AN INSTITUTIONAL HOME FOR ARSOF ROBOTICS:

ESTABLISHING A SORD-TRAINING COMPANY FOR STANDARDS, TRAINING, AND DOCTRINE

Illustration by Special Warfare Staff

By Captain Katheryn Nolen-Harrison, USAJFKSWCS
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INTRODUCTION

ARSOF requires a dedicated institutional organization to develop, standardize, and sustain robotics training, doctrine, experimentation, and Special Operations Robotics Detachment (SORD) support. Currently, these functions are scattered across schools, MOS pipelines, ad hoc initiatives, and unit-level efforts. Each group builds SORD capabilities independently with its own standard and its own assumptions, which means the force has many versions of "trained" and no agreed definition of it. Standardization of institutional training is an explicit role at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS). A SORD Training and Integration Company (SORD-T) within SWCS would provide the missing connective tissue between MOS pipelines, advanced robotics courses, operational detachments, and emerging technology. This article is not focused on any singular course it presents a force-design proposal, focusing on a sustainable, neutral, institutional home for robotics capability generation.

THE PROBLEM: FRAGMENTATION WITHOUT AN OWNER

Robotics training, doctrine, standards, experimentation, and operational integration are fragmented across organizations that lack a centralized institutional proponent. When individual group SORDs independently develop build-and-repair protocols, simulation suites, programs of instruction, and tactics, techniques, and procedures, the enterprise repeatedly pays development costs while diverting resources from operational mission execution. Organizations designed for operational employment are not structured to also serve as institutional owners of training and standards. The result of these disparate efforts and divided responsibilities is a structural force-design challenge, and a limited ability to translate emerging systems into tactical employment. The robotics operational cross-cutting impact integrates functional areas, including MOS, branch, function, domain, and echelon, employing effects, communications, networking, fabrication, sustainment, EW, C-UAS, ISR, strike, C2, and training development simultaneously.

THE SOLUTION: SWCS SETS THE STANDARD

Create or designate a SORD Training and Integration Company within SWCS to consolidate robotics training development, standards, doctrine writing, unit and master trainer development, experimentation, and support to the Special Operations Robotics detachments. To maintain enterprise neutrality, it should not be subordinated to a single MOS committee, training group, institution or academy. Instead, the SORD-T should serve as an enterprise-level integrator that captures elements from existing and former robotics courses through a restructure, creating dedicated tactical and technical operator training pipelines, as well as a dedicated section to focus on training standards, MOS integration, future innovations and collaboration between all group SORDs. The SORD-T should serve as the connective tissue between everything that currently operates in silos, such as MOS pipelines, advanced courses, operational SORDs, and emerging technology. The SORD-T should support and standardize the groups' training efforts rather than replacing them. The groups keep employing robotics and unmanned systems, while SWCS sets and certifies the standard they employ.

A MODULAR COURSE ECOSYSTEM

The SORD-T does not replace existing training with one program; it creates and establishes a coherent ecosystem. A long-form pathway, such as the Robotics Technical Integrator Course (RTIC), remains valuable but cannot be the sole enterprise solution. The force needs modularity:

- **Basic Robotics Literacy Package.** Short, standardized exposure for MOS pipelines and the broader force: planning, threat awareness, safety, system architecture, communications fundamentals, signature management, and the foundational

technical principles that allow operators to adapt as technology evolves.

- **Robotics Tactical Integration Course.** Short-to-medium course for Operational Detachment Alphas and company employment: integrating robotics into planning, battle rhythm, command and control, survivability, and lethality (Gunnery Certification).
- **Technical Robotics Integrator Course.** Advanced technical training for SORD personnel and instructors: networked employment, Ground control station placement, configuration, mission architecture, and troubleshooting.
- **Long Technical Pathway (RTIC).** Deep technical qualification for specialized billets and advanced SORD capability: one pathway in the ecosystem, but not the entire ecosystem.
- **Unit Trainer and Master Trainer Development.** Produce certified units and master trainers capable of executing Initial Licensing Training and Mission Certification within operational units.

The standard is only validated when it is taught and tested. The SORD-T builds the robotics standard as a deliberate progression rather than a single course, so the force can meet operators where they are and move them to validated operational competence levels.

The courses matter, but the cadre is the capability. A modular ecosystem is only coherent if the same group of certified evaluators deliver and certify across every tier. The SORD-Ts dedicated cadre is what keeps the robotics literacy package, the tactical integration course, the technical integrator course, and a longer technical pathway aligned to one standard.

