Remote Piloted Aircraft (RPA)

Proficiency Code: A

Remotely piloted aircraft (RPA), commonly known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) or unmanned aerial system (UAS), are remotely controlled, unmanned aircraft (UA) that can carry cameras, sensors, communications equipment, or other payloads. Although primarily developed for use in reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, their ability to function in combat roles has expanded significantly. The MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), commonly known as drones, have individual pilots and crews who are physically located in control centers often thousands of miles from the aircraft. These officers have completed the same undergraduate flight training as other pilot specialties.

The unique characteristics of these platforms distinguish them from their manned counterparts (e.g., fighters, bombers, and helicopters). However, in recent years, UAS development has reduced this distinction in many areas. Today's UASs offer capabilities complementing those of manned assets. These systems now support many missions that were exclusive to their manned counterparts only a few years ago. Therefore, mission planning and execution for UASs follow the same processes in doctrine established for manned aircraft.

UASs perform a number of missions including: ISR; CAS; strike coordination and reconnaissance; communications or data relay; electronic attack; close combat attack (CCA); and convoy escort.