

Conclusion

In addition to the recommendations in this paper, it is also worth noting Dr. Wayne Chappelle's suggestion to ensure RPA operators, both enlisted and officer alike, go through routine screening to care for the member and learn more about the psychological effects of RPA operations. Dr. Chappelle makes the point that literature and data on PTSD associated with RPA operations is scarce, so it is not clear if mental health issues are the result of engaging a target or other operational factors such as long work hours or the work/life balance. In the opinion of this author, Dr. Chappelle's recommendation of assigning "mental health providers with proper security clearances who are directly embedded" within RPA units should be acted upon by the Air Force.⁷⁴ This would firstly and most importantly, provide support to the RPA operators and allow the Air Force to learn more about mental health issues associated with the career fields. This recommendation could also help improved morale within RPA units. Support would be provided to the operators to help them mentally and emotionally process what they witnessed during a RPA mission. This outlet would allow the RPA operators to express their feelings and thoughts, help them balance their military life and civilian life and in turn improve morale of the operator. One could argue that the an appointment with a mental health provider be required after any RPA mission that resulted in the loss of life, regardless of whether the life or lives were adversarial or collateral damage in nature.

While the Air Force has taken some positive steps recently relating to the RPA career field, such as eligibility for incentive pay of up to \$125,000 across five years, there are other ways to help the career field and the Air Force beyond fiscal bonuses. In addition, by the time the 18X officer reaches the eligibility requirement for the bonus of six years, they may have already made their decision to leave the Air Force – so it could be a case of too little, too late.⁷⁵

