ideal operation.



CAUTION: Failure to follow these instructions could result in damage to the system.



WARNING: Failure to follow these instructions could result in injury and/or damage.

Never attempt to repair or modify any Product yourself. Disassembling a Product, including the removal of external components, may cause damage that is not covered under the warranty. The Product does not contain any user-replaceable parts.

INTRODUCTION

The SwitchBlade-Elite is a tri-rotor drone with an articulating tail, powerful and efficient electric motors, and cutting-edge flight components. Not only is the SwitchBlade-Elite fast and easy to fly, it is also capable of flying for over 30 minutes on a single charge. The SwitchBlade-Elite is light and folds up small so you'll never be unprepared. When you need to fly, you can transition from case to in the air in less than two minutes.

This manual intends to inform and educate the user on how to properly and effectively control, fly, and utilize the full functionality of the SwitchBlade-Elite. It is not advised to operate and fly the SwitchBlade-Elite without first reading and understanding the information and guidelines presented in this document.

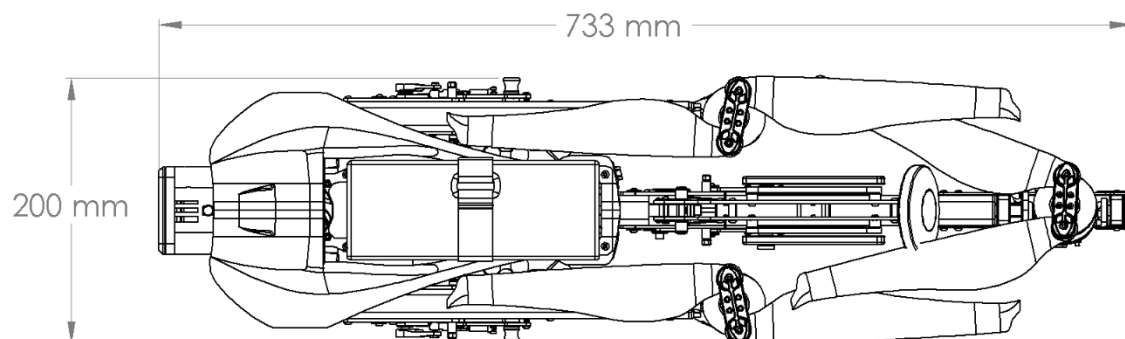
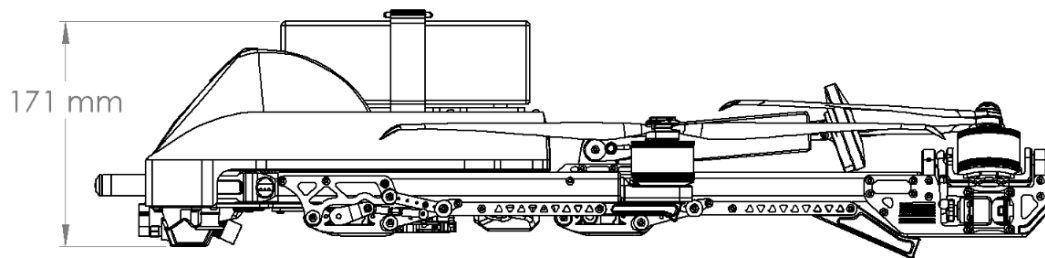
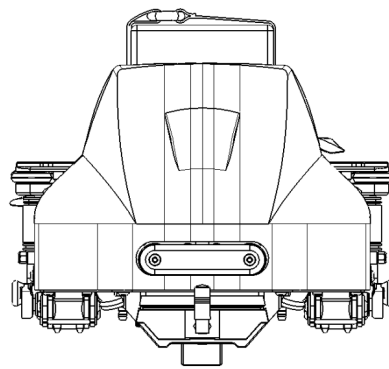
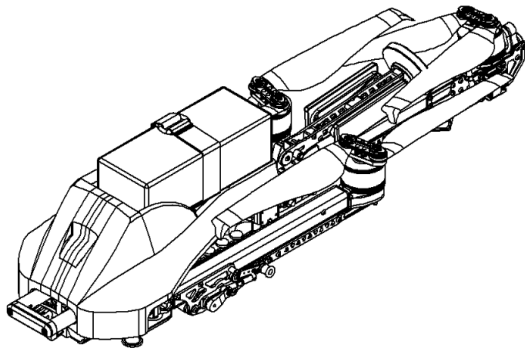
ITEMS INCLUDED

The SwitchBlade-Elite package includes:

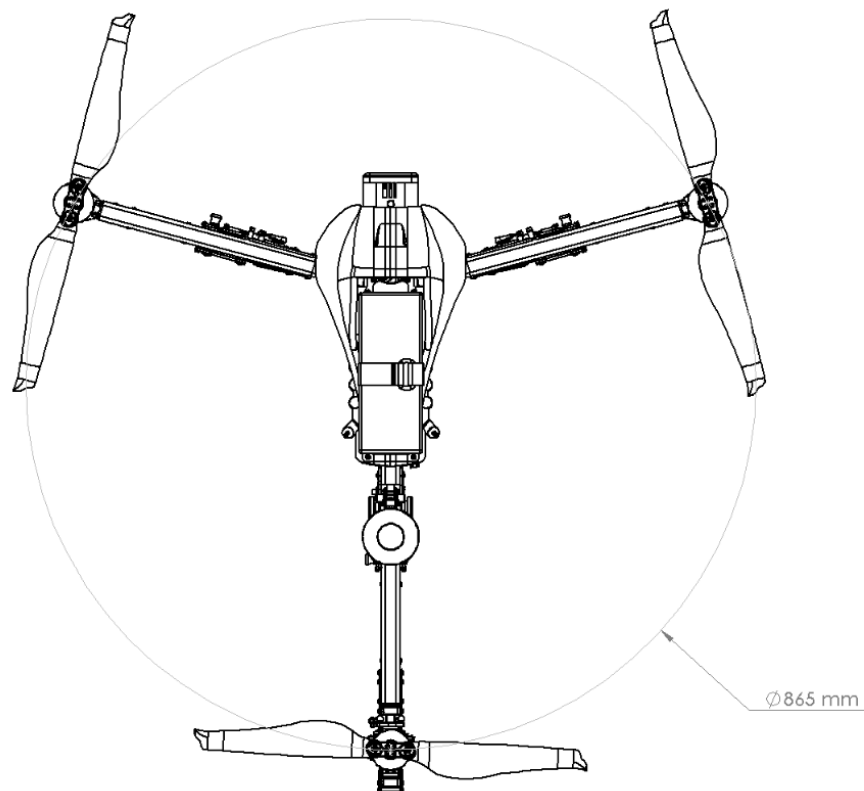
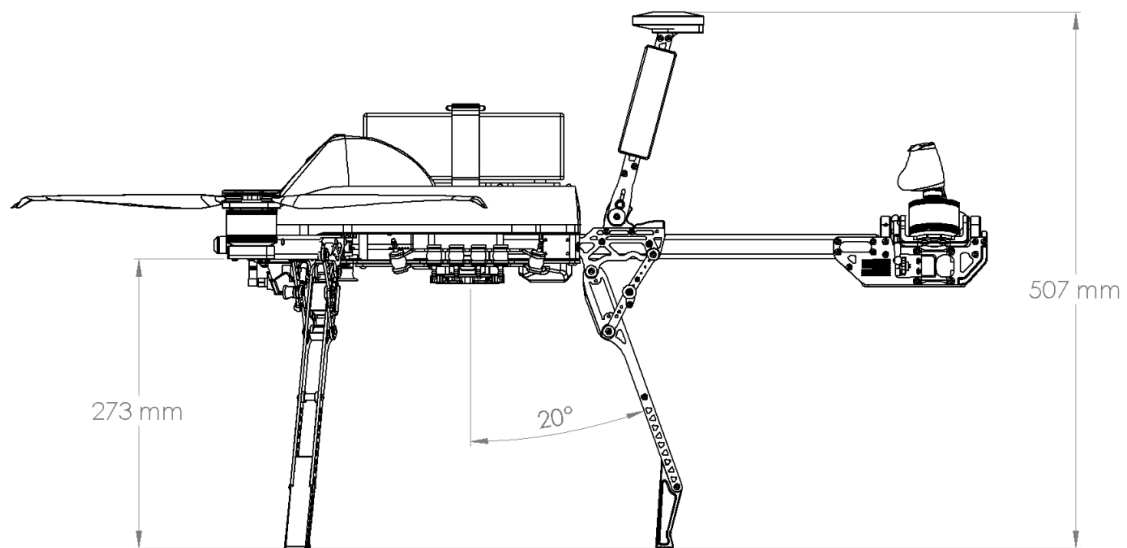
1. (1) SwitchBlade-Elite Tricopter
2. (1) Controller & Charger
3. (1) Battery
4. (1) Battery Charger & Accessories
5. (1) Hard Transport Case
6. (1) Hardware and Tool Kit

SPECIFICATIONS

Storage Configuration Dimensions



Flight Configuration Dimensions

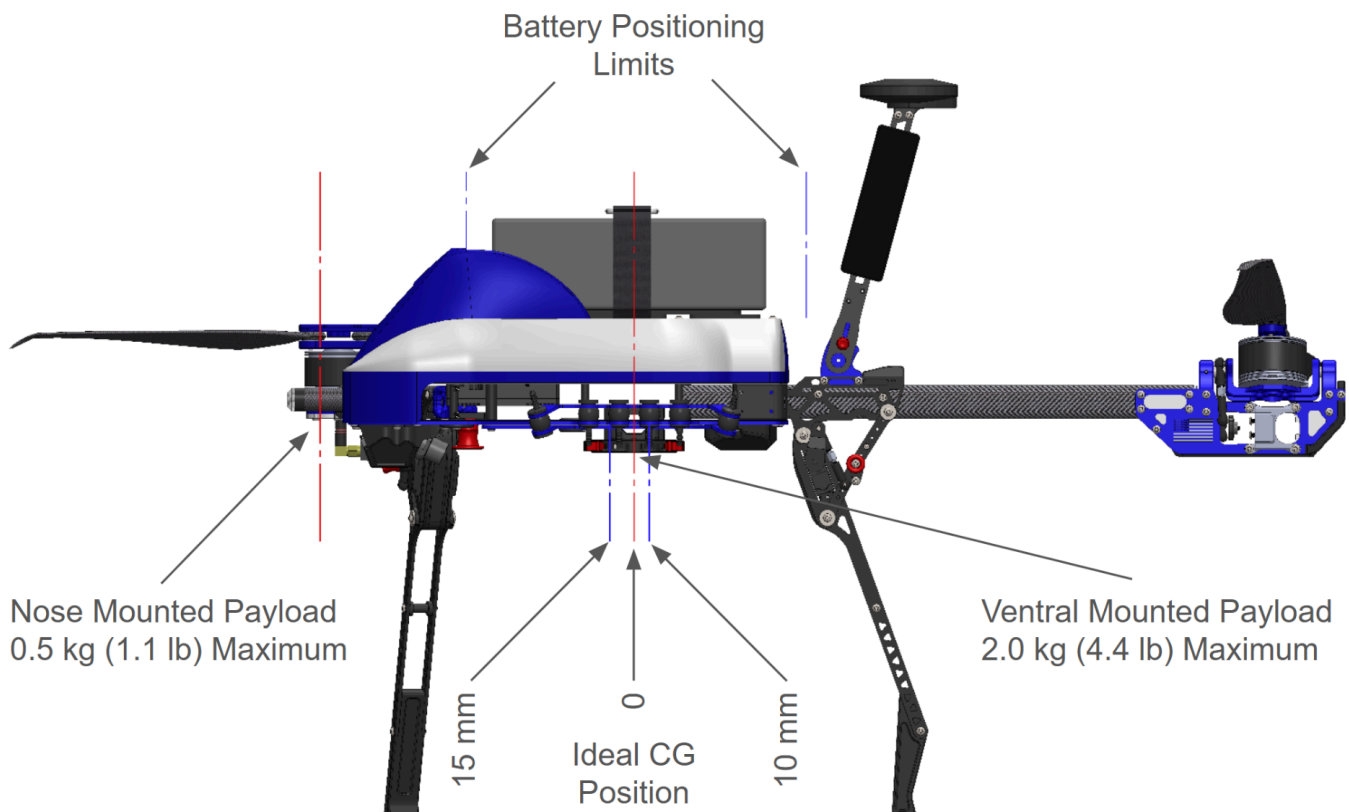


Center of Gravity Specifications

⚠ WARNING: Total Payload: Total payload capacity must not exceed 2.0 kg (4.4 lb).

Battery Positioning: The battery may be adjusted fore or aft, but not beyond the edge of the body (referenced by the blue hash lines below). Follow the battery positioning procedure to ensure proper placement.

Center of Gravity(CG): The ideal CG location is marked by the red hash mark in the diagram below. The acceptable CG limits are referenced by the blue hash lines below.



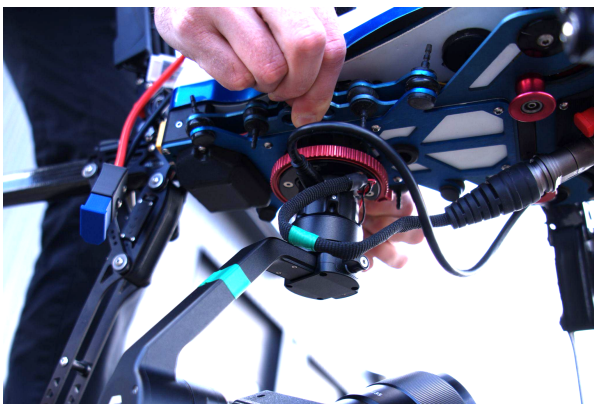
SwitchBlade-Elite Battery Positioning Procedure

This procedure details the proper method for adjusting the fore and aft battery position to ensure the SwitchBlade-Elite's Center of Gravity (CG) remains within the required range.

