ULTRA: the AI robot mule that saves paratroopers from enemy fire

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August 13, 2025 – Vaziani, Georgia – During the multinational exercise Agile Spirit 25, the paratroopers of the **173rd Airborne Brigade** tested a new autonomous vehicle equipped with artificial intelligence: the **ULTRA (Uncrewed Long-range Transport Autonomy)**, developed by the Seattle-based company **Overland AI**.

The vehicle was tested at the **Vaziani Training Area** in Georgia on July 29, with the aim of verifying its resupply capabilities in complex operational scenarios, including GPS-denied environments or degraded communications.

A new logistical paradigm

The ULTRA is a tactical all-wheel-drive vehicle, capable of reaching **56 km/h** and carrying up to **450 kg of cargo** over rough terrain, with a range of over **160 km**. Its main feature is the use of artificial intelligence and an advanced sensor package – stereo cameras, lidar, thermal sensors,

and inertial navigation systems – that allows it to operate even in conditions of **satellite jamming** or low visibility.

According to **Byron Boots**, CEO of Overland AI, “uncrewed systems are radically changing the character of warfare. ULTRA is designed to take soldiers out of the line of fire, reducing risks and costs.” The company emphasizes that the vehicle is **“attritable”**, meaning it is designed to be cost-effective and expendable, much more affordable than a crewed vehicle.

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Field tests with the 173rd paratroopers

During Agile Spirit 25, the ULTRA was used for the **resupply of 60 and 120 mm ammunition** to the mortars of the 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment. The trials included point-to-point delivery missions, autonomous convoy movement, and overcoming natural obstacles.

Private First Class **Jonathan Brooks**, a mortarman of the 173rd, stated: *“I had already received training on the ULTRA in Germany two months ago. It's amazing to see how it moves without the need for direct guidance”*.

Specialist **Jack Padberg** also expressed enthusiasm: *“I would like to see it used more often. It can provide us with enormous help in logistical tasks”*.

Colonel **Will Cox**, co-director of the exercise, emphasized how Agile Spirit serves to field-test new technologies for the security of the **Black Sea** and NATO partners: *“Exercises allow us to try, break, fix, and retry. That's how innovation happens”*.

Towards future applications

In addition to resupply, Overland AI plans to expand the use of ULTRA to high-risk tasks such as:

- **breaching** (creating openings in complex obstacles and minefields);
- **medical evacuation** (casualty evacuation in unsafe zones);
- **reconnaissance and surveillance** in hostile environments.

Chris Higgins, director of development at Overland AI, explained: *“Breaching is one of the most dangerous tasks for any unit. We are working with engineering brigades to ensure that robots, not soldiers, go first”*.

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Conclusions

The introduction of autonomous vehicles like ULTRA represents a **strategic shift** in military logistics: not only does it reduce soldiers' exposure to threats like improvised explosive devices or ambushes, but it also helps cut costs and increase the resilience of supply chains.

The trials of Agile Spirit 25 mark only the beginning: further tests are planned for late 2025 and early 2026, with the goal of fully integrating these systems within NATO units.

If the promises are kept, paratroopers and allied forces could soon rely on a new generation of **“intelligent robotic mules”**, capable of operating where traditional vehicles cannot reach and, most importantly, without putting human lives at risk.

News link: https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2025/08/13/paratroopers-test-autonomous-vehicle-with-ai-for-mortar-resupply/