

## From the Army Acquisition Executive

# Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Office



This issue showcases the magnificent work being accomplished by Program Executive Office Aviation's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Office (UAS PO) in providing our warfighters with valuable intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and changing the face of modern warfare. UAS have become the weapon of choice for Army commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan. These so-called "flying binoculars" save lives and keep the troops out of harm's way.

The Army UAS story is a recent one. In 1999, a single Hunter system was sent to support U.S. troops in the Balkans, becoming the first Army UAS to support real-world operations. A year later, the UAS PO consisted of 70 people with an annual budget of \$60 million. Today, the PO manages more than \$1 billion annually with more than 1,100 unmanned aircraft in support of *Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF)*, and this demand for unmanned systems is continually increasing. It took the Army more than a decade to fly 100,000 UAS hours. It took us less than 1 year to fly the next 100,000 hours, and we fly more than that each year in theater. These systems operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with multiple aircraft in the same unit operating simultaneously.

While commanders once viewed unmanned systems as expendable assets, they are now viewed as indispensable in extending battlefield awareness and expediting the engagement and destruction of targets. In accelerating procurement of UAS, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates told Congress earlier this year that, "UASs have become one of the most critical capabilities in our military. They give the troops the tremendous advantage of seeing full-motion, real-time streaming video over a target—such as an insurgent planting an IED [improvised explosive device]." Secretary Gates then highlighted the success of the Army's Task Force Odin in Iraq that resulted in a dramatic increase of full-motion video available to commanders. That success is now being replicated in Afghanistan.

The UAS PO has a number of success stories in meeting the rapid fielding of unmanned systems to the warfighter and meeting the urgent needs of battlefield commanders. The **Shadow** Tactical UAS, for example, is getting a longer wing to increase flight endurance by several hours, a software upgrade, and a much-sought laser designator to allow commanders and Soldiers to designate targets

for precise munitions. The battery-operated **Raven** was fielded in just 20 weeks from funding. Weighing only about 4 pounds, it is a hand-launched and rucksack-portable unmanned system that provides Soldiers a live video feed both day and night with Global Positioning System tracking and still-image capabilities. Modular, the entire system weighs about 40 pounds and can be distributed throughout the squad, which minimizes the amount of additional weight for each Soldier. Most warfighters agree that the Raven is "fun" to operate and "ideal" for Afghanistan's mountainous terrain.

In July, the Army deployed a so-called quick reaction capability of its Extended Range/Multi-Purpose (ER/MP) **Sky Warrior** UAS to two platoons in theater. This system is proving to be a very powerful tool for our commanders because of its ability to fly at 25,000 feet; employ a redundant, automatic take-off and landing system; and benefit from both satellite communications and a line-of-sight Tactical Common Data Link. In the future, the ER/MP will be the mainstay of the division/corps commander's battleset for land warfare operations.

Another area in the exponential growth of unmanned systems is the Army's expansion of the Video from UAS for Interoperability Teaming from a single battalion of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to 10 additional Apache battalions and other aircraft, including the OH-72 Kiowa Warrior. More advanced manned-unmanned teaming systems will enable helicopter pilots to direct unmanned systems.

Supporting an Army at war is critical, both tactically and strategically. From a tactical standpoint, we are providing weapon systems—manned and unmanned—and equipment that our warfighters need to succeed in their current missions. As we meet our ongoing requirements, we are looking to the future to support an Army at war from a strategic standpoint. We are taking the lessons learned in *OEF/OIF* and putting in place a plan to meet future requirements better and faster. Our goal is to compress the concept-to-combat cycle significantly to meet the immediate and future needs of our warfighters as rapidly as possible. The UAS PO has a lead role in our efforts.

Let me close by extending my very best wishes to you all for a very happy and healthy new year. Keep up the great work!

**Dean G. Popps**  
Army Acquisition Executive