The process of adjusting the fore and aft battery position is easiest done on a bench, but can be performed on any flat surface suitable for takeoff and landing.

Procedure

1. Extend both arms
2. Lower the landing gear
3. Raise and secure the GPS mast
4. Extend Rotors
5. Attach payload if applicable
6. Attach the battery. Be sure to position the battery approximately 1cm (0.4in) aft of the forward limit of the body before fastening the strap. This is the default positioning and the best place to start the balancing process.
7. Identify the ideal location of the CG on your aircraft by referencing the supplied photos and diagrams.
8. Pinch between both sides of the lower plate so that the ideal CG is between your two fingers (this may be done with one or two hands depending on the size of the payload)
9. Lift the Aircraft a short distance in the air using only your fingers and evaluate the fore and aft balance, the aircraft should be evenly balanced in both directions
10. If the aircraft is not evenly balanced, place the aircraft back down and then adjust the battery fore and aft positioning until even balancing has been achieved. Be sure to not exceed the battery position and CG limits by referencing the supplied diagram.
11. Once the aircraft balances equally fore and aft, the aircraft is ready for flight.



Two Hand Balancing With Payload Attached



One Hand Balancing With No Payload Attached

Aircraft Specifications

Empennage	Carbon Fiber
Arms	Carbon Fiber
Frame & Hardware	Aluminum / Stainless Steel
Body	Polycarbonate
Motors	340kv (910W)
Rotors	46.2 x 149.8 cm (18.2 x 5.9 in) Carbon Fiber, Folding and Precision Balanced
Flight Controller	Blue Cube
Controller	Herelink
Software	Flight Deck
Flight Dimensions	865 mm Diameter
Storage Dimensions	717 mm x 200 mm x 172 mm
Case Dimensions	120 cm x 42 cm x 23 cm
Aircraft Weight (Without Battery)	3.35 kg
Aircraft Weight (With Battery)	5.3 kg
Max Takeoff Weight	7.3 kg

Battery / Charger

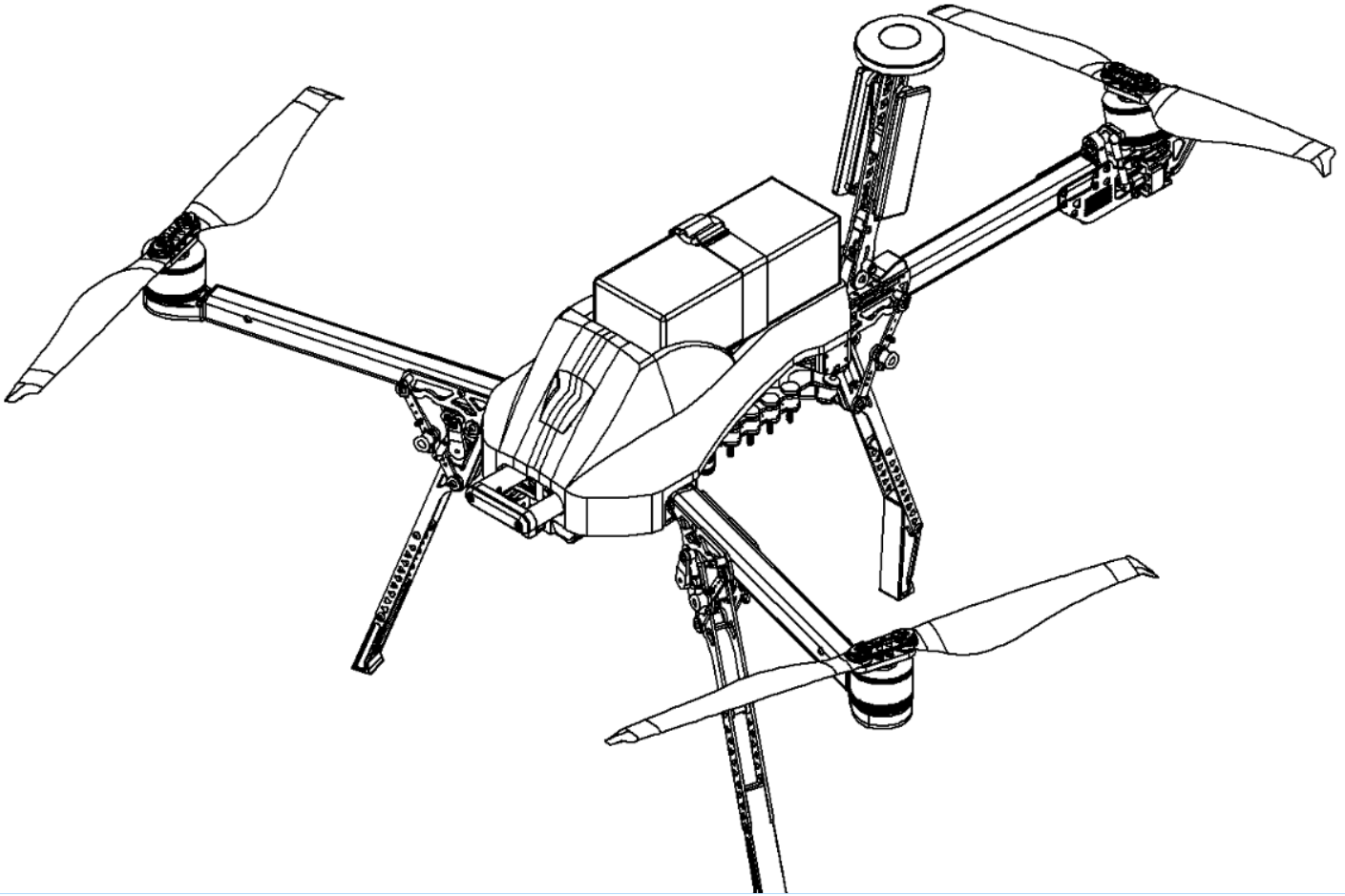
Flight Battery Included	22,000 mAh 6S Solid State Lithium Ion
Battery Charger	High Capacity AC dual battery charger

Flight Operations

Flight Times	
Direct Control Range	20 km (12.4 miles)
Autonomous Flight Range (dependant on environmental conditions)	Over 25 km (16 miles)
Max Operational Wind Speed	Up to 40 KPH (25 MPH)
Max Operational Altitude	3048 m (10,000 ft) MSL
Operational Temperature Range	-10° C to 50° C (14° F to 122° F)
GPS Accuracy non-RTK corrected	±2.5 meters (± 8.2 feet), typically < ±1 meter
GPS Accuracy RTK corrected (Optional)	±0.1 meters (±0.33 feet)
Compass	Magnetic heading

Payloads

Max Payload	2.0 kg (4.4 LBS)
Payload Mounting: Vision Aerial - Payload Connection System	M3 Flathead x 20mm circular M3 Flathead x 25mm square
Electrical Connections	Primary payload connector - up to 50 watts of 12V power and 15 watts of 5V power. XT-30 connector - up to 500 watts of unregulated pack power.
Center of Mass	Adjustable Using Battery Positioning



SwitchBlade-Elite Setup

SETTING UP THE SWITCHBLADE-ELITE

Charge Flight Batteries

The SwitchBlade-Elite kit includes a battery charger. Remove the battery from the SwitchBlade-Elite, attach the charger to a power source, and attach the battery cell balance connector to the battery charger.

1. It is recommended to always use the "balance" charge cycle.
2. It is recommended to not charge the pack at a greater rate than its capacity rating.

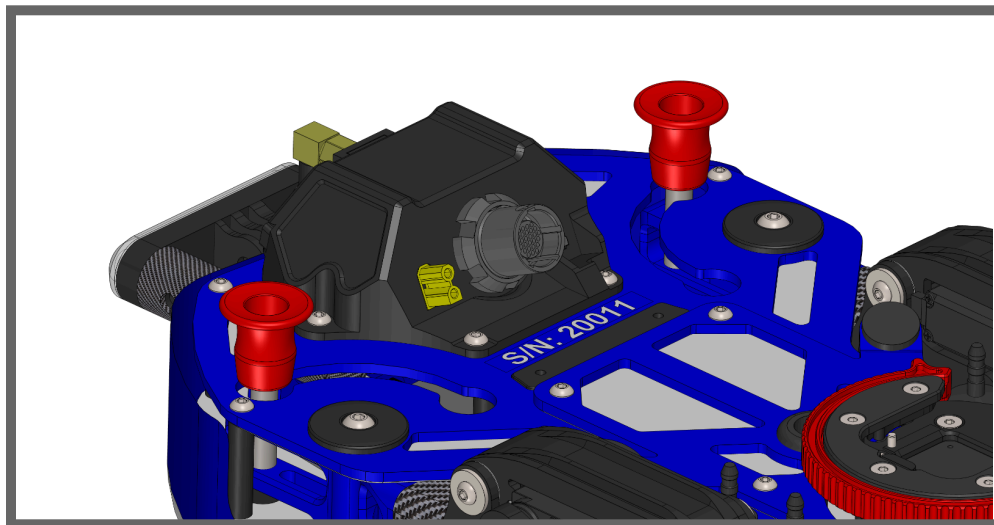
[See Appendix](#) for full instructions.

[See Battery Safety](#) for more information.

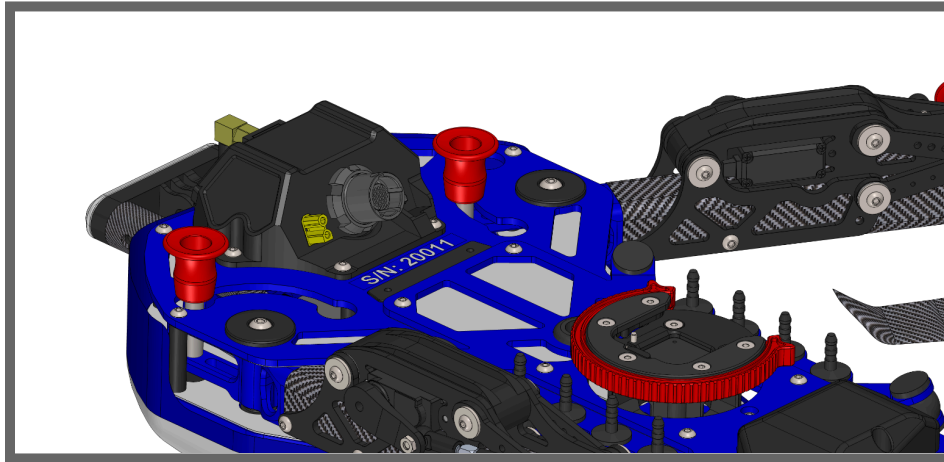
Extending the Arms

The SwitchBlade-Elite features two arms that fold in and lock for compact travel, protection, and safety. The arms are secured with red, spring-loaded pull knobs underneath the chassis.

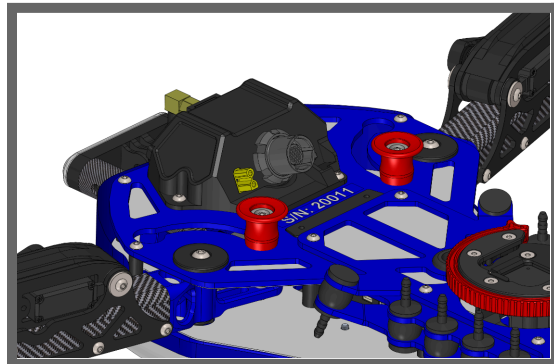
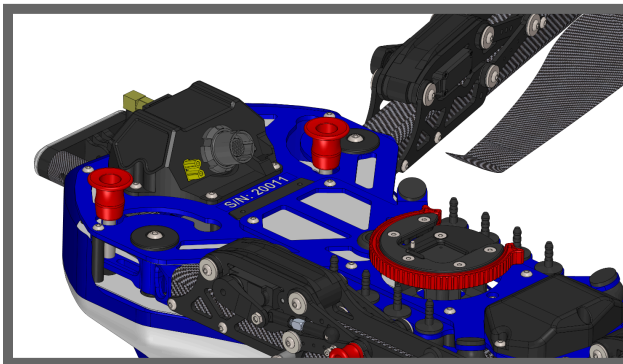
1. Remove the SwitchBlade-Elite from its case.
2. Select one arm and pull out on the corresponding red knob.



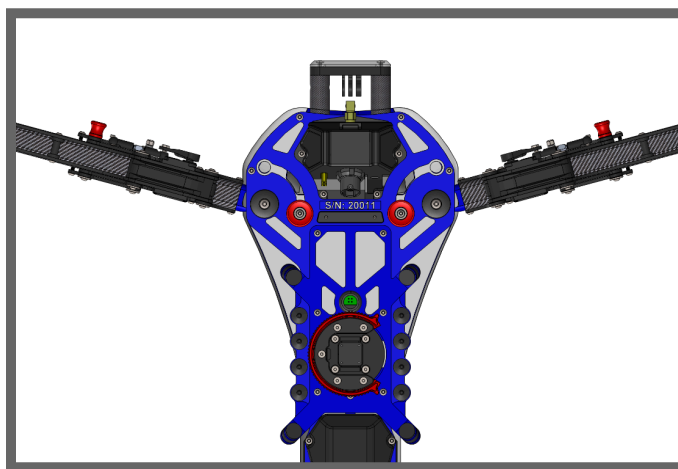
3. Rotate the arm away from the tail.



