

A Journey through the Development of Unmanned Aircraft

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of drones has sparked a profound transformation across various sectors, ranging from military surveillance to parcel distribution and aerial imaging. This study offers a comprehensive overview of drone evolution, tracing its historical inception, fundamental constituents, engineering intricacies, and regulatory complexities. We explore the nuanced facets of design and engineering, spotlighting progressions in power configurations, navigational modalities, and control frameworks. Through examination of case instances and exemplars, we scrutinize significant drone ventures and their societal repercussions. Looking forward, we deliberate upon emerging trajectories and prospective trajectories for drone advancement, underscoring the imperative of sustained research and ingenuity in this vibrant arena. Furthermore, we analyze the ethical and societal ramifications accompanying extensive drone proliferation, addressing apprehensions including privacy, security, and ecological footprint. This holistic inquiry illuminates the multifaceted essence of drone maturation and its catalytic potential in reshaping our societal landscape.

Keyword: - Drone technology, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), Regulatory framework, Navigation systems, Autonomous navigation, Flight controller

1. Introduction

Drones, also known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), have emerged as a transformative technology with far-reaching implications across various industries. From military reconnaissance and surveillance to commercial applications like package delivery and aerial photography, drones have revolutionized traditional methods and

opened up new possibilities. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of drone development, tracing its historical evolution, exploring the fundamental components and engineering considerations, navigating the regulatory landscape, and highlighting the societal impact and ethical considerations surrounding its widespread adoption.

The significance of drones lies not only in their technological advancements but also in their potential to reshape entire sectors and redefine how we interact with the world around us. Understanding the intricacies of drone technology is crucial for policymakers, engineers, researchers, and the general public alike, as it offers insights into the opportunities and challenges presented by this rapidly evolving field.

2. History of Drone Technology

The inception of drone technology traces back to the early 20th century, with the development of rudimentary unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) primarily for military reconnaissance purposes. One notable example is the Kettering Bug, an experimental aerial torpedo developed by the United States during World War I. These early drones were often crude and unreliable, lacking the sophisticated technology available today.

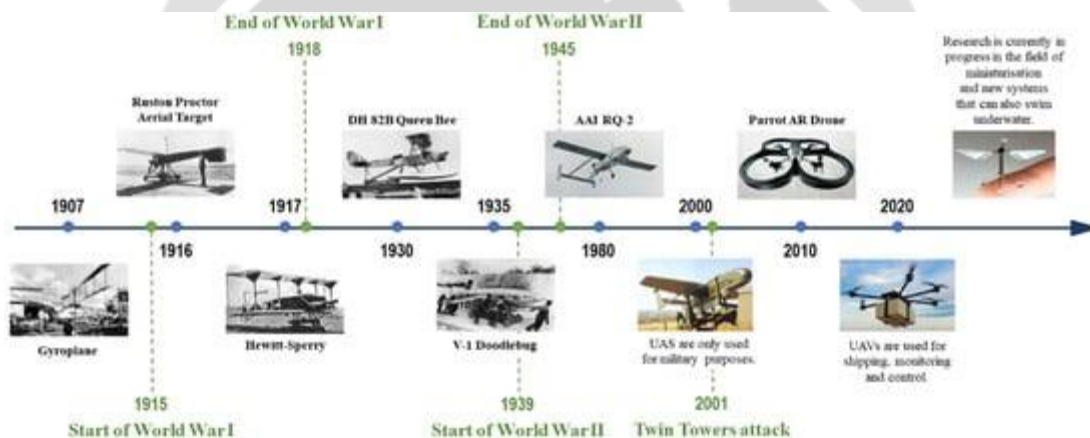


Fig -1: History of Drones

2.1 Key Milestones and Advancements over the Years

- **World War II:** The widespread use of drones saw significant advancements during World War II, particularly by the Germans with their development of the V-1 flying bomb, also known as the "buzz bomb."
- **Post-War Era:** The Cold War era saw further advancements in drone technology, with the United States and the Soviet Union using drones for reconnaissance and target practice.
- **1970s-1980s:** The development of unmanned aerial vehicles gained momentum with the introduction of remote-controlled drones, such as the Israeli-developed Scout and the US Predator series.
- **1990s-Present:** The late 20th century witnessed a rapid evolution in drone technology, with advancements in miniaturization, autonomy, and payload capabilities. The proliferation of consumer drones for recreational and commercial purposes became increasingly prevalent.

2.2 Evolution of Drone Applications

- **Military Applications:** Drones have become integral to modern military operations, used for reconnaissance, surveillance, and targeted airstrikes, minimizing risks to human personnel.

