



**FEATURES OF TEACHING MOUNTAIN AND HIGH-ALTITUDE TRAINING  
IN THE UNITS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

**Parajillayev Umidjon Gulomxusinovich**

*Senior Lecturer, Department of Physical Education and Sports, University of  
Public Safety of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Lieutenant Colonel*

**Annotation.** *This article highlights the peculiarities of teaching mountain and high-altitude training, methods of movement in mountainous areas, endurance and survival techniques, requirements for cadets (fighters), and the relevance of such training.*

**Keywords:** *standards, special forces, water obstacles, camouflage equipment, machine gun, mountains, cadets, offensive, ambush, capture.*

**Introduction**

The formation of the special forces of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China dates back to the mid-1980s, with the first division established in 1988. Special forces units are distributed among China's seven military regions, with one regiment in each.

The purpose of these units is to conduct military operations in regional conflicts, engage in counter-terrorism, and eliminate separatist groups. Training is carried out according to PLA-specific standards and regulations, taking into account the unique features of preparing special forces units.

A wide range of training and skills are used, from basic strength exercises to extreme drills, including unarmed self-defense, overcoming water obstacles in full gear, shooting with all types of weapons, and survival in forests, mountains, and water. Exercises also include parachute jumps in temperatures as low as  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ , survival in water with hands and feet tied, and other extreme challenges.

**Example: The "Falcon" Unit**

During initial training, groups of six cadets are formed. They are issued minimal equipment: a machine gun, a knife, helmet, boots, one kilogram of rice, biscuits, and a small box of matches. Carrying water is prohibited.

Before starting the route, the group undergoes an inspection to identify banned items. The training route covers 2,500–3,000 kilometers of mountainous and forest terrain at altitudes of 200–300 meters above sea level, over seven days, while completing missions such as assaults, ambushes, and captures.

Food must often be found independently to maintain physical activity. Since most rivers are unsafe for drinking, cadets are taught to identify clean water sources by observing animal behavior. In mountainous regions, food may include rats, snakes, and insects, though many snakes are poisonous.





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Such training, which occurs every 2–3 months, is referred to by cadets as “descent into hell.” A typical daily routine starts at 04:30 with half-hour meditation, followed by long-distance runs carrying weighted packs (up to 25 km twice daily). Physical conditioning includes 300 strikes to sandbags daily, enough to harden palms with calluses, head strikes against wooden posts, and eventually breaking bricks and glass.

Running 3.3 km must be completed in 12 minutes over rough terrain, often in rain. Swimming drills require covering 5 km with a 10 kg weight in under 80 minutes. Daily exercises include 100 push-ups in under 60 seconds and 200 pull-ups. Special drills include:

- Throwing a grenade 50 meters 100 times.
- Shooting at a target from a moving vehicle at 50 km/h.
- Entering vehicles and structures during simulated combat.

### **Specialized High-Altitude Training**

Recruits assigned to units in high-altitude border regions (such as Xinjiang) undergo specialized mountain training before deployment. Together with the PLA Army Medical University, a training base was established in Xinjiang to conduct “hypoxia and low-pressure acclimatization programs.”

The Xinjiang-Uyghur mountains differ from other regions due to their high altitude, low air pressure, and thin air. Newly deployed soldiers often suffer from shortness of breath and difficulties performing strenuous physical activity. The acclimatization program reduces adaptation time and accelerates combat readiness through staged exercises, ischemic conditioning, and combined high-altitude drills.

### **Training Structure**

Training is divided into two parts: **basic** and **professional**.

- **Basic training includes:** physical exercises for strength, agility, and endurance; unarmed combat; survival skills in field and extreme conditions; climbing drills; crossing water obstacles; use of firearms; tent setup; building shelters from snow or earth; providing medical aid; ambush and assault tactics; amphibious and skiing drills. Ski training is held in northeastern provinces under all weather conditions, including  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperatures.

- **Professional training includes:** sabotage and demolition; handling explosives (installation, defusing, choosing optimal sites); camouflage and infiltration drills using inflatable boats, barrels, and diving skills; foreign language and computer training; operations in urban and underwater environments.

### **Standards**

Examples of PLA special forces standards:

- Climb a 30-story building wall without equipment in under 5 seconds.
- Run 5 km in full gear (10 kg, including grenades and rifle) in 80 minutes.
- Walk 10 km with feet bound, carrying grenades and 4.5 kg of gear.
- Complete a 3.3 km run in muddy terrain within 12 minutes (“satisfactory”), 11:20 (“good”), or 11:00 (“excellent”).
- 200 pull-ups and 200 push-ups daily.





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- 100 push-ups in under 60 seconds.
- 35 kg dumbbell press 60 times in under 60 seconds.
- Grenade throwing, 100 repetitions at 50 meters.
- Shooting from a moving car at 200 km/h at a human target 50 meters away.
- Throwing grenades into a car window from 30 meters.

### **International Exercises**

Since 1998, Chinese special forces have been invited to the **ERNA International Special Forces Competition** in Estonia. On their first participation, they won first place in 8 disciplines, second place in 4, and third place in 20, finishing third overall. Later, they also received the “Best Foreign Team” award.

Indirect reports suggest that 32 members of the Falcon unit were deployed to assist Afghan special services in freeing kidnapped Chinese workers. According to *Islamabad Times*, Chinese special forces freed hostages without firing a shot and captured 21 terrorists, earning praise from US representatives in Afghanistan.

### **Mountain Training System in China**

The mountain training system in the PLA is well developed, with emphasis on strict discipline and safety. Major training centers include Guilin, Dalian, Kunming, and Nanjing military academies. Each offers 10 specializations, with practical exercises conducted in their respective regions.

China’s well-known mountain ranges include:

- **Mount Everest (Qomolangma)** – 8,848 m.
- **Lushan Mountain Range** – 1,474 m, Jiangxi Province (UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996).
- **Tianmen Mountain National Park** – 1,519 m, Hunan Province.
- **Makalu Mountain** – 8,485 m, on the China-Nepal border.

Special forces and mountain units conduct practical training on these ranges, using aviation and drones. For relocation and evacuation in mountainous terrain, paragliders are widely used as a lightweight, silent, and effective means of movement.

Training in PLA mountain units includes: orientation, camouflage, survival, tactical movement, tactical medicine, parachuting, skiing, and rescue operations. Specialized instructors with expertise in each discipline lead the courses. Practical training dominates the curriculum, and cadets are required to complete independent exercises regularly.

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