4. Once reaching the stop, release the knob to allow locking.



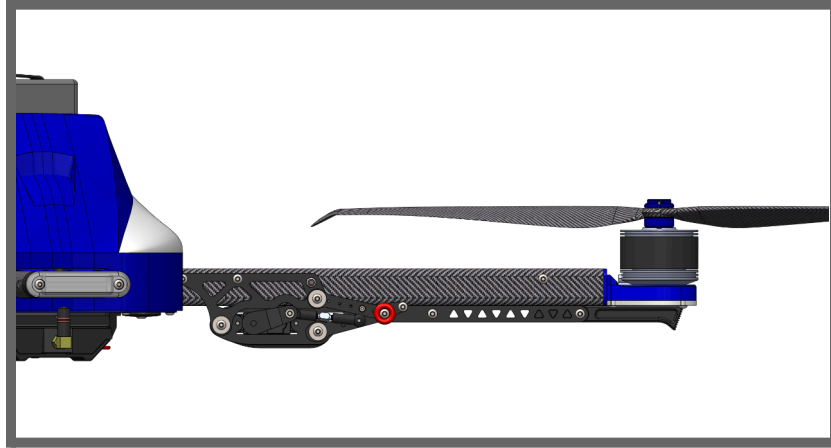
5. Gently move the arm back and forth to verify the knob is engaged and seated thoroughly.



6. Repeat the process with the other arm.

Lower the landing gear.

1. Securely hold the drone. Gently pull the red knob located on the retract away from the arm.

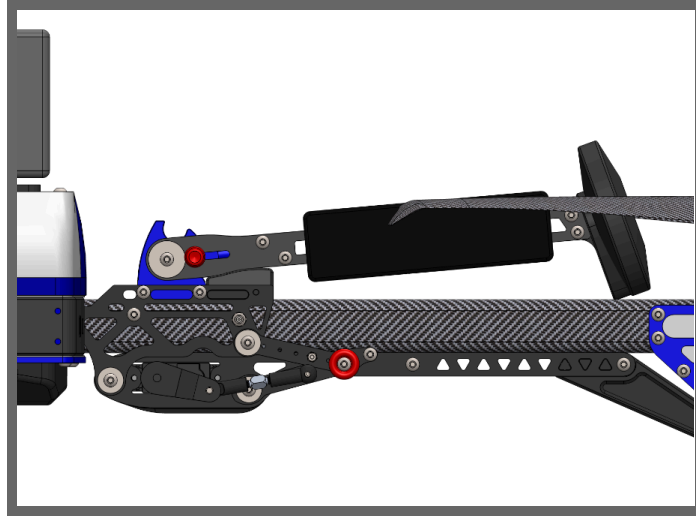


2. Push the red knob in until the landing gear is fully extended.

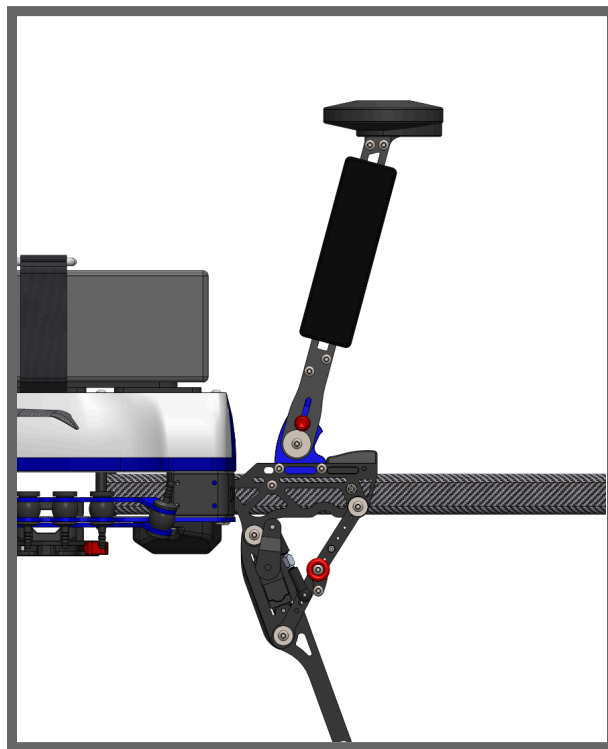


Raise and secure the GPS mast.

1. Slide the red pins back to unlock them from the stowed position.



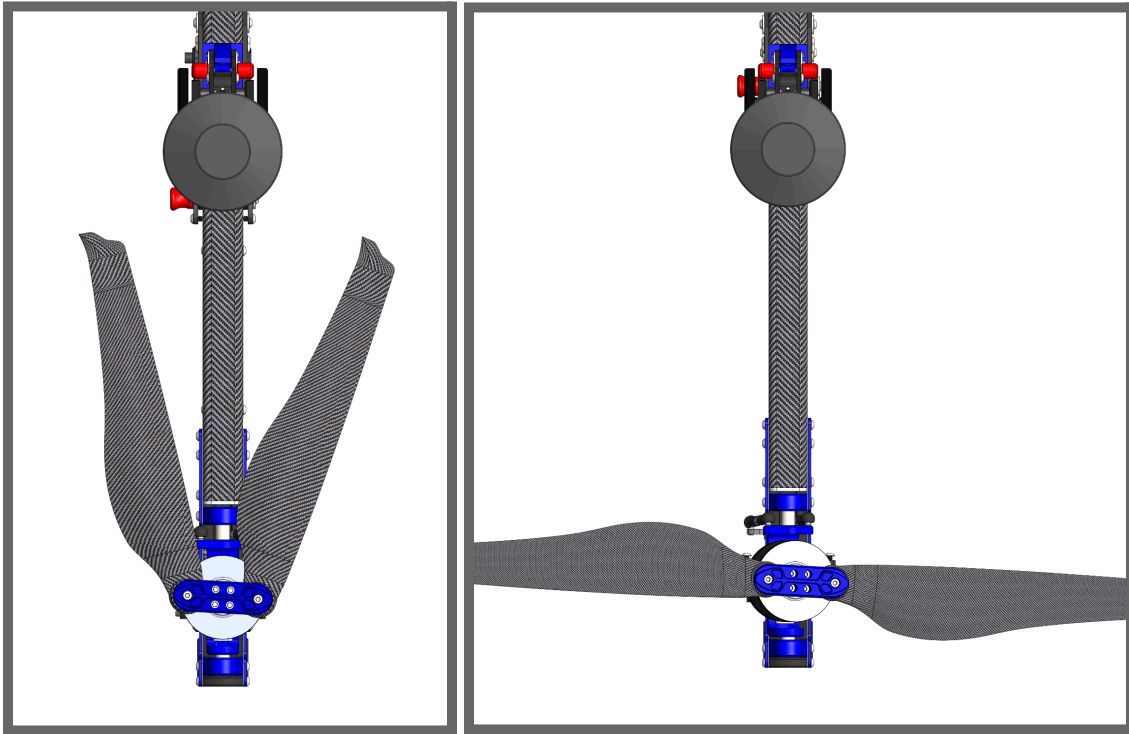
2. Once the pins are released, gently lift the mast to raise it into an upright position. The red pins will lock into place once the mast is properly seated.



Extend Rotors

1. Unfold each rotor so the blades point in opposite directions along the long dimension of the blade mount for all three rotors.

2. Remove protective blade sleeves before flight.



Attach Payloads Using the Payload Connection System (PCS)

If flying with a payload, attach it to the airframe with the Payload Connection System.

⚠ Note: *Depending on the mass of the payload, the user may need to adjust the number of damper balls used.*

1. Determine how many damper balls are needed for the payload.

Payload Mass (kg)	Number of Damper Balls
0-0.75	4
0.6-1.5	8
1.25-2	12

Common Payloads	Mass (kg)
Wiris Pro	~1.0
Sony A6400	~0.55
Sony RX1R ii	~0.65



Note: *Always remove the center most damper balls first. For example, if you have a payload that weighs around 1kg, the 4 damper balls in the middle should be removed (2 from the left side and 2 from the right side). If you have a light payload that weighs around 0.5kg, the 8 damper balls in the middle should be removed and you'll just have the 4 outermost corners remain.*

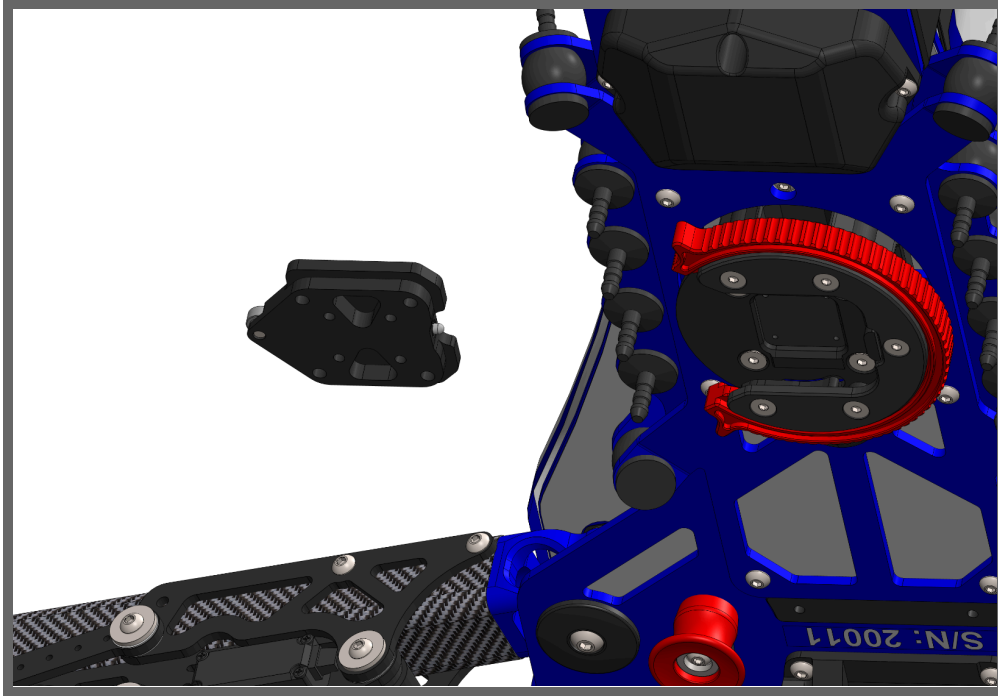
2. If you need to remove damper balls:
 - a. First, gently pushing the top of the damper ball through the floating plate. Be careful not to apply too much force, or the damper balls can tear and will need to be replaced.
 - b. Then, push the bottom of the damper ball through the lower main plate.
 - c. Pull the damper ball out sideways, between both plates.
 - d. Place them in the bit box for storage.
3. If you need additional damper balls:
 - a. Remove damper balls from the bit box.
 - b. Start by adding the center-most damper balls first, and work outwards.
 - c. Sometimes it can be helpful to gently poke the damper ball into place using an allen key or something similar. Be careful not to use anything that is too sharp because it can tear through the damper ball.
 - d. Double check that all damper balls are securely seated in place on the top and bottom.



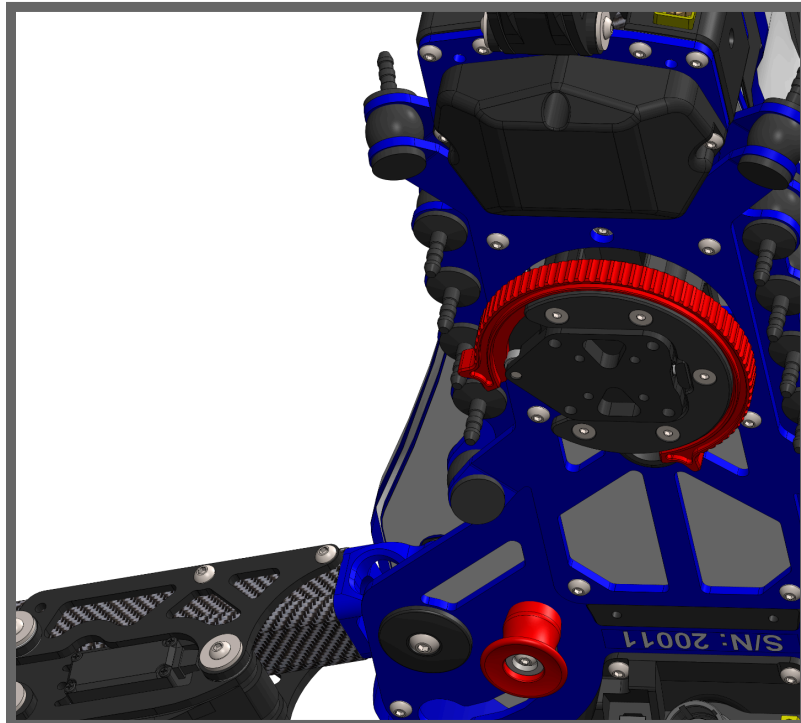
Warning: *The damper balls come with a high-frequency whisker. These are functional items and should not be cut off.*



4. Slide the payload into place. The payload mounting bracket on the top slides into the opening on the payload connection system on the belly of the aircraft. (Note: Payload is not shown in this illustration for clarity.)