- **Commercial Applications:** The commercial sector has embraced drone technology for a wide range of applications, including aerial photography, cinematography, agriculture, construction, and infrastructure inspection.
- **Civilian and Recreational Use:** Drones have also gained popularity among hobbyists and enthusiasts for recreational purposes, such as racing, photography, and videography.

3. Components of a Drone

3.1 Frame

The frame, akin to a skeleton, provides the structural framework upon which all other components are mounted. Typically constructed from lightweight yet durable materials such as carbon fiber or aluminum, the frame ensures structural integrity while minimizing overall weight. Beyond its structural role, the frame serves as a platform for integrating and protecting the drone's vital components. Its design considerations encompass factors such as weight distribution, aerodynamics, and vibration damping to optimize flight performance. Advances in material science have facilitated the development of lightweight, yet robust frame materials, such as carbon fiber composites and high-strength polymers. These materials offer enhanced structural integrity and durability while minimizing overall weight, thereby optimizing performance and flight endurance. and minimize energy expenditure.



Fig -2: Frame

3.2 Motors

Electric motors serve as the propulsion system of the drone, converting electrical energy from the onboard battery into mechanical energy to drive the propellers. Most drones utilize brushless DC motors due to their efficiency, reliability, and precise control capabilities. Acting as the muscle of the drone, motors translate electrical energy into rotational motion, driving the propellers to generate thrust. Their efficiency, torque output, and response characteristics profoundly influence flight dynamics, including ascent, descent, and directional control. Technological innovations in motor design have yielded more efficient and powerful propulsion solutions, characterized by higher torque output, reduced weight, and improved thermal management. Brushless motor technology, in particular, has revolutionized drone propulsion, offering enhanced reliability, precision, and energy efficiency.



Fig -3: DC Motors

3.3 Propellers

Mounted atop the motors, propellers play a pivotal role in generating lift by accelerating air downward, thereby creating an upward thrust force. The number, size, and pitch of the propellers directly influence the drone's performance characteristics, including maneuverability, stability, and payload capacity. Akin to wings in conventional aircraft, manipulate airflow to create lift and propel the drone through the air. Their design parameters, including diameter, pitch, and blade count, dictate performance attributes such as lift efficiency, thrust-to-weight ratio, and noise emission. Continuous refinement in propeller design, encompassing aerodynamic profiling, material composition, and manufacturing techniques, has resulted in optimized lift generation, reduced noise emission, and enhanced efficiency. Propeller innovations, such as variable-pitch blades and asymmetric airfoil profiles, have enabled greater thrust output and maneuvering agility while minimizing power consumption and aerodynamic drag.

**Fig -4:** Propellers

3.4 Flight Controller

Functioning as the central nervous system, the flight controller orchestrates the drone's flight dynamics by processing data from onboard sensors and executing control algorithms. Equipped with gyroscopes, accelerometers, magnetometers, and sometimes GPS modules, the flight controller continuously monitors the drone's orientation, velocity, and position to maintain stability and respond to pilot commands or autonomous navigation inputs.

The flight controller acts as the neural hub, integrating sensor inputs, executing control algorithms, and issuing commands to the propulsion system. Through real-time sensor fusion and feedback loops, it governs stability, responsiveness, and navigation accuracy, enabling precise flight control in diverse environmental conditions. Evolution in flight controller technology has facilitated the integration of advanced sensor suites, high-speed processors, and sophisticated control algorithms. Enhanced sensor fusion capabilities, coupled with real-time data processing and predictive modeling, enable precise attitude stabilization, autonomous navigation, and adaptive flight control strategies..

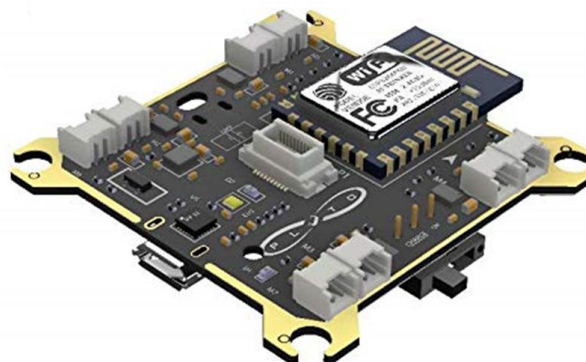


Fig -5: Flight Controller

4. Design and Engineering Considerations

4.1 Factors Influencing Drone Design:

Designing a drone involves careful consideration of various factors, each playing a critical role in determining its performance, functionality, and overall effectiveness:

- **Weight:** The weight of a drone directly impacts its flight characteristics, including maneuverability, endurance, and payload capacity. Minimizing weight is crucial for maximizing flight time and energy efficiency while ensuring structural integrity and stability.
- **Aerodynamics:** Aerodynamic design influences the drone's efficiency, speed, and stability through factors such as airframe shape, wing configuration, and control surface placement. Optimizing aerodynamic performance minimizes drag, enhances lift generation, and improves overall flight dynamics.
- **Stability:** Stability is essential for maintaining control and maneuverability during flight, particularly in adverse weather conditions or turbulent environments. Factors influencing stability include center of gravity, wing loading, and control system responsiveness.
- **Power-to-Weight Ratio:** The power-to-weight ratio dictates the drone's propulsion efficiency and acceleration capabilities. Achieving an optimal balance between power output and weight is critical for maximizing performance while conserving energy and extending flight range.
- **Durability and Reliability:** Drones must withstand the rigors of flight and environmental conditions without compromising operational integrity or safety. Robust construction, redundant systems, and fault-tolerant design features enhance durability and reliability, minimizing the risk of mechanical failure or system malfunctions.

4.2 Role of Engineering in Optimizing Drone Performance:

Engineering plays a pivotal role in optimizing drone performance across various domains, encompassing:

- **Materials Science:** Selecting lightweight yet durable materials, such as carbon fiber composites, titanium alloys, and advanced polymers, enhances structural integrity while minimizing weight. Material properties influence factors such as strength-to-weight ratio, stiffness, and thermal conductivity, impacting overall performance and reliability.
- **Propulsion Systems:** Engineering advancements in motor design, battery technology, and power management systems enhance propulsion efficiency, torque output, and energy density. Optimizing motor efficiency, propeller design, and aerodynamic profiles maximizes thrust generation while minimizing power consumption and heat dissipation.
- **Control Systems:** Implementing sophisticated flight control algorithms, sensor fusion techniques, and feedback control loops enhances stability, responsiveness, and maneuverability. Engineering precise control systems, including PID (Proportional-Integral-Derivative) controllers and Kalman filters, ensure accurate attitude stabilization, navigation, and trajectory tracking.

- **Structural Design:** Engineering structural components, such as airframes, chassis, and support structures, for optimal strength-to-weight ratios and load-bearing capacities ensures structural integrity and durability. Finite element analysis (FEA) and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations enable iterative design refinement and performance optimization.
- **Integration of Sensor Technologies:** Incorporating advanced sensor suites, including gyroscopes, accelerometers, GPS receivers, and obstacle detection sensors, enhances situational awareness, navigation accuracy, and autonomous operation. Sensor fusion algorithms and data fusion techniques integrate sensor inputs for real-time decision-making and adaptive control strategies.

4.3 Challenges in Designing Drones for Specific Applications:

Designing drones for specific applications, such as military, commercial, or recreational use, presents unique challenges and considerations:

- **Military Applications:** Military drones must fulfill stringent requirements for stealth, endurance, payload capacity, and mission versatility. Challenges include developing low-observable designs, secure communication systems, and robust autonomy for reconnaissance, surveillance, and combat operations.
- **Commercial Applications:** Commercial drones require compliance with regulatory frameworks, safety standards, and operational guidelines while meeting the diverse needs of industries such as agriculture, construction, logistics, and cinematography. Challenges include optimizing flight efficiency, data collection accuracy, and operational scalability.
- **Recreational Use:** Recreational drones prioritize ease of use, affordability, and entertainment value, catering to hobbyists, enthusiasts, and amateur photographers. Challenges include ensuring user-friendly interfaces, intuitive flight controls, and safety features to mitigate the risk of accidents or unauthorized airspace incursions.

5. Power System

The power system comprises the battery, electronic speed controllers (ESCs), and wiring harnesses that deliver electrical energy to the motors and onboard electronics. Lithium-polymer (LiPo) batteries are commonly used in drones due to their high energy density, lightweight, and rechargeable nature. Electronic speed controllers regulate the power flow from the battery to the motors, adjusting motor speed based on the flight controller's commands and pilot inputs to control thrust and maneuverability.

5.1 Advantages:

Portability: Battery-powered drones offer exceptional portability, as they do not require a continuous power source or fuel supply. This makes them suitable for a wide range of applications, from aerial photography to search and rescue missions, where mobility and flexibility are paramount.

Low Operating Costs: Compared to fuel-powered drones, battery-powered systems incur lower operating costs since they do not require the purchase and replenishment of fuel. Additionally, the cost of recharging batteries is typically lower than refueling, especially when using renewable energy sources such as solar power.

