ABE: The Drone of the 101st Airborne Division Assembled in 20' by Soldiers (Video)

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The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) of the US Army has introduced ABE 1.01, the **Attritable Battlefield Enabler**: a small modular drone, entirely assembled at Fort Campbell with domestic components, designed to be built by soldiers in less than 20 minutes and at extremely low costs (about 750 USD per unit). This solution — already showcased in several reports and photo-reports — synthesizes two clear trends: decentralizing logistical production and bringing ISR capabilities and, potentially, kinetic effects, directly into the hands of the individual unit.

The Affordable, Modular, and Quick-to-Assemble Drone

ABE 1.01 is designed as an "attritable" platform — meaning affordable and not necessarily recoverable — with a modular frame that allows for quick repairs and mission-specific

configurations. The declared assembly time is about 20 minutes, making the system appealing for dispersed units or scenarios where the traditional logistical chain is vulnerable. The reported unit price (≈ 750 USD) is a fraction of commercial drones with similar capabilities cited in the media (estimated on average around 2,400 USD).

According to official sources, the components are American and were acquired under the “Blue UAS” framework of the Defense Innovation Unit, which aims to provide the Pentagon with reliable options compliant with regulatory restrictions (NDAA/Blue UAS). The "in-house" production at Fort Campbell and the direct involvement of the departments (design, assembly, training) indicate a desire to accelerate the innovation cycle: prototype → test → tactical distribution without exclusively going through traditional industrial contracts.

Currently, ABE 1.01 is optimized for reconnaissance and surveillance, but the RAID (Robotics and Autonomous Integration Directorate) of the 101st has already announced the intention to subject the platform to evaluation for lethal capabilities, up to the possibility of carrying explosive loads like C4. This prospect opens — as expected — a significant political and legal debate on the use of unconventional systems at the unit level: from operator responsibility to rules of engagement, to implications for international humanitarian law.

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Training and Integration: the Purpose Built Attritable System Academy

To create operators capable of employing and maintaining ABE 1.01, the RAID has launched the **Purpose Built Attritable System Academy** at Fort Campbell: an eight-day (40-hour) course aimed at providing practical skills on system use, control, and maintenance. The training approach emphasizes the choice not to confine the UAS to drone specialists but to distribute competence among the personnel operating on the ground, promoting integration within the unit.

The choice to internally produce low-cost drones has several practical effects:

- **Logistical Resilience:** the ability to assemble and repair in theater reduces dependencies on long and vulnerable supply chains.
- **Economic Scalability:** low-cost units allow for more "daring" use (attritable), useful in high-asset-loss scenarios.
- **Innovation Acceleration:** the soldier-driven model (ideas, testing, iteration within the division) compresses development times compared to traditional industrial channels.

For European (and Italian) Forces: What to Observe

The ABE 1.01 program shows how military innovation is shifting towards economically scalable and unit-integrated solutions. For the Italian Defense — and for units like the Brigata Folgore — the key points to watch are:

1. **Regulations and Doctrine:** rules of use and training need updating if UAS are to be employed in similar contexts.
2. **Local Industrial Capacity:** evaluate whether "in-house" productions or partnerships with national SMEs (within Blue-like frameworks) can ensure reliable and compliant components.
3. **Widespread Training:** replicate the academy approach to transfer UAS skills to sub-unit levels without creating specialist bottlenecks.

ABE 1.01 is a clear example of how large armies are democratizing access to tactical aerial technology: small, affordable, quickly assembled, and with potential lethal developments. This model reshuffles logistics, training, and production: it is not mere experimentation, but an operational laboratory that other armies (including Italy) cannot ignore when rethinking equipment, procedures, and industrial supply chains.

News link: https://nextgendefense.com/us-army-tactical-drone/