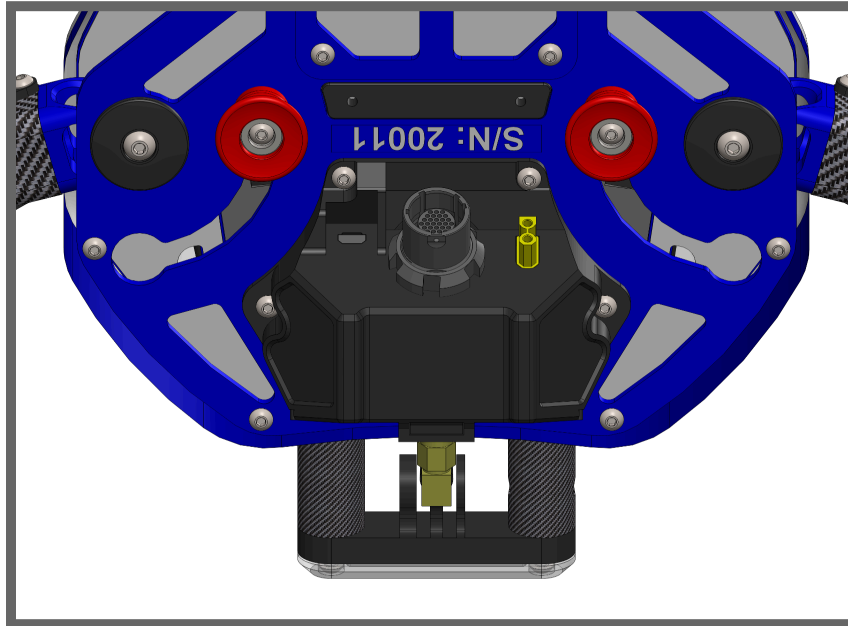


5. Once the payload is seated, rotate the red ring to secure it.

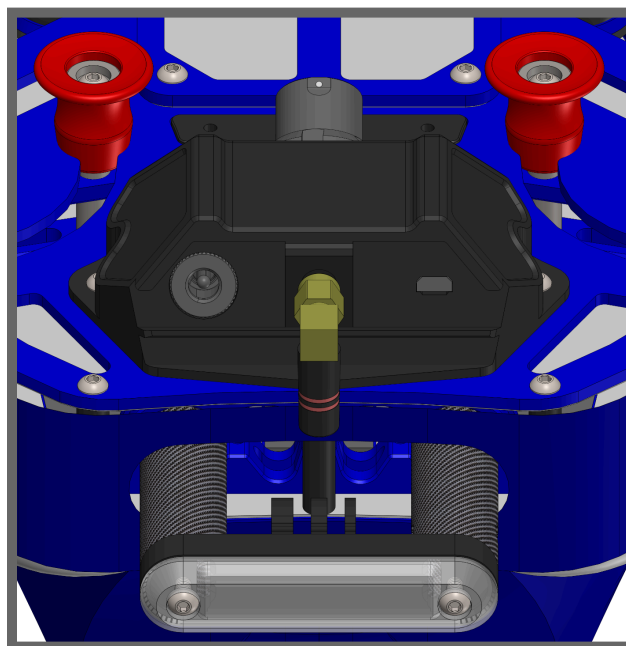


6. Plug in the payload to the Connector Interface. Any Vision Aerial payload will come with one or more of the appropriate connector(s) listed below.

- For low power and data, connect the primary payload connector.
- For video, connect the HDMI connector from your payload to the EPCS.
- For high power, connect the XT-30 connector from your payload to the EPCS.



7. Turn on your payload (if applicable)
8. Pull back cover and plug in payload power and video into the Secondary Interface for nose-mounted payloads (if applicable)



Connect Battery and Power the Drone

1. Place the battery on the battery plate and securely attach with the velcro strap.
2. Plug in the battery.

 **Caution:** *Payloads cannot be hot swapped. Power shall be removed for payload changes.*

 **NOTE:** *If applicable, ground test the payload and associated equipment.*

Set Up Additional Equipment

1. Setup accessories (if applicable).

Visual Pre-Flight


Perform a visual survey of all electrical & mechanical connections to ensure proper connection.

[See Appendix for Checklists](#)

Power On the Controller

To power up the controller, press and hold the power button on the Herelink controller for 5 seconds.

The Herelink battery level can be checked in the upper right corner of the powered GCS in the Control Center.

 **WARNING:** *Ground controller power level should not be less than 25% for flight. An auxiliary power source may be used during operation to supplement the controller battery.*

Power up the aircraft by plugging the battery connector in. Leave the aircraft motionless for 10 seconds to allow the gyroscopes to calibrate. (Indicator light will flash red/blue during calibration.)

When the vehicle is powered the GPS antenna will display various LED light colors:

Pulsing Blue-Disarmed, No GPS Lock: Similar to above, but your vehicle is disarmed. This means you will not be able to control motors, but all other subsystems are working.

Solid Blue-Armed, No GPS Lock: Indicates vehicle has been armed and has no position lock from a GPS unit.

Pulsing Green-Disarmed, GPS Lock: Similar to above, but your vehicle is disarmed. This means you will not be able to control motors, but all other subsystems including GPS position lock are working.

Fast Flashing Green-Armed, GPS Lock: Indicates vehicle has been armed and has a valid position lock from a GPS unit with more than DGPS signal attained.

Solid Green-Armed, GPS Lock: Indicates vehicle has been armed and has a valid position lock from a GPS unit.

Solid Purple-Failsafe Mode: This mode will activate whenever the vehicle encounters an issue during flight, such as losing link with GCS, a critically low battery, or an internal error. In the event of a critically low battery or loss of GPS signal, default failsafe settings will execute a landing sequence (user definable).

Solid Amber-Low Battery Warning: Indicates your vehicle's battery is running dangerously low. After a certain point, the vehicle will go into failsafe mode. However, this mode should signal caution that it's time to end this flight.

Blinking Red-Error / Setup Required: Indicates that your autopilot needs to be configured or calibrated before flying.

 **Note:** *Vehicle will not arm unless GPS status is a pulsing or fast flashing green LED.*

GROUND CONTROL STATION (GCS)

The SwitchBlade-Elite comes with a Herelink ground control station or an optional, TAA-compliant, Blue Herelink. To charge the controller, plug the included Micro USB cable into a power source and the other end into the charging socket on the bottom of the controller (Micro USB port).

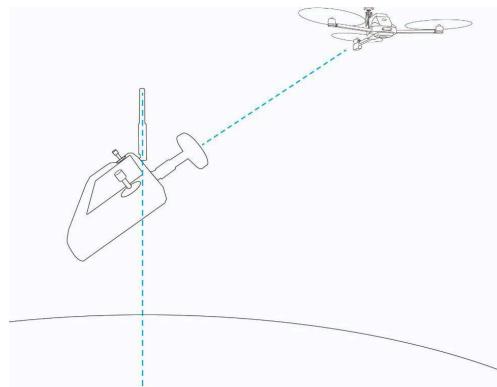
⚠ WARNING: *Do not intentionally turn the controller off during flight. Any loss of communication or GCS power will initiate an immediate lost link failsafe.*

For additional information [see Appendix](#).

Keep the controller away from liquids, fire, microwaves, and other hazardous or combustible materials. Don't expose the controller to extreme temperatures. If the controller is hot to the touch, wait for it to cool before using or charging. Perform periodic visual inspections of the controller battery to check for any damage and handle the controller battery using the same safety precautions as the flight battery.

Controller Antenna Configuration

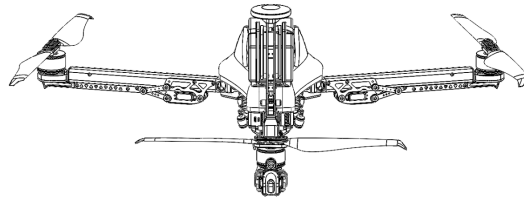
For the strongest connection to the SwitchBlade-Elite, position the Omni-Directional antenna so its vertical axis is in alignment with the center of the earth, or perpendicular to the ground. Position the Directional antenna so it points at the aircraft.



CONTROLS

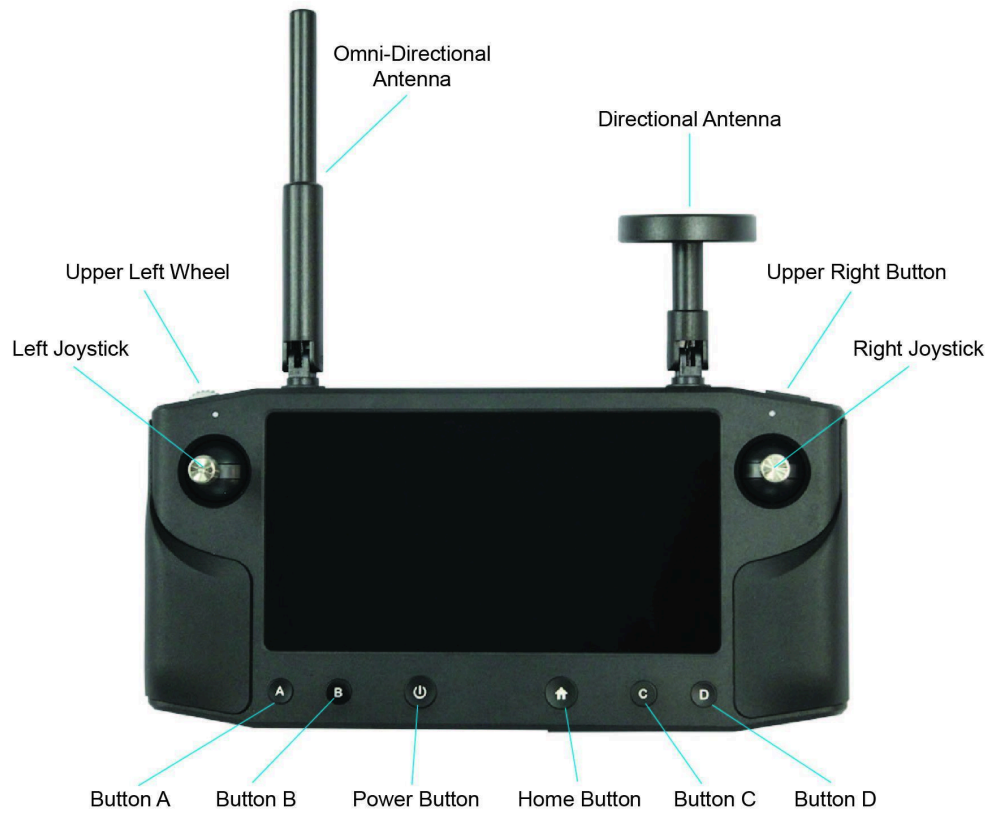
⚠ CAUTION: *This document is for reference only and should not be considered a substitute for flight training.*

⚠ CAUTION: *The SwitchBlade-Elite is a precision machine designed to be controlled with very disciplined and smooth inputs. During familiarization of the aircraft, small subtle inputs result in a smooth flight.*



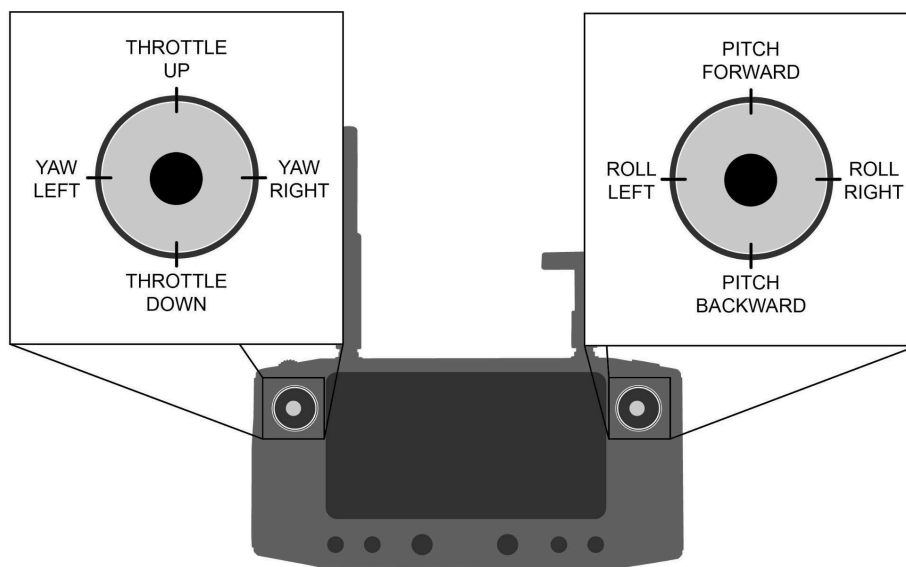
⚠ NOTE: All controls are given from the perspective of a "tail-in" orientation with respect to the pilot.

The controller features and control inputs are shown below.



Left Joystick	Controls altitude and yaw.
Right Joystick	Controls pitch and roll.
Upper Left Wheel	Controls camera tilt.

Upper Right Button	Toggle between Manual and Brake Mode.
Button A	Toggle between gimbal pan and tilt. Long hold to recenter.
Button B	Payload-specific functions.
Power Button	Controller Power Button. Press and hold for 5 seconds to turn on or off. Tap to put it into power save (sleep) mode.
Home Button	Initiates Return To Launch (RTL).
Button C	Payload-specific functions.
Button D	Toggle nadir mapper mode for gimballed payloads.

