

Translation from Swedish newspaper Sydsvenskan

Ukraine's fighters learn reconnaissance and attack with drones from Sweden

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Ukraine's drone fighters learn reconnaissance, mapping, but also attack, with donated drones from Sweden. We visit the top-secret training facility – somewhere in Ukraine.

The sun is shining over wide-open slopes that stretch miles away towards the horizon. Undulating grass fields crisscrossed by dirt roads. Here and there small accumulations of trees, a few water mirrors stand out. In the air over us, one of the smarter weapons of the Ukrainian defense buzzes – drones of all kinds. Donated from abroad.

Exactly where we are is secret – it concerns life. The chief of the drone warriors calls himself Andrew. He wears a pistol belt over his chest and a submachine gun on his back as he steps forward and greets with firm handshake and harsh tone:

"No faces of the soldiers, no houses are allowed to be seen, no building structures – you have to delete metadata on films and pictures. And you can't write anything about how you got here – no coordinates.

There's no contradicting. Here, as everywhere else in Ukraine, the Russian threat is ever-present. Alarms for incoming missiles go off several times a day. This place, these people and especially the equipment that is here would be a dream target for a Russian attack.

With a pair of missiles, the thirty soldiers trained in warfare with drones could be wiped out in one fell swoop.

In the lecture hall stand drones of different models. Gifts from individuals, organizations and companies in Sweden, among others, are labeled Drones2Ukraine, a Swedish initiative.

In the center is a black model, about a meter high with six propellers. Civilly, it is used to measure forests, land, roads, and railway lines, for example. "It can carry an explosive charge of three or four kilograms. The smaller ones take about 200 or 300 grams," said Anton, one of the civilian instructors.

Together with a handful of colleagues, he trains the soldiers in basic flight, adapted to combat and field conditions. First, a theoretical draw to show the possibilities: like the heat-sensitive camera, which can see the body heat of enemy soldiers through camouflage. But also used to locate injured comrades who have taken shelter.

When it comes time for practical training, the soldiers spread out in small groups. Some should hide in the terrain as practice targets. "To begin with, we teach them to fly safely, both over longer and shorter distances. Then they're going to learn different standard maneuvers", Anton said.

On a hill crisscrossed by low ramparts, two soldiers settle down in uniforms and partially hidden faces, as if behind a trench. "Go", the instructor shouts, and one of the soldiers raises his hand with a drone in it. His companion pulls it off from the remote and it whizzes off straight up.

"We have modified the technology in them, so that they will be more difficult to detect. The enemy cannot access the signals and take them over, Anton explains. "And the barriers are gone, so that it is possible to fly higher, up to 500 meters."

What radius of action?

"It depends on the wind and the temperature, but three to five kilometers".

Fifty meters away, instructor Dmitry stands in a cap and khaki pants twenty meters from an empty banana box with some soldiers around him. The drone he just sent up carries a bomb staircase and he is going to show how the mechanism for releasing it works.

Two hand grips and it dusts in the ground next to the cardboard when the staircase falls from ten meters. Formally a miss by about two decimeters. If it had been sharp and landed at a fuel storage facility, it wouldn't have mattered—a flash of the utility of drones, even here far from the fighting at the front.

"The military can use the drones in three ways, if we're going to split it up", Anton explains. "On the one hand, it's intelligence." Gather information about the enemy's movements, how vehicles and other things are positioned, how much equipment the other side has. And to scout troop movements, well you see what I mean – spying.

The other two ways are more direct:

- To provide coordinates when firing with heavier weapon systems. A drone can lie up and wait for the first grenades in the event of an attack on the Russian side, note how they hit and correct to give better hits next time.
- As a weapon carrier. Improvised explosive charges are hung on the drones and released on the other side of enemy lines. The explosive force is not huge, but they can be controlled in close. And in practical terms, the drone can be flown onto Kamikaze and blown up along with its charge.

Back on the hill with the mock rifles, the exercise is about to end. The two lying soldiers have practiced evasive maneuvers and methods of passing unnoticed for the enemy.

The buzz of the drone appears suddenly, it flies in with the sun behind it and is difficult to see. One soldier rush across the "guard" and rolls around, lays on his back with his arms on his chest – gets a command and stretches one arm up towards the drone that's on its way down.

The propellers stop the moment he grabs it. So, he rushes back crouchingly. "We can teach them the basics of flying, but the methods they have to develop themselves in the field, only they know the conditions there," says instructor Alex.

Exactly how many drones have come from the Swedish initiative Drones2Ukraine, Anton does not want to tell. "But one task is that about 20,000 drones are used across the country", he said.

While the groups of soldiers pack up – battery life is over on several of the drones – we retreat up to the training facility and meet the drone warriors' chief Andrew, who shakes hands. farewell and says "Slava Ukraini", "Glory to Ukraine", in simple translation.

"When this is over, I hope that the people we trained can come back and be involved in developing the work civilly", says Anton, as the drone fighters go through the equipment and puts batteries on charge. "It will be needed to map the country and everything that has happened here, and to rebuild Ukraine."

FOOTNOTE: For security reasons, all the people in the article have fictitious names.