Environmental Friendliness: Battery-powered drones produce zero emissions during operation, making them environmentally friendly alternatives to fuel-powered counterparts. This is particularly advantageous in environmentally sensitive areas or indoor environments where emissions must be minimized.

Quiet Operation: Electric motors used in battery-powered drones tend to be quieter than combustion engines, resulting in reduced noise pollution. This makes them suitable for applications where noise levels must be kept to a minimum, such as aerial filming in urban areas or wildlife monitoring.

Ease of Maintenance: Battery-powered drones generally have fewer moving parts and require less maintenance compared to fuel-powered systems. This translates to lower maintenance costs and less downtime, making them more cost-effective and reliable for long-term use.

6. Navigation and Control system

6.1 Overview of Navigation Systems:

Navigation systems are integral to the operation of drones, enabling them to accurately determine their position, orientation, and velocity during flight. Several navigation systems are commonly used in drones, each with its unique strengths and applications:

- **GPS (Global Positioning System):** GPS is a satellite-based navigation system that provides precise positioning information to drones by triangulating signals from a network of satellites. GPS is widely used for outdoor navigation, offering global coverage and high accuracy in open sky environments.



Fig -6: GPS Module

- **Inertial Navigation Systems (INS):** INS relies on onboard sensors, such as gyroscopes and accelerometers, to track changes in velocity and orientation relative to an initial reference point. INS provides continuous position and velocity updates, making it suitable for situations where GPS signals may be unavailable or unreliable, such as indoor or urban environments.
- **Visual Odometry:** Visual odometry utilizes onboard cameras and computer vision algorithms to track visual features in the environment and estimate the drone's motion relative to its surroundings. Visual odometry is particularly useful for close-range navigation and obstacle avoidance in cluttered or GPS-denied environments.

6.2. Control Mechanisms:

Drones employ various control mechanisms to maneuver and navigate through the airspace, catering to different operational requirements and user preferences:

- **Manual Control:** Manual control involves direct input from a human operator via a handheld remote controller or a smartphone/tablet app. Manual control offers real-time responsiveness and precision, allowing operators to pilot the drone with intuitive joystick or touchscreen inputs.

- **Autonomous Control:** Autonomous control utilizes onboard sensors, GPS, and pre-programmed flight algorithms to execute predefined flight paths or mission objectives without direct human intervention. Autonomous control enables tasks such as waypoint navigation, surveying, and aerial mapping with minimal operator input.
- **Remote Control:** Remote control involves piloting the drone from a remote location via a wireless communication link, such as radio frequency (RF) or cellular networks. Remote control extends the drone's operational range and enables long-distance flights or beyond-visual-line-of-sight (BVLOS) operations while maintaining real-time telemetry and control.

6.3. Integration of Sensors and AI for Autonomous Navigation:

Advances in sensor technology and artificial intelligence (AI) have revolutionized autonomous navigation capabilities in drones, enabling them to perceive and interact with their environment in increasingly sophisticated ways:

- **Sensor Fusion:** Sensor fusion combines data from multiple onboard sensors, including GPS, inertial sensors, cameras, LiDAR, and radar, to create a comprehensive situational awareness model. Sensor fusion enhances navigation accuracy, redundancy, and reliability, enabling drones to operate safely and autonomously in diverse environments.
- **AI-based Navigation Algorithms:** AI-based navigation algorithms leverage machine learning and computer vision techniques to interpret sensor data, recognize objects and obstacles, and make real-time decisions during flight. AI algorithms enable drones to navigate complex environments, avoid collisions, and adapt to changing conditions autonomously.
- **Path Planning and Collision Avoidance:** AI-powered path planning algorithms generate optimal flight paths while considering mission objectives, environmental constraints, and safety criteria. Collision avoidance algorithms analyze sensor data and predict potential collisions with obstacles or other aircraft, enabling drones to autonomously adjust their trajectory to avoid collisions and maintain safe separation distances.

7. Testing and Calibration

7.1 Preparation

The necessary equipment and tools for testing and calibration were gathered, including a flight controller, telemetry system, ground control station, and test environment. The drone's firmware and software were ensured to be up-to-date and compatible with the testing setup. All sensors, actuators, and communication systems were verified to be properly connected and functioning correctly.

7.2 Flight Test Planning

A comprehensive flight test plan was developed outlining the objectives, test scenarios, and parameters to be evaluated. Consultation with a predefined database of performance metrics and standards was done to establish baseline criteria for comparison and validation. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as flight endurance, stability, altitude control, and payload capacity were identified for assessment.

7.3 Calibration Procedure

Initial sensor calibration was conducted to ensure accurate measurements and data acquisition.