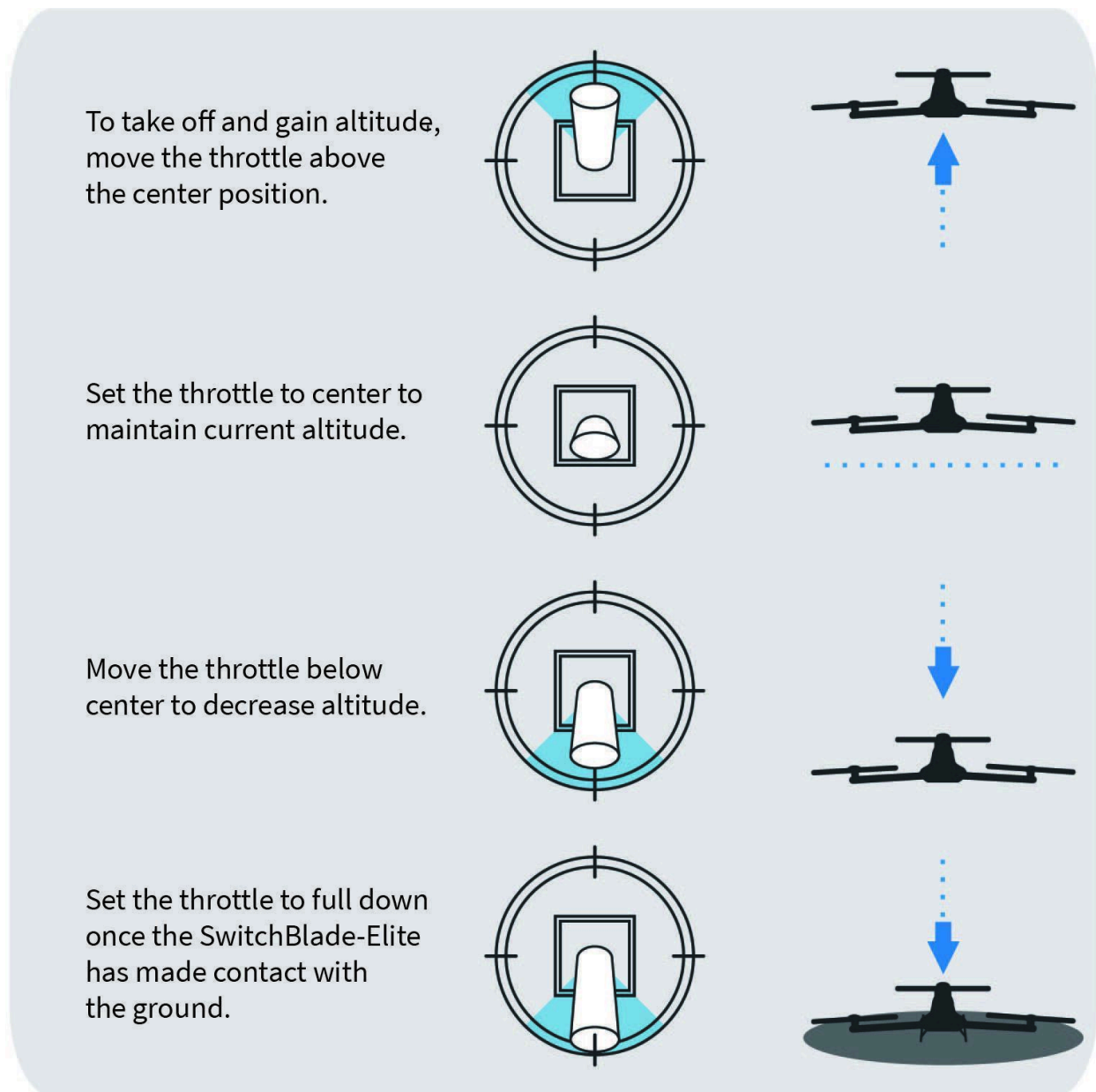


The left stick controls the altitude (throttle) and rotation (yaw) of the SwitchBlade-Elite.

Use the right stick to fly the SwitchBlade-Elite forward, back, left, and right. These movements are relative to the SwitchBlade-Elite's tail-in orientation, so always maintain awareness of SwitchBlade-Elite's forward-facing direction before inputting control.

Left Stick (Throttle)

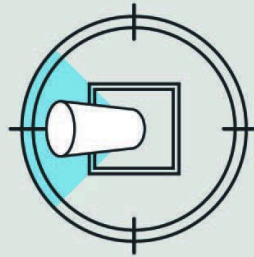
Move the left stick vertically to control the SwitchBlade-Elite's altitude and vertical acceleration.



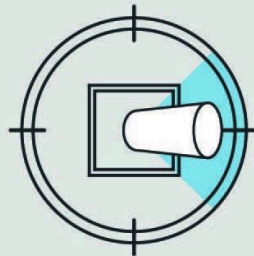
Left Stick (Yaw)

Move the left stick horizontally to rotate or "yaw" the SwitchBlade-Elite and control orientation.

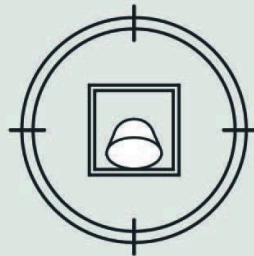
Move the stick to the left
to rotate counter clockwise.
(As viewed from above.)



Move the stick to the right
to rotate clockwise.
(As viewed from above.)



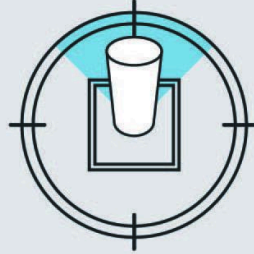
Release the stick to stop
rotating and maintain the
current orientation.



Right Stick (Pitch)

Move the right stick vertically to control pitch.

Move the right stick up to fly forward.



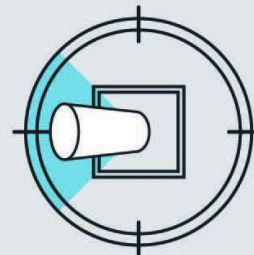
Move the right stick down to fly backward.



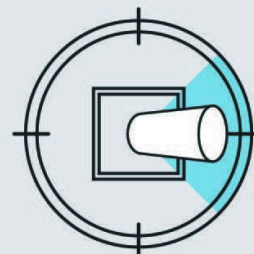
Right Stick (Roll)

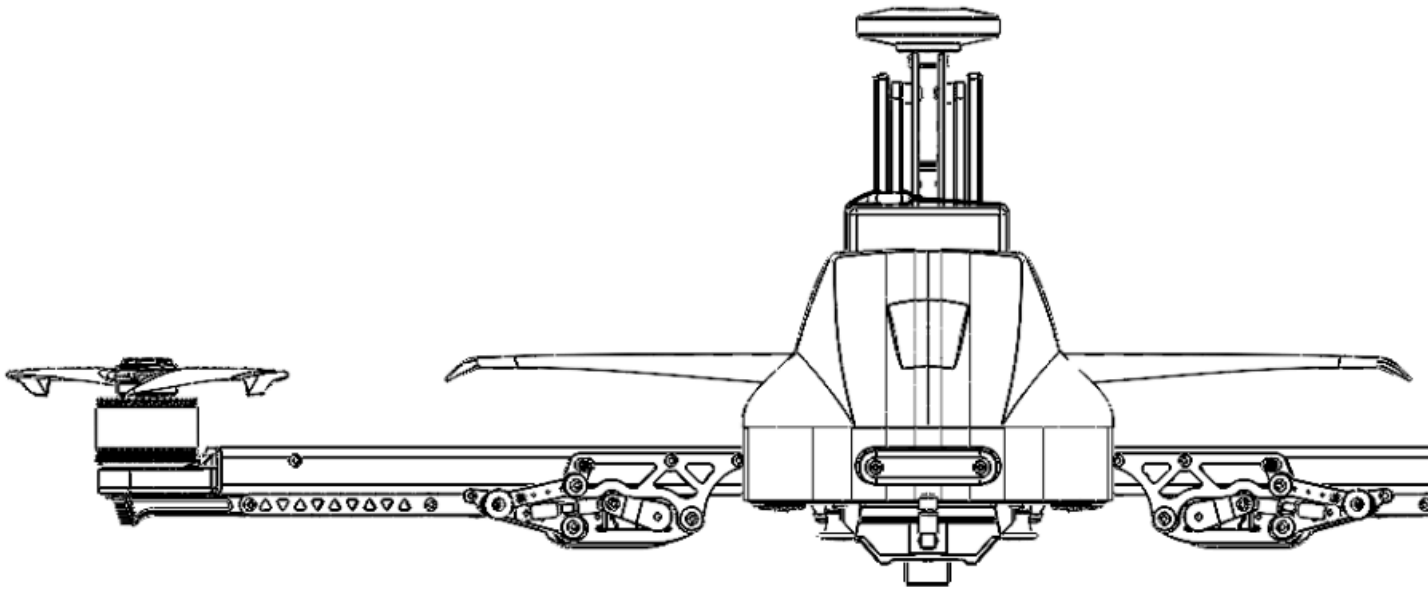
Move the right stick horizontally to control roll.

Move the stick left to fly left.



Move the stick right to fly right.





SwitchBlade-Elite Flight Modes


FLIGHT MODES

The SwitchBlade-Elite comes programmed standard with five different flight modes:

- **Manual:** Manual flight mode
- **Brake:** Vehicle holds position, joysticks deactivated (Prevents unintentional user input)
- **Auto:** Engages pre-programmed autonomous mission (User adjustable)
- **Land:** Land vehicle at current location
- **RTL:** Return-To-Launch site at pre-programmed altitude (User adjustable)

Manual Mode

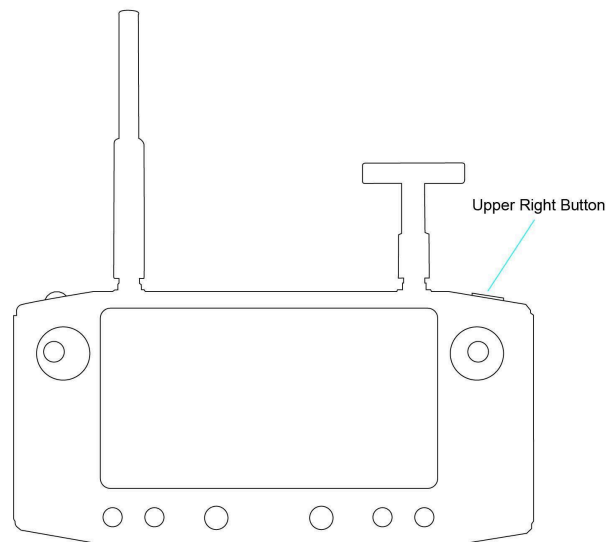
The active flight mode, Manual Mode, is adjusted by tapping the upper right button on the Herelink Controller.

 **NOTE:** *In Manual Mode, the joystick movements are directly proportional to the ground speed of the SwitchBlade-Elite.*

For example: If the roll joystick is moved left to half of its travel, the SwitchBlade-Elite will choose its roll angle to achieve 50% of the programmed max ground speed for that direction.

This can be useful for applications like aerial filming when keeping the ground speed constant is desirable.

 **NOTE:** *The throttle does not directly correlate to the RPM of the motors. The throttle correlates to the desired climb and descent rates.*



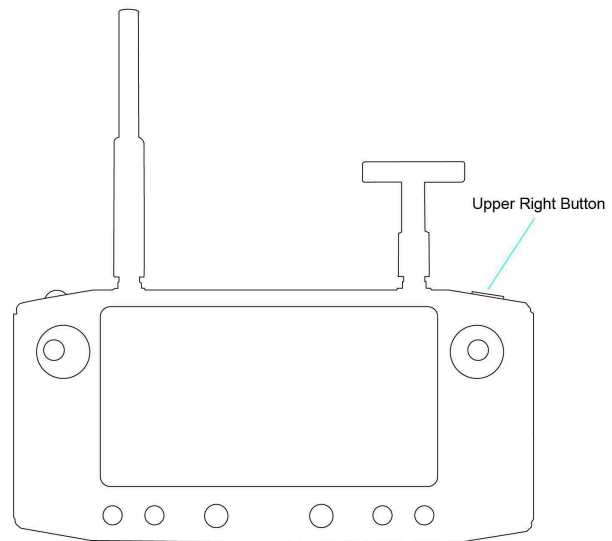
Brake Mode

Brake Mode functions similarly to Manual Mode except the control sticks are completely deactivated. This mode is useful when the pilot wishes to reduce the risk of unintentional control input.



CAUTION: Never leave an airborne aircraft unattended.

This mode is activated by tapping the upper right button on the Herelink Controller.



Autonomous Flight (Auto)

Autonomous Mode is for use with pre-planned missions created in advance using mission planning software. A best practice is to design the missions so the pilot launches in Manual Mode and then, once airborne, enables Auto to execute the mission. This increases the pilot's ability to adapt to unpredicted events during launch (such as non-participants, bird activity, sudden changes in the flight environment, etc).

How to use Auto Flight Mode:

1. Pre-plan the mission using mission planning software in the Herelink.
2. Power and connect the Herelink to the aircraft.
3. When the pattern or waypoints are complete, select "Upload" to send the mission to the vehicle.
4. Manually launch the aircraft and perform systems check.
5. Select the "Action" soft key on the touch screen, then select the "Slide to confirm" soft key under "Continue Mission" for the uploaded mission
6. Now the SwitchBlade-Elite will perform the mission according to the uploaded plan.



NOTE: To pause or stop an autonomous mission, activate Brake Mode by tapping the button on the top right edge of the Herelink Controller. Once a mission is paused, the SwitchBlade will hover in place. To resume a mission, "Slide to confirm" the "Continue Mission" button on the Herelink screen and the vehicle will continue as previously programmed.

To learn more about Mission Planning, [see Appendix](#).

Land Mode

When Land Mode is activated, the SwitchBlade-Elite will deploy its landing gear and begin a gentle descent over its current position. It is recommended to use a 6 meter diameter or larger landing environment, as the precision of the GPS can vary up to $\pm 2.5\text{m}$.

Land Mode is initiated by pressing “Land” on the Herelink screen and slide to confirm.

Land Mode as a Failsafe Protocol

Land Mode will automatically be activated if the battery becomes critically low. In most situations, this failsafe will prevent the aircraft from uncontrolled descents from altitudes of $< 10\text{m}$. It is not recommended to fly the SwitchBlade-Elite when it has less than 10% of its available battery capacity, to ensure an adequate margin of safety.

To learn more about failsafe modes, [see Emergency Procedures](#).

