UNMANNED and UNREPARED In the second for Large-Scale Combat Operations: A Tactical Unmanned Aircraft System Perspective

By CW3 Patrick J. Barbier

he title of my favorite lesson to instruct at the Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Operations Technician Warrant Officer Basic Course (WOBC), military occupational specialty (MOS) 150U, is UAS Operational Sites. The lesson plan can be deceiving, because its content doesn't elaborate on the technical aspects of where UAS equipment must be emplaced, or how to read a chart to determine runway length requirements. The material presented develops the missing tactical expertise our students require by providing them with an opportunity to plan a platoon defense, integrate local security measures, and employ direct-fire weapons with a provided scenario.

This becomes an uncomfortable exercise for most students, many of whom have supported the Global War on Terrorism from safeguarded forward operating bases for the last 2 decades. The severity of this problem is compounded by inadequate training across all domains. These two factors have enabled this lack of proficiency in the execution of warrior tasks and battle drills (WT-BDs) to become acceptable. For Tactical UAS (TUAS) formations to be able to effectively fight, survive, and win in large-scale combat operations (LSCO), WTBDs must be actively pursued and integrated to improve the training and development of their Soldiers and leaders. Expertise in WTBDs will become increasingly important as the TUAS community retires the cumbersome, but accomplished, RQ-7B Shadow and inherits small UAS (sUAS) as a stopgap. Many of the leaders that will have direct oversight over this transformation are either grossly overconfident in the tactical knowledge that is commensurate with their rank, or they have accepted this gap as a fault.

The institutional training domain is tasked with establishing a "baseline proficiency of ... Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills (WTBDs)" (Department of the Army [DA], 2017, p. 67; U.S. Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC], 2016, p. 7; TRADOC, n.d.) in our future UAS Soldiers and leaders. This is accomplished through Enlisted Initial Military Training, which consists of Basic Combat Training, Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and the Officer Education System's branch-specific WOBC. The institutional professional military education (PME) that our noncommissioned officers (NCOs) receive through the NCO education system (NCOES) has similar goals in preparing them to "lead and train Soldiers who work and fight under their supervision, and to assist

An MQ-1C Gray Eagle unmanned aerial system flies over Division Artillery as they fire during the Mass Fire Mission on Fort Stewart, Georgia. U.S. Army photo by SGT William Begley.

their leaders in executing unit missions" (DA, 2017, p. 69).

What one might assume after reading these descriptions is that future UAS Soldiers and leaders continuously receive or execute training to reinforce the "skills needed by all Soldiers for combat" (TRADOC for STAND-TO, 2010, para. 1). The reality is that the TRADOC Regulation, which exists to integrate these skills into training at WOBC, falls short of achieving its objective, and there is no equivalent to hold our NCOES accountable, leaving a knowledge gap.

The Common Core Task List (CCTL)¹ contains several WTBDs, none of which must be taught, trained, and/or reinforced at WOBC (TRADOC, 2020, pp. 30-35). This results in our defined "combat leader ... confident warfighters..." (DA, 2023, p. 29) underdeveloped in the "proficiency of drills necessary to succeed while in contact with the enemy" (TRADOC, 2020, p. 30). Many newly commissioned 150Us will find themselves in a modified table of organization and equipment position of UAS Platoon Leader without ever having led or understood what is required to keep their Soldiers and selves alive.

The NCOES, beginning with the Basic

¹ "The updated CCTL establishes the minimum requirements for IMT [initial military training] junior officers, and will help to develop officers with the character, competence, and commitment to successfully lead Soldiers at their FUA [first unit of assignment]" (TRADOC, 2020, p. 31, para. 4-4a).

Leader Course and branch-specific Advanced and Senior Leader Courses (ALC, SLC), are equally challenged. This curriculum lacks a baseline guiding document equivalent to the CCTL for WOBC to guide how and when WTBDs are integrated. If that's not concerning, consider that the NCOES removed map reading and land navigation from their program of instruction (POI) (DA, 2013). This was the same year that the Center for Army Lessons Learned published, "Operating in a Denied, Degraded, and Disrupted Space Operational Environment," which recognized this skill as important for units to integrate as they plan, prepare, and execute operations with degraded capabilities (Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2018). This appears counterintuitive and passed the responsibility of training map reading and land navigation onto the operational or self-development domain. A review of the current POI for 15E (TUAS Maintainer) and 15W (TUAS Operator) ALC and SLC demonstrates a comparable disregard for the WTBDs.