CORE FUNCTIONS

The organization is designed around functions rather than a single course:

- **Training development:** Programs of instruction, lesson plans, evaluations, unit trainer and master trainer development, instructor standards, and progression models across all tiers.
- **Doctrine and standards:** Employment standards, task lists, training guidance, and doctrinal recommendations.
- **Experimentation and lessons learned:** Testing emerging systems, capturing lessons learned, and feeding findings into training and doctrine.
- **Build, repair, and simulation:** Unit-level sustainment practices plus simulators, controllers, and low-cost trainers for safe repetition.
- **Networked employment, command and control, and external integration:** Ground control station placement, distributed control, radio frequency and signature management, coordinated with 1SWTG, 2SWTG, 1SFC, industry, and joint partners.
- **SORD support:** Advanced training, certifications, tactics, techniques, and procedure developments, and reach-back to detachments.

These functions cluster into three roles the force currently has no owner for. It is a schoolhouse (course development, instruction, certification, instructor standards), a standards-and-doctrine authority (employment standards, task lists, training guidance, doctrinal recommendations), and an advisory-and-experimentation center (reach-back to SORDs, tactics, techniques, and procedure development, testing emerging systems, capturing combat lessons and feeding them back into training). Together, these three roles create an institutional capability that does not currently exist within a single organization.

Most discussions of a robotics schoolhouse start with courses. Instead, we should start with what the groups are missing: a centralized organization to develop standards. The SORD-Ts cadre functions as the force's robotics advisory and training authority, the standard-holder a group can reach back to, those who can turn combat lessons into training requirements, and the specialists who keep training current as systems change. Course delivery, unit trainer and master trainer development, and experimentation extend from that advisory core rather than the other way around.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

A possible internal structure, adjustable by manpower and authorities, includes six cells:

- Command and Integration Cell to prioritize and synchronize efforts.
- Training Cell for resident courses and certification.
- Doctrine and Standards Cell to write standards and frameworks.
- Experimentation and Systems Cell to test platforms and develop tactics, techniques, and procedures.
- Build, Repair, and Simulation Cell to maintain systems and sustainment workflows.
- Operational Support to assist units and feed lessons back into training.

Rather than propose a fixed structure, the SORD-T should be built around the functions the force is missing and staffed to those functions as resources are provided. A minimal initial cell can own initial training standards and

advisory reach-back for internal SWCS training units on day one; instruction, experimentation, and sustainment capacity can be added as demand and resourcing justify.

WHY THIS MUST SIT AT SWCS

Robotics is inherently cross-functional. Placed inside one school, the organization will optimize for that school's timeline, priorities, and lane. Under the 1st Special Warfare Training Group alone, it becomes pipeline support rather than enterprise capability generation. Under the 2nd Special Warfare Training Group alone, it becomes another resident course with weak operational integration. Under a single MOS committee, it narrows to a single perspective. Under a technical school alone, it grows too narrow or too long for broad force needs. As a separate integration company, the function can support all these stakeholders without being captured by any of them. Only a SWCS-level function can set a standard that all of them are then held to.

STRATEGIC BENEFITS, RISKS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ROBOTICS capability is being built across the force currently, unevenly and in isolation, because no one owns the standard. SWCS is the proponent for enterprise standards. Establishing SORD-T fulfills this core mission in robotics before the gap between institutional training and operational reality becomes unbridgeable.

BENEFITS. Preserves the capability without preserving any specific course; creates enforceable standards; gives SORDs a training, doctrine, and sustainment base; relieves pipeline burden by separating baseline exposure from advanced expertise; accelerates adaptation from operational lessons and emerging industry; and connects operational lessons directly to training, doctrine, and standards so innovations do not remain isolated within individual groups or disappear after deployment.

RISKS AND MITIGATIONS. The SORD-T should be framed as a consolidation and integration function, not a new course empire; start with a small provisional cell and scale on demonstrated value; define RTIC as one pathway within a modular architecture; position the company as a support and standards entity that enables 1SWTG, 2SWTG, and MOS committees rather than owning their lanes; and use the experimentation cell to keep standards current as technology outpaces doctrine.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

- Stand up a provisional SORD-T cell or company within SWCS and align current robotics training functions and authorities.
- Design it as a neutral integration entity supporting 1SWTG, 2SWTG, MOS committees, operational groups, warrant pipelines, and SORDs.
- Build the modular course ecosystem and assign responsibility for doctrine, standards, simulation requirements, and networked employment frameworks.
- Resource it with simulators, controllers, training aircraft, build-and-repair tools, network equipment, instructor billets, and experimentation authority and establish a continuous feedback loop from operational units.

The future force will not be trained by handing out drones. It will be trained by building an institution that can standardize, experiment, adapt, and teach faster than technology changes.

Author's Note: Captain Katheryn Nolen-Harrison is a Psychological Operations Officer assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, where she leads robotics and unmanned training modernization efforts. She holds a Master of Professional Studies in Cybersecurity Strategy and Information Management from the George Washington University and is a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.