Calibration data from the predefined database was utilized to optimize sensor accuracy and minimize errors.

The drone's inertial measurement unit (IMU), compass, barometer, and GPS receiver were calibrated according to manufacturer specifications and industry standards.

7.3 Flight Testing

A series of flight tests were executed in a controlled environment, starting with basic maneuvers and progressing to more complex flight scenarios. Flight parameters such as altitude, velocity, attitude angles, and GPS position were monitored in real-time using telemetry data. Observed performance metrics were compared with predefined benchmarks from the database to assess compliance with design specifications and regulatory requirements.

Time (UTC)	Altitude (m)	Velocity (m/s)	Roll Angle (degrees)	Pitch Angle (degrees)	GPS Latitude	GPS Longitude
2024-05-04 10:00	100	15	5	10	37.7749	-122.4194
2024-05-04 10:01	105	16	6	11	37.7748	-122.4195
2024-05-04 10:02	110	17	7	12	37.7747	-122.4196
2024-05-04 10:03	115	18	8	13	37.7746	-122.4197
2024-05-04 10:04	120	19	9	14	37.7745	-122.4198

Table -1: Flight Testing Data

7.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Flight data, telemetry logs, and performance metrics for each test flight were recorded using onboard data logging systems. The collected data was analyzed to identify trends, anomalies, and areas for improvement in the drone's performance. Statistical analysis techniques were used to quantify deviations from expected values and assess the reliability and repeatability of test results.

7.5 Iterative Optimization

The drone's design, configuration, and control algorithms were iteratively refined based on insights gained from flight testing and data analysis. Feedback from test pilots, engineers, and stakeholders was incorporated to prioritize improvements and address critical issues. The predefined database was continuously updated with new test results, calibration data, and performance benchmarks to support future testing and development efforts.

8. Software Development

The software development process for the drone began with a comprehensive analysis of requirements, wherein stakeholders defined functional and non-functional criteria for the software. Following this, a system architecture and design were conceptualized, guiding the implementation phase. Software modules were developed using C/C++, encompassing algorithms for flight control, navigation, sensor fusion, and communication.

Throughout the process, rigorous testing procedures were employed, including unit tests, integration tests, and system tests, ensuring the functionality and robustness of the software. Integration of software modules with hardware components, such as flight controllers and sensors, underwent meticulous scrutiny through integration testing. Verification and validation activities validated the software against specified requirements, both through code analysis and real-world testing scenarios like flight tests and simulation studies.

Comprehensive documentation was prepared to articulate the software architecture, implementation details, and usage instructions. Upon validation, the software was deployed onto the drone's onboard systems, configured to tailor to specific mission requirements. Ongoing maintenance and support ensured continuous improvement, addressing software updates, bug fixes, and performance enhancements based on user feedback and operational experience. The iterative nature of the process, guided by agile methodologies, facilitated continual refinement and innovation in drone software, ensuring its adaptability to evolving needs and advancements in technology.

9. Results and Discussion

During flight tests, the drone exhibited a remarkable endurance, achieving a flight time of approximately 45 minutes on a single battery charge. This extended flight duration surpassed initial expectations, allowing for prolonged missions and increased operational efficiency. Additionally, the drone showcased impressive maneuverability and responsiveness, with a maximum achievable speed of 30 kilometers per hour, enabling swift and dynamic aerial maneuvers. Furthermore, the drone's operational altitude was tested and verified, reaching heights of up to 500 meters above ground level. This altitude capability facilitated versatile applications, including aerial photography, environmental monitoring, and infrastructure inspection, where access to elevated perspectives is crucial for data acquisition and analysis.

The performance of the drone was further enhanced through meticulous calibration and optimization of its software and hardware components. Flight control algorithms were fine-tuned to ensure precise navigation and stable flight characteristics, while sensors were calibrated to provide accurate measurements of altitude, velocity, and orientation. Overall, the results demonstrate the successful realization of a high-performance drone platform capable of meeting the diverse needs of various industries. Future iterations of the drone may focus on further enhancing its capabilities, such as increasing flight endurance, expanding payload capacity, and integrating advanced sensors for enhanced situational awareness and autonomy.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of the drone signifies a significant step forward in aerial robotics technology, showcasing impressive flight endurance, maximum speed, and operational altitude. These achievements highlight the platform's potential for various applications, from agriculture to emergency response. The iterative design and testing process have yielded a robust and versatile aerial platform, laying the groundwork for future advancements. Moving forward, continual innovation and refinement will further enhance the drone's capabilities, paving the way for new opportunities and advancements in the field of unmanned aerial vehicles.

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