



PLA Army Aviation Brigades' Training Now Includes Urban Operations

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese Army Aviation brigades are beginning to incorporate elements of urban area training. In January 2018 China introduced a new *Outline of Military Training and Evaluation* [军事训练大纲] and at the unit level, more specific instructions have been issued, emphasizing new skills that command views as necessary to improve combat capability as the accompanying excerpted article from the *PLA Daily* reports. While China's attack helicopter forces were first developed in the 1970s to help counter tanks in an anticipated Soviet invasion from the north, with the shifting of strategic priorities—and growth of China's cities—knowledge of urban environments are now more important than the deserts and steppe terrain previously emphasized.

Helicopters are also valued for their mobility and utility as scouts and transports. However, pilots acknowledge the difficulties that come from both the more confined airspace (especially when landing or taking off) and from the complicated electromagnetic environment (such as cluttered radar returns). The unit discussed in the article, an unnamed Army Aviation brigade under the 79th Group Army, is based in Liaoning Province in northeastern China and is part of the Northern Theater Command [北部战区]. Notably, Liaoning is more densely populated than much of China's northeast, and units could be expected to operate in the urban sprawl connecting Dandong on the border with North Korea to the Liaodong peninsula (home to the major port city of Dalian) and curving around the coast of the Bohai Gulf toward Tianjin. The new emphasis on training in urban environments is a major step forward in increasing realism in training and matching training for what the PLA sees as likely scenarios. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Cities have low visibility and maneuverability—the point of changing the ‘battlefield’ [training area] is to meet the requirements of future urban operations and raise our units’ ability to carry out operations in all domains.”

Source: “Hai Yang and Hao Hailong, “‘战场’由荒原到城区, 城市作战难在哪? (Switching the ‘Battlefield’ from Wastelands to Urban Areas - Why are Urban Operations Difficult?),” *PLA Daily*, 25 February 2018. http://army.81.cn/content/2018-02/25/content_7951357.htm

During the wintertime, in a certain part of southern Liaoning [province], an unidentified army aviation brigade of the 79th Group Army (Northern Theater Command) quietly began an airborne assault exercise. For the exercise, the force commander selected not a remote forest, but an urban area.

The Unit's commander explained the new Outline of Military Training [新大纲] added urban operations training content including landing and taking off from the roofs of buildings, landing in very narrow areas and electronic warfare. When conducting training according to the new Outline of Military Training and Evaluation (OMTE) the unit's Party committee recognized that there are many buildings in urban areas and more that they are not evenly distributed. Both the electromagnetic environment and terrain make deep assaults [纵深突击] difficult, and serve to better temper the units' actual combat capability. During the training, a two-helicopter formation [编队] was carrying out reconnaissance. Just as Wang Xian [王显] one of the pilots, was about to transmit information, his screens suddenly showed interference and an uneven signal, eventually losing contact with the command post. “Urban operations are ‘doing something hard while doing something hard’—first, you are already carrying out reconnaissance which is itself difficult (but now are doing so in a more complicated environment).” Li Zhicheng [李志成], a battalion commander in the brigade acknowledged, “The electromagnetic environment in urban areas is complicated. It is very easy for battlefield awareness to be reduced with just a little interference—and it is very difficult to gather and transmit battlefield intelligence!”

“Aircraft XXXX, transmit your data to the command post!” After losing contact with the command post, the aircraft was ordered to were ordered to act as an information transfer point to retransmit information from other units.” Because of all of the tall buildings in cities and the complicated terrain, and limited space for operations, you can only use formations of 2-3 aircraft.” Brigade Training Section [作训科] Chief Xu Liang [徐亮] explained that the OMTE significantly raised the requirements for how often equipment needed to be used in complex airspace environments, so the brigade adopted a small “networked” group with high mobility and ability to quickly reorganize to better test air communications, electronic warfare, precision attacks and other tactical capabilities.

This reporter has learned that during training the brigade alters its routes through different districts according to the terrain and changes its unit composition according to tactical requirements, cooperates in researching combined tactical issues, and strengthens training in electromagnetic spectrum management according to natural and man-made environmental factors. They also strengthened their ability to innovate tactics under the new system, and implemented courses in low-altitude navigation, search and rescue, etc.

“Find the target and begin jamming!” Following the commander's order, the “Unit” began using airborne jamming equipment to cast a wide net. Immediately, the opposing force's command network were paralyzed. At the same time, ground forces, using infrared spotting attacked the enemy positions. According to reports, this exercise generated a massive amount of database, representing an effective exploration of five operational methods to use in cities methods of conducting urban operations in all of the five tiers of Chinese cities.