Training and Doctrine Command develops learning products through the analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation, or ADDIE, framework, which exists to provide "relevant, effective, efficient, and current instruction" (TRADOC, 2017, p. 46). This is a critical component to the improvement or creation of POI, which is supposed to receive candid feedback from 15+ recommended sources, such as combat training centers (CTCs), surveys of course graduates, and professional studies. Developers and managers must rely heavily on applying responses to successfully incorporate trends and current observations into existing or new lesson plans. A significant challenge to this process lies with The Army University's posture regarding education and a proclaimed "no-growth budget environment" (The Army University, 2023, p. 3). To effectively bypass this challenge, our training and education developers will need to integrate WTBDs into their existing POI, identify opportunities to generate honest dialogue among students, and facilitate professionals

from the operational domain to provide insight for what is to come.

Future TUAS (FTUAS) will transform how our TUAS Soldiers in the military occupational specialties of 15E and 15W conduct their operations. The procurement requirements for FTUAS includes: vertical takeoff and landing, command and control on-the-move capability, simplified logistics, and a reduced acoustical signature (Uncrewed Aircraft Systems

"I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills."

> (The U.S. Army Soldier's Creed, line 8)

Project Management Office, 2023). The selected system will finally be able to live up to the word "tactical" within its title, regardless of whether a unit operates an sUAS or TUAS. This presents a significant challenge in how our UAS Soldiers, leaders, and trainers at-scale are going to prepare to operate from the land and integrate in the air domain. In a Likert² survey of 18 15E and 15W NCOs, more than 85 percent of respondents said they're confident in their ability to perform selected WTBDs commensurate with their grade and PME level (or below). At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were prompted to explain the steps of tasks they were confident in performing. Only a select few had quality responses. Most of the leaders surveyed were willing to receive additional training to become more proficient in WT-BDs, which can be addressed by choosing to act upon their own core leader competencies (leads, develops, and achieves). If this isn't a red star cluster moment for us as a branch, it's hard to say what is.

A prevailing concern of mine and other professionals is how to solve the problem of TUAS formations' individual training proficiency in WTBDs. Increased risk acceptance will coincide with the increased tactical mobility that FTUAS provides to our units as our unmanned scouts push out farther away from the support area. One way to mitigate the probability of a hazardous event occurring is training the basics first, while we train our individual tasks within the

operational training domain. The reality is that most TUAS units are not observing the Eastern European theater and thinking about how they innovate their training plans. The E43 team lead from the Joint Readiness Training Center Operations Group, CW3 Cody Smith, pointed out that the divestment of Shadow and Raven "begs the question, what is next ... 15W/E community will find themselves in more austere conditions when conducting FTUAS operations ... in terms of understanding basic Soldiering tasks, it's clear that the tactical UAS community do not get the reps, are not competent, and overall seem to not care" (C. Smith, personal com-

munication, 2024). While he noted that some units are taking an aggressive approach at reinvesting in the basics, a majority remain apathetic and unwilling to accept this challenge. The reality is that without an effective accountability measure to determine a unit's individual proficiency, it's difficult to assess a unit's real readiness.

Army warrior training is the annual training of selected WTBDs and is not optional for E-1 to E-7, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2, unless waived by an O-8 (active duty) (DA, 2017, p. 207). This training is recognized by both Army Doctrine Publication and Field Manual 7-0, "Training," as being the "foundation to unit-level collective training" and at times, assists commanders in achieving proficiency in their collective live-fire and mission-essential tasks (DA, 2021, p. C-1). Our leaders may be overestimating their training-readiness level in the execution of their collective tasks if they are deficient in the individual Soldier skills. Unfortunately, no clear

2 "Various kinds of rating scales have been developed to measure attitudes directly (i.e., the person knows their attitude is being studied). The most widely used is the Likert scale (1932)" (Mclead, 2023).



