

《PLA Air Force making exercises more realistic》

The People's Liberation Army Air Force is strengthening the intensity and difficulty of its combat exercises to improve pilot capabilities.



Jiang Jiaji, a Golden Helmet Award-winning pilot of the PLA Air Force, makes a low-altitude precision strike during an exercise. LIU YINGHUA/CHINA DAILY

In the past, exercises were normally executed in accordance with preset plans, and pilots would often be told in advance the whereabouts and tactics of their practice enemies before the drill.

The reasons behind the well-orchestrated exercises included the idea that some units regarded the training sessions as a performance opportunity for high officers and that some commanders wouldn't accept risks that could emerge in fierce simulated confrontations.

That mentality has vanished, according to a news release from the Air Force. Commanders and pilots have been given stringent, realistic combat scenarios and are told to try their best to win.

Now, freestyle fighting, live-fire strikes and long-range sea patrols have become regular elements in the training of

the Air Force's fighter jet and bomber units, according to the news release.

The Air Force Headquarters organizes four large exercises each year for different units: the Red Sword advanced aerial combat exercise, Blue Shield aircraft and missile defense exercise, Golden Helmet freestyle fighting exercise and Golden Dart land attack exercise.

All of these exercises involve the use of sophisticated maneuvers, cutting-edge weapons and electronic countermeasures. The tasks in the exercises are deliberately designed to test the weaknesses of participants, forcing them to keep improving, the Air Force said.

On the basic level, front-line commanders are also aware of the importance of combat simulations and use every opportunity to create realistic fighting scenarios, it said.

A fighter jet unit of the Southern Theater Command invited an electronic warfare unit to carry out electronic war games with it to verify its jamming and anti-jamming measures. The unit also cooperates with aviation forces under the PLA Navy's South Sea Fleet to conduct aerial combat drills, which feature confrontation between various types of fighter jets above the sea.

Another fighter jet unit, under the Western Theater Command, often joins hands with other Air Force units to perform integrated command and joint operation drills, which involve radars and air defense missiles, as well as multiple kinds of aircraft.

"Pilots should train in every environment where aerial combat can occur. Thanks to exercises that are much more difficult than before, pilots have substantially enhanced their capabilities," the news release quoted Xu Qin, a female pilot of the JH-7 fighter/bomber in the Northern Theater Command, as saying.

PLA Daily previously reported that the Air Force established an adversary brigade in 2015 to help improve the combat training of its units.

The brigade has fighter jets, helicopters, electronic warfare aircraft and drones, and all of its aircraft are domestically developed models.

Its aviators include several top-class fighter pilots selected from Air Force units. They communicate in English during exercises, according to the newspaper.

An Air Force adversary unit uses enemy tactics, techniques and procedures to provide a realistic simulation of air combat to military pilots.