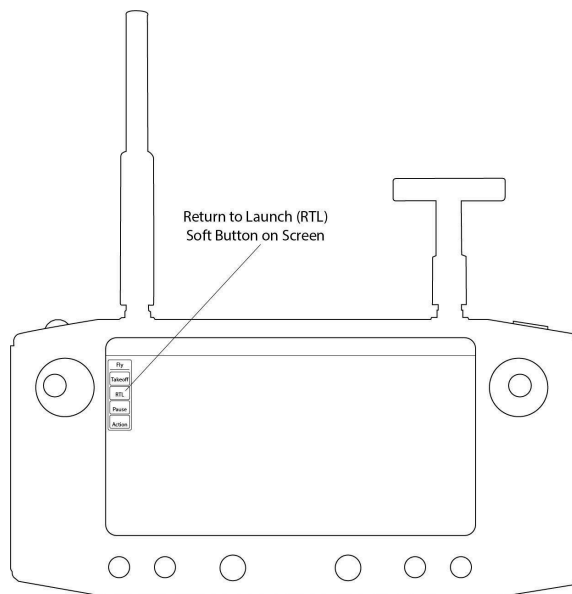
 **NOTE:** *If the pilot wishes to retake control during the descent portion of Land Mode, they may do so by moving the left joystick to full up position (full throttle) or by enabling Brake/Manual Mode by tapping the button on the top right edge of the Herelink controller.*

Return to Launch (RTL)

When RTL is activated (and the vehicle has GPS lock), the SwitchBlade-Elite will autonomously climb to 50 meters (user adjustable) or maintain altitude if above 50 meters. The vehicle will then return to the launch location on a direct path, hover for 5 seconds, deploy its landing gear, and begin a slow landing descent sequence. It is recommended to use a 6 meter diameter or larger launch/land environment, as the accuracy of the GPS can vary up to $\pm 2.5\text{m}$.

There are four ways RTL Mode can be activated:

1. Return to Launch Mode is initiated automatically when battery voltage drops below 30% (user definable) for 60 continuous seconds. The GCS will produce an audible “Low Voltage” warning followed by a “Return to Launch” audible warning.
2. Return to Launch can also be manually activated by selecting the “RTL” soft button on the main menu of the Herelink screen. The user will need to verify this action by the “Slide to confirm” soft key. The Herelink will also produce an audible “Return to Launch” cue.
3. Return to Launch can also be activated as a final stage in [Mission Planning](#).




4. Return to Launch can also be activated as a user selectable flight mode in the flight modes drop down list.


RTL can be overridden by changing to any other flight mode.

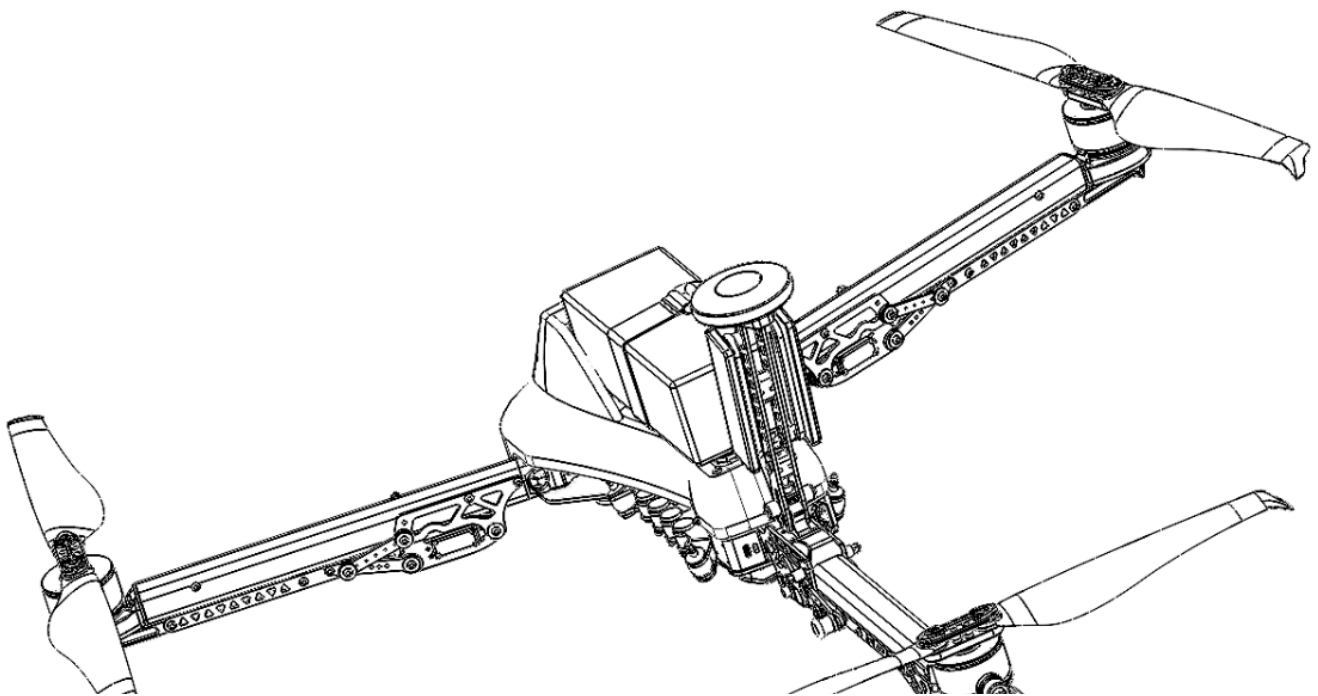
If the flight environment is significantly higher than the launch location, a 50 m climb altitude may not be adequate. If 50 m is not adequate for your flight environment, the setting can be changed in the parameters section of the Mission Planner software. Additionally, if the launch location itself is moving (such as on a moving vessel) it is best to avoid the use of Return to Launch Mode.

Return to Launch (RTL) Mode as a Failsafe Protocol

Return to Launch will be activated automatically if the SwitchBlade-Elite loses communication with the controller. To learn more about failsafe modes, [see Emergency Procedures](#).

 **NOTE:** *If the pilot wishes to retake control during RTL Mode, by enabling Brake /Manual Mode by clicking the button on the top right edge of the Herelink controller.*

 **NOTE:** *During the descent portion of the landing sequence the landing cycle can be aborted by applying 50% or more throttle.*



Operating Procedures

PREFLIGHT CHECKLIST

The first step for any flight is to make sure the environment is safe for flight.

! WARNING: *Don't fly the SwitchBlade-Elite indoors. Always fly outside in clear, open areas at a safe distance from yourself, other people, power lines, obstacles, and buildings. As the pilot, you are responsible for navigating the SwitchBlade-Elite to avoid obstacles.*

! CAUTION: *Don't fly within 5 miles of an airport or any airspace restricted by your local, state, or national airspace authority without proper authorization. As the pilot, you are responsible for knowing and understanding the regulations that govern small unmanned aircraft like the SwitchBlade-Elite in your jurisdiction (check resources like the B4Ufly app).*

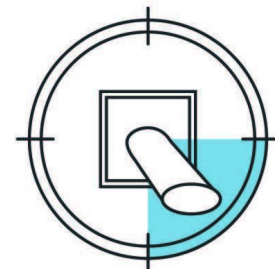
! CAUTION: *Don't fly the SwitchBlade-Elite in extreme weather conditions such as rain, high winds, snow, or fog. Extreme weather conditions can permanently damage the SwitchBlade-Elite or cause instability in flight.*

! CAUTION: *Determine safe flight boundaries at your location. Be aware of any risks, including bodies of water, structures, trees, power lines, etc, and designate a few areas where you can land the SwitchBlade-Elite in case of an unsafe situation. Throughout your flight, be prepared to recover the SwitchBlade-Elite manually or use an [emergency procedure](#) if the SwitchBlade-Elite flies outside the safe flying area.*

Once a suitable environment is selected, [prepare the SwitchBlade-Elite for flight](#).

ARMING / TAKEOFF

- Arm the aircraft by holding the left joystick at the bottom right position for 5 seconds . When it arms an audible cue will be initiated stating "Arming."
- Gently bring up the throttle (left joystick) and initiate take-off



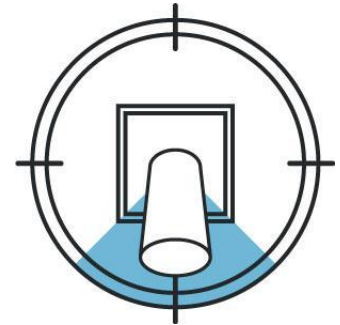
Arming for Takeoff

FLIGHT

Fly safely by remaining in the line-of-sight (LOS), while staying aware of your flight environment.

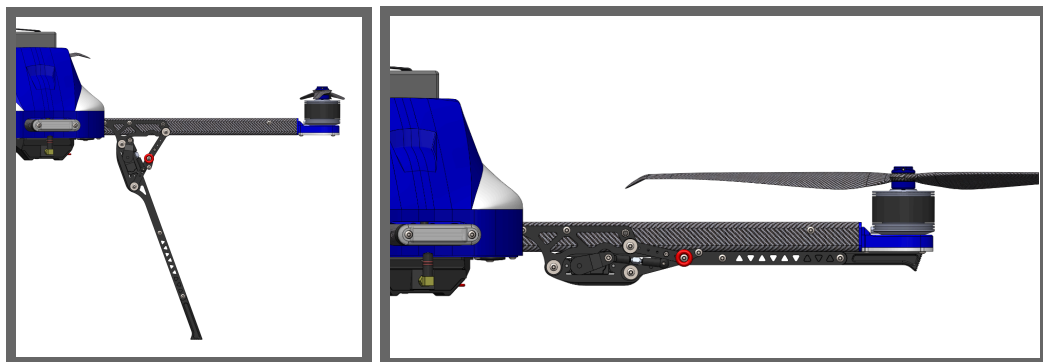
LANDING / DISARMING

1. Before landing the aircraft, check the landing site environment to ensure it is clear of power lines, people, animals, etc.
2. If landing manually, deploy the landing gear. [See Landing Checklist.](#)
3. Land the aircraft (ideally on a level surface).
4. Disarm by holding the left joystick in the full down position for at least 3 seconds. If the vehicle has not taken off, hold the joystick down and to the left.
5. If carrying a payload, remove it. [See Payload Connection System.](#)

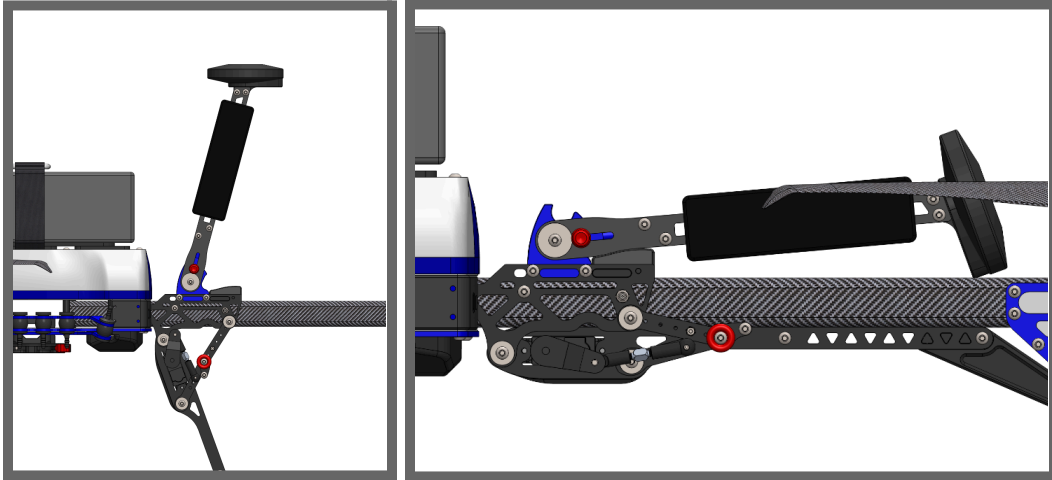


POST FLIGHT AND STORAGE

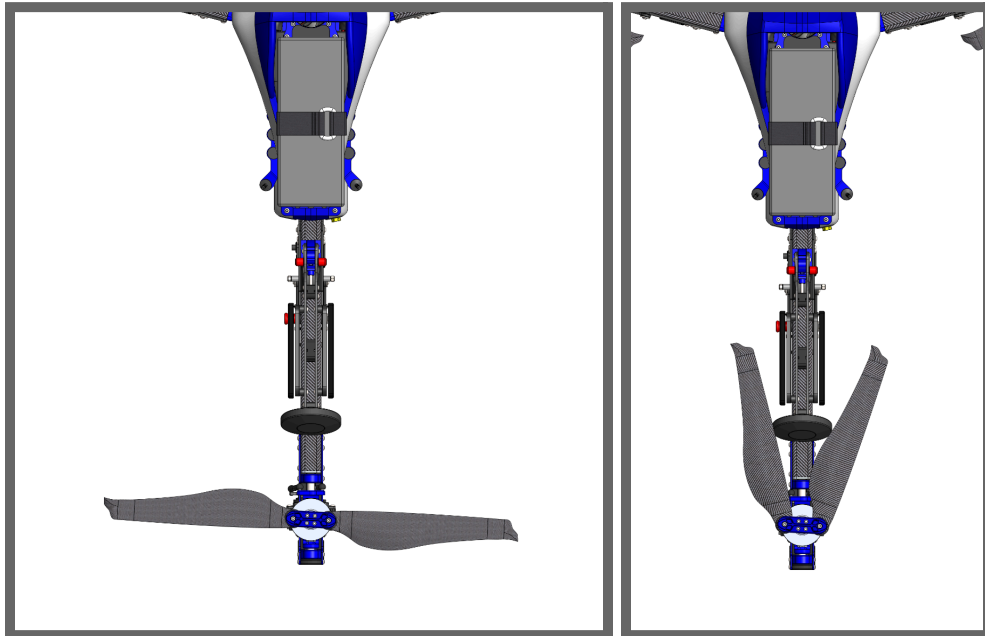
1. Disconnect the battery from the aircraft.
2. Power down the GCS.
3. Visually survey all electrical and mechanical connections.
4. Using the red knobs, manually retract the landing gear.



