

Pookie fleet flies into Afghanistan

The deployment of three lightweight, highly manoeuvrable Mine Detection Vehicles (MDVs) to support MineTech's mine clearance activity in Afghanistan, is testimony to the fact that, in the drive to improve safety and efficiency in mine clearance, old need not necessarily mean outdated. Twenty-five years after it was left to gather dust as outdated technology, MineTech's development team have completed their resurrection of the Pookie and produced a Mine Detecting Vehicle (MDV) light enough to deploy successfully into minefields all over the world today.

Originally used in Zimbabwe in the 1970s, the Pookie earned its stripes in the battle against anti-tank mines, which at one point were being laid on the roads at a rate of 200 a day. While more than 600 people were killed and countless more injured by landmines on the roads and runways in Zimbabwe, prior to its independence, the toll would have been much higher but for the invention of the Pookie, a small detection vehicle, designed to travel ahead of military and civilian convoys and light enough not to detonate anti-tank mines.

The Pookie, so called because of its resemblance to a small wide-eyed African bush baby of the same name, was constructed on a lightweight chassis and carried a one-person armour plated cab. Despite being consigned to the MDV scrap heap in 1980, the arrival of new demining technologies, in particular the Large Loop Detector, has given it a new lease of life as a highly effective platform for detection with the ability to head right into the field.

Explains Chris Thompson, "Very few mine detection techniques other than mine detecting dog teams or metal detectors have any platform from which to deploy successfully into a mine affected area with only a limited risk of exploding mines. The Pookie provides that platform, applying a ground pressure of just 4lb per square inch, it travels straight over the mines it's searching for."

Even with a detonation, as occurred several times on the roads in Zimbabwe, the design of the armour plated vehicle with its 'V' shaped undercarriage, deflect any blast away from the driver. The wheels are also positioned some distance from the cab, again to protect the driver in the event of detonation.

MineTech's Pookie Fleets are currently deployed with a large sensor, large loop detector, although it has also been tested and is a suitable platform for other detection systems such as Ground Penetrating Radar. The large loop detector has proved most effective, however, enabling each Pookie to clear in wide, three metre lanes. It's ideal for clearing UXO, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines and has the ability to detect mines and UXO to depths of four and six metres. As well as covering a large area, the detector registers less scrap metal as traditional detectors which speeds up the whole clearance process.

Having completed its resurrection of the first Pookie three years ago, MineTech now has three Pookies in its fleet with plans for more on the way.

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