A UAS from Company D, 82D Combat Aviation Brigade, 82D Airborne Division, is prepped for flight operations. U. S. Army photo by SGT Vincent Levelev.

mechanism exists to evaluate a unit's WTBD proficiency or report readiness to our seniormost commanders. While on the surface, a unit can report that it has achieved advanced task proficiency, the remaining underlying issues will not allow us to set the conditions that drive our operations. The consequence is that poorly trained UAS units then become a liability rather than an asset. This means we will fail to honor the sacred trust because we cannot satisfy our commitment to the maneuver forces on the ground (Mangum et al., n.d.).

None of these concepts should be new to any Army Aviation professional, including seniormost leadership. "Mastering the Fundamentals" is what MG Michael McCurry, former Commanding General of the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, advocated nearly 1 year ago (McCurry, 2023, p. 2). The Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Randy George, wants every echelon focused on warfighting (Tan, 2023b), while Sergeant Major of the Army, Michael Weimar's message is to be brilliant at the basics (Tan, 2023a). Newly commissioned WOs and future 150Us confirm the criticality of these fundamental skills. In their response to the same Likert survey, they communicated a confidence rate that was half of the NCOs' (41 percent). At this point, they've completed ALCs (at a minimum) and WO Candidate School, but they are still unprepared.

This requires an objective review of TRADOC requirements, or lack thereof. The CCTL is not bringing future WOs up to speed (or resetting them) on the basics, and there is nothing comparable to ensure our NCOES reinforce the WTBDs needed to fight and win in LSCO. Training developers and course managers will need to get creative in how they allocate one of our most vital resources—time—to ensure they give future leaders the chance to successfully

develop themselves. Recommending that, "Soldiers should [emphasis added] train on the task" throws out any level of accountability when managing the frequency for sustainment training of WTBDs (TRADOC, 2008, p. 2-1). Compounding this issue is our inability to measure individual training readiness and determine how prepared the TUAS Platoon is to conduct their own defense and remain undetected from the enemy, or how effective squads establish their ground and aerial observation posts. Combat training centers are continuing to challenge rotational training units within the decisive action training environment. In response, these CTCs are providing units transforming in contact and learning product developers with the requisite data needed to create tactics, techniques, and procedures to be applied to FTUAS.

With the dynamic future of UAS, the Regulator Battalion remains steadfast in



An RQ-28A short-range reconnaissance quadcopter used during a field training exercise at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, June 6, 2024. U.S. National Guard photo by SPC Aliyah Vivier.

its commitment to the modernization of all institutional training efforts. The 2D Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment, the home for the 150U WOBC and UAS AIT, continues to seek an advantage through consistent outreach between industry, academia, and our joint partners. This is accomplished by providing our leaders to CTCs as augmentee observer coach/ trainers; support to Mission Command Training Program Warfighter Exercises; or involving our CTC Operations Group professionals in POI regularly. The proactive integration of sUAS, counter-UAS, and sUAS Master Trainers into its POI demonstrates the aggressive efforts at

Fort Huachuca to remain at the forefront of UAS' transformation in contact. For many AIT students, a rigorous WTBDfocused training exercise named in honor of UAS Operations Officer and Platoon Leader, CW2 Edward Balli,³ Operation Watchdogs Revenge, prepares them for the beginning of their story as a Soldier. The cost for these initiatives incurred is negligible, but the observation and feedback of training and networking is invaluable to the creation of challenging, LSCO-focused POI. This is the time for our leaders to recognize that we are entrusted with making every effort to protect the sons and daughters of America when our nation calls.

Biography:

CW3 Patrick Barbier currently serves as an Instructor for the 150U WOBC within the 2D Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment, 1st Aviation Brigade. His previous assignments include: UAS Operations Officer, TUAS Platoon, D/299th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division; Squadron UAS Operations Officer and TUAS Platoon Leader, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop; and B Troop 1-17th Air Cavalry Squadron, 82D Combat Aviation Brigade.

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³ CW2 Edward Balli was a Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2D Cavalry Regiment Soldier killed in an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (January 2014) (Combined Task Force Dragoon Public Affairs, 2014).