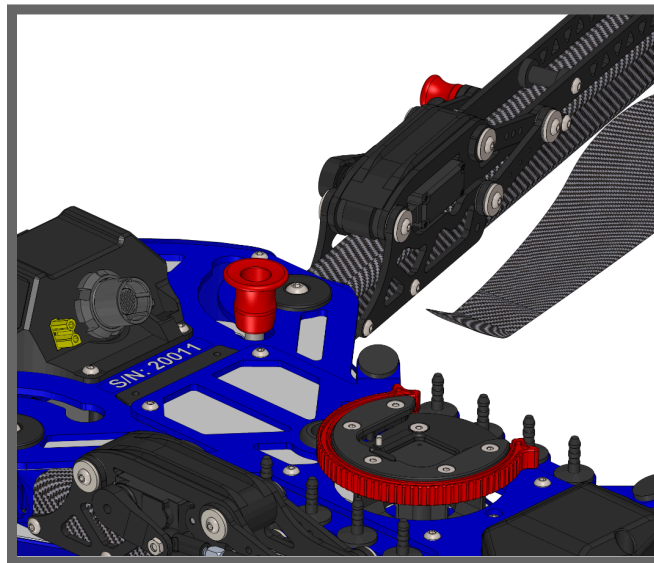
5. Unsecure and lower the GPS mast by lifting the pull pin vertically and rotating the mast back toward the tail motor.



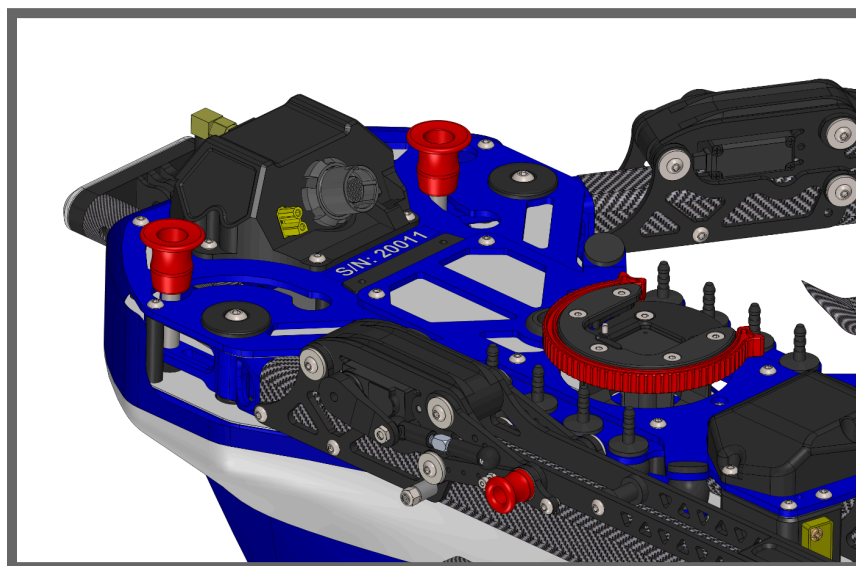
6. Fold in the tail rotors so the blades point forward.



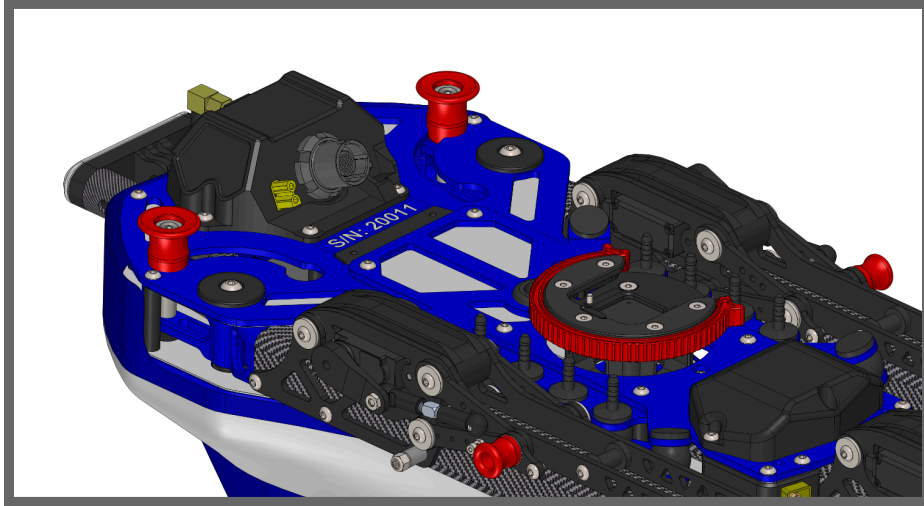
7. Select one arm and pull out on the corresponding red knob.



8. Rotate the arm towards the tail.

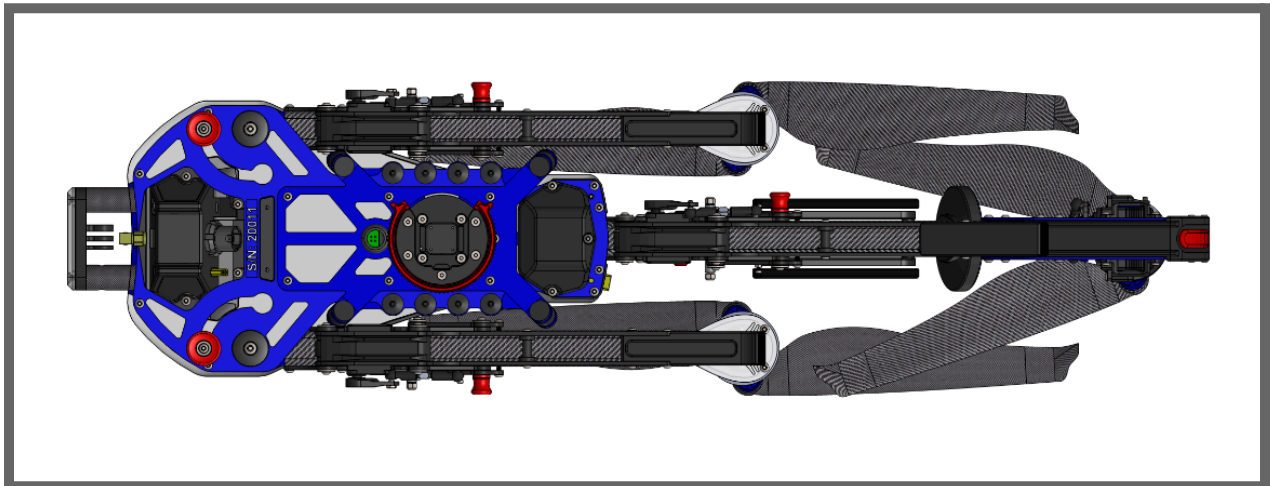


9. Once reaching the stop, release the knob to allow locking.



10. Repeat this process with the other arm.

11. Gently move the arms back and forth to verify the knobs are engaged and seated.



12. Place aircraft in its case and secure latches.

BATTERY SAFETY

Use caution when handling the lithium batteries as they can cause a fire if handled incorrectly.

- ✓ Never alter, puncture, throw, bend, or impact the battery.
- ✓ Keep the battery away from liquids, fire, microwaves, and other hazardous or combustible materials.
- ✓ Don't expose the battery to extreme temperatures.
- ✓ If the battery is hot to the touch, wait for it to cool before using or charging.

Damaged Batteries

 **Warning: Do not send damaged batteries to Vision Aerial. Please follow proper disposal instructions.**

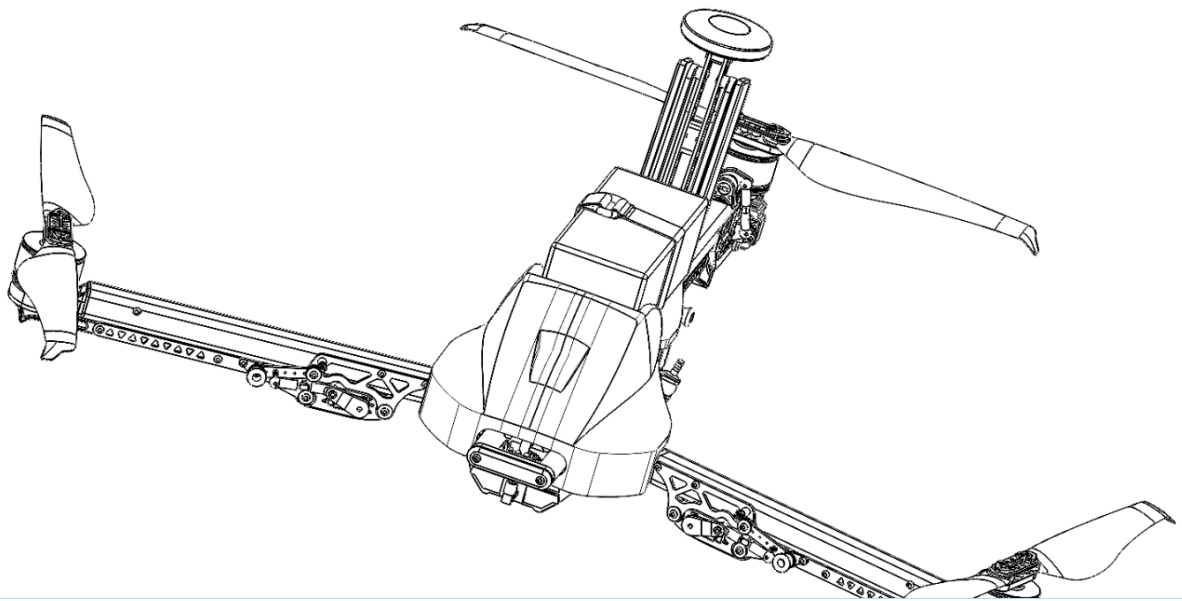
Be sure to inspect the battery before and after each flight. Batteries can be damaged in shipping, use, or charging. If you notice any abnormal features such as damage to the exterior shell, swelling, deformation of the battery, abnormal smell, leakage, or other unexpected behavior, do not use the battery! These can be signs of serious damage that can cause the battery to catch fire. To prevent a hazard in case of fire or explosion:

- Disconnect the battery, then place it in a safe area outside of any buildings or vehicles and away from flammable materials.
- Do not dispose of the battery in the trash; dispose of the battery at a local battery recycling center as soon as possible. In the US and Canada, visit call2recycle.org to find a recycling location.

Proper Battery Storage

For long term storage, the following conditions are recommended:

- Environmental temperature range of 18° C to 28° C (64° F to 82° F)
- Recommended 45-85% relative humidity
- Storage charge level should be roughly 50%
- Ensure the battery won't be exposed to extreme temperatures or direct sunlight



Emergency Procedures

INTRODUCTION

The emergency procedures listed in this section are the recommended practices for handling the aircraft in an emergency. This guidance should be considered and applied as necessary.

The risk of an emergency occurring can be reduced substantially through proper aircraft maintenance, by performing thorough inspections before and after all flights, careful pre-flight planning, and thorough flight environment surveying prior to flight.

Emergency situations are dynamic events, and not all conditions or procedures can be anticipated or applied during the event. These procedures are not a substitute for a thorough understanding of aircraft systems and sound pilot judgment.

If an emergency occurs, three basic actions can be applied to most situations:

1. Maintain aircraft control
Small emergencies can quickly escalate if the pilot is distracted by attempting to troubleshoot the problem. Always maintain visual contact with the aircraft during an emergency to reduce the likelihood of losing orientation.
2. Analyze the situation
Once the aircraft is stabilized, begin to assess the cause of the emergency if practical.
3. Take appropriate action
In many cases, the appropriate action will be to land the aircraft as soon as possible. Always consider the safety of yourself and others before attempting to save the aircraft in an emergency.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Aircraft Error

During any portion of the flight if the user makes an aircraft movement that is undesired.

1. Neutralize controls
2. Select Brake Mode (as required)
3. Analyze situation and make an appropriate response

Uncontrollable Environmental Change

An unanticipated change in environment such as pilot distraction or unforecast weather may require user action.

1. Neutralize Controls
2. Switch to Manual Mode and pilot to a safe landing location

If flight environment does not change or conditions warrant:

3. Select RTL (as required)

Lost Orientation

Condition of flight environment, distance/location of the vehicle and the perception of the user can all lead to a misinterpretation of the vehicle's spatial orientation. Restoration of the user to the orientation to the vehicle is paramount for mission continuation and safe vehicle recovery. Primary consideration is the orientation of the vehicle before any mission is executed or continued.

In the event of **Lost Orientation**:

1. Reference telemetry on GCS

If telemetry is unavailable:

2. Reference FPV (if equipped)

If FPV is unavailable:

3. Orientation turns (Vector 2-second, SB-E 3-second turns)
Input a 1 second yaw and roll in the same direction until the drone's movements correspond with the inputs (back to tail-in orientation).
4. RTL: Select manually

Lost Link

Loss of link is a condition that is the result of some interruption of communication between the vehicle and GCS. Loss of link can be the result of many situations. Loss of power in GCS, GCS Failure, unpredictable RF environment or terrain/obstructions (inside a vehicle) may cause a loss of link. Proper preflight planning by ensuring GCS charge and understanding the flight environment will mitigate the majority of lost link issues.

Loss of link will manifest in several forms. GCS will furnish an audible “Communications Lost” message. User will experience a loss of control from right and left joysticks. Vehicle will begin an RTL unless communication is regained, and the user selects a different mode.

