

The Sky Warrior Program ... Building a House of Cards

A key contention the Army regularly makes in the ongoing unmanned aircraft discussion is that "the Army's Warrior Program is 'By the Book.'" They often cite that its requirement is approved by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) - the senior DoD Requirements Body and that it is DoD 5000 (Acquisition) and Federal Acquisition Regulation compliant. In reality, their 'By the Book' program has substantial short falls when studied more closely.

In February 2004, the Army cancelled the RAH-66 Comanche helicopter program, and in an unusual decision by DoD, were allowed to keep the \$14B they had programmed for the helicopter to upgrade their remaining aviation portfolio. Realizing that they were in the unusual position of having more money that they could readily spend on their existing helicopters, they sought other opportunities to spend the Comanche windfall. Later that year, they issued a Combat Mission Need Statement (CMNS) documenting the need for unmanned aircraft to support their ground forces. A CMNS is used by a Service to document urgent requirements, needed in the short term (usually a year or less) to address a critical capability gap of forces engaged in combat operations. It is afforded expedited processing through the requirements system and, if approved, can similarly expedite the traditionally laborious acquisition process as well. The goal is to get something fielded quickly to enable the soldier to get the mission done.

Shortly thereafter, the Army submitted an Operational Requirements Document (ORD) for their Extended Range/Multi Purpose Unmanned Air Vehicle (UAV) for staffing and JROC approval. An ORD takes the largely conceptual requirements in a traditional MNS or CMNS and with analysis of the operational need, develops performance requirements for the desired system. In this case, the ER/MP ORD was based on the earlier UAV CMNS and other studies that the Army had produced showing that no existing DoD systems could fulfill this requirement. It identified the need for medium altitude UAV to support Corps Operations. At the time, the Air Force vigorously opposed the ER/MP ORD. While they recognized the need for UAV support of ground forces, they showed the Air Force's existing MQ-1 Predator, operationally deployed since Operation Allied Force in 1999, and a critical weapons system in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, could meet all ER/MP requirements with minimal modification. They also expressed strong concern that an Army ownership of the ER/MP was inconsistent with clearly defined Service Roles and Missions. After much debate, the Air Force was overruled in a March 31, 2005 JROC executive session decision.

With rather suspicious timing, the Army announced the results of "Decision Point 43," an Army Staff decision to field the ER/MP at the Division level instead of at the Corps level. Initially, this seemed like an innocuous decision. Much of the debate over the ER/MP centered on giving organic control to the ground forces. The Army was simply going to make it organic to the Division instead of the Corps. What was less apparent was the fact that this decision fundamentally changed the approved concept of operations (CONOPS) for the ER/MP. Since the ORD is based on the CONOPS, this change should have forced a review and subsequent revision of the performance parameters specified in the ER/MP ORD. Specifically, a Corps is responsible for a significantly larger portion of the battlefield than a Division, driving the need for a commensurately more capable UAV. To illustrate this change, the Multi-

national Corps in Iraq is responsible for most of the country's 170,000 square miles. It is over 500 miles from the Turkish border to the Kuwaiti border. This Corps has seven subordinate divisions each of which is responsible for no more than 25,000 square miles, an area about 150 miles on a side. The ER/MP ORD lays out a reasonable set of requirements if it is supporting a Corps. The requirements calls for range, altitude, endurance, comm architecture, sensor performance and payload in the same class as the Air Force Predator, which is used to support operations across a theater. Yet if you compare those requirements to the needs of a division, they are clearly overmatched. A Division UAV isn't supporting nearly the same amount of battlefield and wouldn't need the range, endurance, or payload capacity specified in the ER/MP ORD.

Apparently, this fact was overlooked. In August 2005, the Army completed source selection for the ER/MP ORD and down selected to the MQ-1C Warrior (now Sky Warrior). This decision was validated by the Defense Acquisition Board (DAB), who also approved the Milestone B decision for the program. No one raised the point that designation of the ER/MP as a Division asset might call into question the fundamental analysis that was used to validate the requirement and identify the performance parameters that the Source Selection used for its criteria. No one questioned the fact that the Air Force was in Full Rate Production on the MQ-1B Predator and was receiving substantial plus-ups from Congress to enable the acceleration of this program to enable it to field increased capacity to the field at an ever increasing rate. No one questioned the fact that the ER/MP ORD was fundamentally based on the earlier CMNS and, despite the urgency of its requirement, the ER/MP program would not deliver its first production aircraft until 2009. Meanwhile the AF continued to field Predators at an ever increasing rate.

It is now two years after that source selection, and the Army still has not flown a single Sky Warrior sortie. Meanwhile, a look at their CONOPS for basing and employing their Warriors shows that they will deliver less combat capability to the warfighter for a given force structure than the Air Force could with the same forces. The Army plans to assign each set of 12 Warriors to an individual Division. Each of these Divisions will either be deployed, at homestation in ready status, or just returned from a deployment in recovery status. At any given time, only a third of their forces will be forward, with another third able to be deployed if needed in a surge, yielding 21 and 36 orbits respectively. The Air Force, on the other hand, has a streamlined operations concept, honed by the last 8 years in almost constant combat operations. Under the Air Force proposal, the operational UAVs would be split between three bases with 40 aircraft each. The natural synergy of consolidated operations at home station and deployed, would enabling the USAF to field 36 orbits and up to 40 orbits during surge operations.

With this background, does the Army Sky Warrior still look so "By the Book?" Their CMNS foundation will not see a single UAV fielded until 2009 and should be invalidated as a requirement. Their JROC approved ORD requirement is for a Corps level system but contains requirements that go far beyond the need for a Division OPR. The DAB approved source selection chose a weapons system that is a direct derivative of the Predator Program, but did not ask why the Air Force Predator itself was not considered as an interim solution to meet the urgent needs, and did not ask if the ORD requirements were still valid following the change in the CONOPS from the ORD. Now as we engage in substantial dialogue on Executive Agency and Mission ownership, the JROC and the Deputies Advisory Working Group (DAWG) are getting ready to approve the status quo. They will do this despite the fact that the Air Force can show clearly that

it can deliver more combat power to the ground forces at the tactical level than the Army could with the same force structure.

No the Army's Sky Warrior program is not cleanly "By the book." Instead, the requirements used to justify the Warrior program form a house of cards. Every further decision in this program is another card precariously placed on a program that lacks foundation. Allowing it to continue, only exacerbates the problem, and allows the Army encroach further into the fixed wing aviation mission that has been the responsibility of the Air Force for the past 60 years. If the Army truly considered its original CMNS to be an urgent requirement and had recognized the potential of the AF Predator to meet that need, how much more UAV capability would we have in the field today?

PREDATOR



- 268,000 Flight Hours
- 12 Years in Combat
- 92 Air Force owned aircraft

Sky Warrior



- 41 Flight Hours
- 0 Combat
- 0 Government owned aircraft