In the event of Lost Link:

1. **Launch/Landing site:** Ensure area is clear for RTL landing
2. **Communication:** Attempt to regain by resetting GCS and/or attaching charging source to device.
3. **Monitor RTL**
4. **Launch/Landing Site:** Monitor for safe vehicle recovery

In-Flight Battery Emergencies (RTL)

Battery emergencies can be classified as low battery or critical battery conditions. In either case the failsafe will be triggered by pre programmed values. The intent is to alert the user and for the vehicle to complete a flight action that will produce a favorable outcome in recovering/reusing the vehicle.

Low battery situation is triggered by battery voltage dropping below 21.6 volts continuously for 60 seconds. The GCS will produce an audible “Low Voltage” warning followed by a “Return to Launch” audible warning.

A critical battery situation is triggered when the battery is at or below 10% (user definable). The GCS will produce an audible “Critical Battery” warning. The warning will be followed by a “Landing” audible cue and the vehicle will begin an immediate landing sequence.

In both cases the vehicle will continue the programmed landing sequence unless action is taken by the user.

*In the event of **Low Battery** (RTL Mode):*

1. **Mode select:** Override RTL Mode if Manual Mode is desired or required.
2. **Landing site:** Identify landing site and ensure the area is clear.
3. **Landing sequence:**
 - a. *If in RTL Mode:* Monitor landing site and landing sequence while monitoring voltage.
 - b. *If in Manual Mode:* Maneuver vehicle to desired landing site while monitoring battery voltage.



WARNING: *When Landing Mode has been engaged due to critical voltage, vehicle can land in its immediate vicinity without operator action. In the event the operator overrides and continues extended flight, the vehicle may lose functional lift and will result in catastrophic loss of vehicle and potential damage loss of any persons/property in its flight path.*



CAUTION: *Continued extended flight after RTL or Landing Mode has been engaged due to low voltage is not recommended.*

*In the event of **Critical Battery** (Landing Mode):*

1. **Mode select:** Override Landing Mode if Manual Mode is desired or required.
2. **Landing site:** Identify landing site and note location.
3. **Landing sequence:**
 - a. *If in RTL Mode:* monitor landing site and landing sequence while monitoring voltage.
 - b. *If in Manual Mode:* Maneuver vehicle to desired landing site while monitoring battery voltage.

Loss of GPS (Altitude Hold)

Loss of GPS position will trigger a switch to Altitude Hold Mode. Additionally, the user may manually select Altitude Mode for environments that lack adequate GPS signal such as under bridges, heavy vegetation, etc. The loss of GPS will create an audible “EKF Failure” tone. In the event of loss of GPS, the user will retain controllability of the vehicle. However, RTL Mode and the ability of the vehicle to maintain station will be compromised.

*In the event of **Lost GPS**:*

1. Altitude: Climb to avoid all obstacles
2. Manually pilot vehicle referencing telemetry as needed
3. Manual landing as required




NOTE: *Loss of GPS will require the user to account for external forces like wind.*

Failed Landing Gear

A landing gear failure can manifest in multiple ways. In a failure the landing gear may present in limited deployment/retraction of single or multiple arms. Consideration should also be given to the presence of a payload and when attached, the type of payload.

In the event of any landing gear malfunction:

1. Determine presence and type of payload
2. If no payload present: Belly land aircraft manually

 **NOTE: Type of payload will predicate action taken for landing. Consideration should be given for survivability of payload over vehicle.**

Partial failed landing gear

1. Landing gear: Cycle (If landing gear extends to full down, land as required)
2. Landing gear remains partial failed: Return to landing site
3. Prepare site to land vehicle on substitute landing device (bush, piled up clothing, etc) to facilitate a level landing which protects payload from impact
4. At minimum hover (2-3cm) disarm flight by selecting the onscreen “armed” button and sliding to confirm disarm.

Full failed landing gear

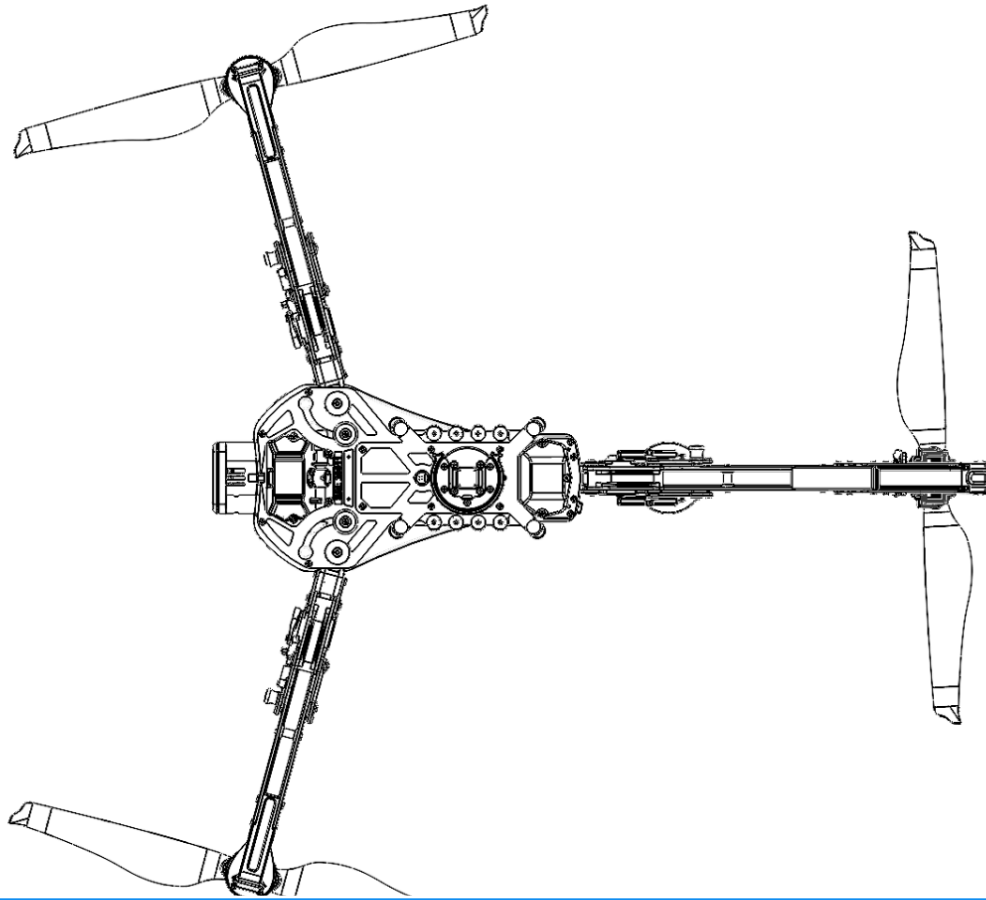
1. Landing gear: Cycle (If landing gear extends to full down, land as required)
2. Landing gear remains fully failed: Return to landing site
3. Prepare site to land vehicle on substitute landing device (trash can, bucket, etc) to facilitate a level landing which supports landing points and protects payload from impact
4. At minimum hover (2-3cm) disarm flight by selecting the onscreen “armed” button and sliding to confirm disarm.

Yaw Malfunctions

Yaw Malfunctions will manifest in either a right or left uncontrollable yaw. While left joystick yaw control will be ineffective, all other controls will be fully functional. The GCS may produce an audible “EKF Failure.” In a worst case scenario the vehicle will begin to pirouette.

Loss of yaw control (Compromised tail)

1. Manually engage RTL
2. If RTL is unavailable or not desired, utilize a pulsing forward movement in the direction of the landing zone.
3. If no payload present, landing with gear up on soft surface
4. If a payload is present, landing gear down.
5. Position over intended landing site
6. At minimum hover (2-3 cm): Disarm flight



Inspection & Support

SUPPORT

Vision Aerial is here to help you get the most out of your SwitchBlade-Elite. If you have any questions, please contact us at info@visionaerial.com or call +1 (406) 333-1795. To submit a support request through our website, visit www.visionaerial.com.

INSPECTION

BEFORE EVERY FLIGHT

1. Arm Locks

- The arm locks should move freely and lock solidly both in the storage and flight configurations.

2. GPS Mast

- Check that GPS mast locks should move freely and lock solidly both in the storage and flight configurations.

3. Landing Gear

- When the retracts are fully deployed, check that the upper linkage screws make contact with the lower linkage on both sides of the assembly.

4. Yaw Mechanism

- Inspect all four connection points of the control links between the servo and yaw motor cradle are securely attached and move freely.
- Inspect that the yaw motor cradle moves unobstructed from any debris, wires, etc.
- Ensure cradle spring is secured on both sides.

5. Rotors


- Inspect for chips, typically found on the leading edge. If chips greater than 1.5mm are found, it is recommended the rotor be replaced.
- Inspect for cracks and excessive flexibility. If significantly more flexibility in the rotor is detected, replace the rotor.
- Inspect for proper hub tension. To test, unfold the rotor and hold the aircraft on its side. The rotor should be clamped just tightly enough to ensure adequate friction such that gravity does not cause the rotor to rotate on its hub, but loose enough to be comfortably rotated by hand.

- Once preflight checks are complete, use the throttle to gently rotate the rotors and check that the front rotors are spinning in the correct direction.

Rotors

The SwitchBlade-Elite comes with three attached, folding rotors.

Attachment and removal of the blades is performed by tightening or loosening the four center bolts on the rotor.

 **CAUTION:** Anytime these bolts are removed, apply Loctite 277 (RED) to the bolts when reattached to keep them from loosening during transport or operation.

 **WARNING:** *Avoid contact with SwitchBlade-Elite's high-speed rotors*

- ✓ *Always disarm the SwitchBlade-Elite before handling*
- ✓ *Before starting motors for takeoff, always ensure that the rotors are clear of any obstructions and at least 5 meters (16.5 feet) away from any people, animals, or property before activating*
- ✓ *Do not touch moving rotors or approach the SwitchBlade-Elite while the rotors are spinning*
- ✓ *Always disarm the SwitchBlade-Elite before picking it up*
- ✓ *Do not approach the SwitchBlade-Elite until the rotors stop spinning*

EVERY 25 FLIGHTS

Tools Needed: 2mm Allen key, thread locker, and Phillips screwdriver.

1. Motors

With the aircraft unpowered, slowly rotate each motor feeling & listening for any grinding or rubbing, any significant grinding or rubbing warrants a motor replacement or rebuild.

2. Batteries

Plug each battery pack into the charger and complete a full charge via the balance charging program. Once complete, compare the highest voltage cell to the lowest voltage cell. If the difference is greater than 50mV (0.05V) , recycle the pack.

3. Arms

Inspect carefully the carbon fiber arms & empennage for cracks and/or delamination. Small surface level delaminations of the clear coat pose no significant threat, however any crack or separation that is deeper than the clear coat warrants an immediate replacement of the arm.

APPENDIX

Additional Information

Checklists: Pre-Take Off, Take Off, Systems Check, Mission Checklist, Landing Checklist	https://visionaerial.com/docs/flight-checklists/
Flight Deck Manual	https://visionaerial.com/docs/flight-deck-user-manual-archive/
Battery Charging Instructions	https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vSBx8QDI R4LbspbqtFJPR2CWLtO_zYofEge5xwvP72eNJdu9cdhZB xEIMFF3BR8G5g59scSiOzULqm8/pub
Herelink Controller Manual	https://docs.cubepilot.org/user-guides/herelink/herelink-user-guides
How to Download Flight Logs	https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vT8Jbs6iA h1S2MB8V5toOe7BoGrCLTxdlBffzinFP3fyVQpvVQ4Bmoy4OGaEkaXm5gDGBwJpW8gHflA/pub

Glossary of Terms, Acronyms, and Abbreviations

AS	Air Speed
APP	Application (Computing program)
AUTO	Autonomous Mode
C1	Broadcast feed for user controls. Also referred to as RC (Radio Control)
C2	Broadcast feed for soft controls. Also referred to as Telemetry
CG	Center of Gravity
Drone	Unmanned vehicle
EO	Electro-Optical
ESC	Electronic Speed Controller
FAM	Familiarization
Flight Deck	Vision Aerial Software
GCS	Ground Control Station (Herelink)
GPS	Global Positioning System
GS	Ground Speed
IOS	Internet Operating System
IR	InfraredCaution
LED	Light Emitting Diode
Li-Po	Lithium Polymer
LOS	Line-Of-Sight
Mission	Use of GCS software to execute a preprogrammed route for vehicle
Nadir	Point on the celestial sphere directly below an observer
PC	Personal Computer
PCS	Payload Connection System
PDB	Power Distribution Board
PIDS	Proportional Integral Derivative
PITCH	Rotation around the horizontal axis
QC	Quality Control
RID	Remote Identification
ROLL	Rotation around the longitudinal axis
Rotor	Complete assembly of blades including hub
RPM	Revolutions per minute
RTL	Return to Launch

SB-E	SwitchBlade-Elite
Throttle	Left stick, vertical motion
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UAS	Unmanned Aerial System
YAW	Rotation around the vertical axis
V1	Video Broadcast feed-Channel 1
V2	Video Broadcast feed-Channel 2
Use of Special Terms	
Note	Operating procedure, practice or condition that is essential to emphasize
Caution	Operating procedure, practice or condition that may result in damage to equipment if not followed or observed
Warning	Operating procedure, practice or condition that may result in injury or death if not followed or observed
Requirement for compliance	
Shall	Application of a procedure is mandatory
Should	Application of a procedure is recommended
May	Application of a procedure is optional
Will	Indicates futurity
Requirement for Landing	
Land as soon as Practicable	Extended flight not recommended, duration is at the discretion of the operator
Land as soon as Possible	Land at the nearest safe site which a landing can be made
Land Immediately	Execute a landing without delay