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MILITARY AVIATION AND TRAINING PREPARATION IN MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT

The Mongolian people were introduced to aircraft for the first time on May 25, 1925, when pilot A.A. Lapin arrived flying a Yu-13 cargo aircraft. The arrival of the aircraft generated great interest among the city and roadside residents, who gathered to discuss the large, noisy white object flying overhead. In present day Selenge Province, witnesses of the aircraft flying even offered samples of their milk and tea, believing that a god had descended from the sky. During the early years of the revolution, young people actively participated in the movement to acquire aircraft, engaging in propaganda and education efforts that played a crucial role in the important task of mastering new technology and training pilots and technicians.

This paper traces the historical development of military aviation and personnel training in Mongolia from 1925 to the present. The introduction of aircraft to Mongolia in 1925 by Soviet pilot A.A. Lapin marked a significant milestone in the nation's military and technological progress. The study explores the establishment and evolution of Mongolia's Aviation Force through different historical phases. During the early revolutionary period, youth organizations raised funds to acquire aircraft, with symbolic names like "Revolutionary Party," "Revolutionary Mongolia," and "Revolutionary Youth." The government employed a three-pronged approach to personnel training, utilizing Soviet instructors, establishing aviation schools, and sending students to the Soviet Union.

The 1930s saw the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army's Aviation Force grow into a combat-ready unit under key military leaders. The force expanded its fleet and established air routes across Mongolia. Combat experiences in the 1936 battles provided tactical insights. The force played crucial roles in conflicts against Japanese aggression and Xinjiang insurgents, highlighting its strategic importance.

In the modern era, specialized squadrons were formed, including the military communications flight squadron, fighter aircraft squadron, and combat helicopter fire support squadron. The Military Communications Flight Squadron undertook diverse missions, including peacekeeping operations. The study also addresses challenges faced, such as political repressions in the late 1930s. Primary historical sources, including anniversary histories and official records, provide a comprehensive overview of Mongolia's aviation development. The dual nature of military and civil aviation development showcases aviation's multifaceted contributions to Mongolia's modernization.

KEYWORDS

Military Aviation, Training Preparation, Pilot, Mechanic, Engineering-Technical Personnel

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Introduction

For Mongolia to have its own national aviation force, one of the main issues that needed to be resolved first was the training of aviation professionals. This was not an easy matter. The government and military leadership of that time decided to address the personnel training issue in three ways: first, to train minor specialists with the help of Soviet instructors who came to assist our country; second, to establish a branch of our own aviation school and train some specialists (technicians, navigators) through an accelerated program; and third, to train other specialists such as pilots, operational and armament technicians at various aviation schools in the Soviet Union (USSR). The first and second approaches were methods used for urgent training. In general, to properly train all types of aviation specialists, they had to be trained in the USSR.

The Early Years of Military Aviation Training Preparation

When the People's Government and Party formed their Armed Forces, they aimed to modernize the traditional cavalry into a Soviet-style army. This involved equipping them with modern combat weapons like aircraft, armored tanks, and artillery, and training personnel to operate them. The aviation component of the Armed Forces obtained military and civilian transport aircraft and helicopters, serving various military-civilian, national economic, and scientific purposes such as military command communications, postal cargo transport, agricultural and aerial surveying, and medical assistance. Eventually, this branch of aviation evolved into Mongolia's civil air transport.

Therefore, in 1924-1925, the initial aircraft were acquired using funds gathered from public organizations and contributions from the public. The first three aircraft had the words "Revolutionary Party," "Revolutionary Mongolia" and "Revolutionary Youth" inscribed on their fuselages, symbolizing that they were constructed with the resources of the entire population. In addition to raising funds for the aircraft purchase, the government prioritized bringing these aircraft to the country. By the end of 1924, an airfield was chosen in the Consul's Hill area in the northeastern part of Ulaanbaatar city. Fourteen students from the military school leveled and prepared the airfield, and a hangar for the aircraft was set up near the school's premises.

The People's Government focused on enhancing the military aviation unit by improving staffing, organization, budget, and increasing the number of aircraft. In 1925, two U-1 aircraft were acquired for training and sports flying. By 1925, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army (MPRA) had a total of 6 aircraft, including R-1 and U-1 types, as well as a Yu-13 cargo aircraft, which was the country's first aircraft.

To further strengthen and expand the unit, goals were set to enhance the airfield, establish protection measures, increase the aircraft fleet, set up an aircraft repair facility, and train professional personnel. In June 1927, five R-1 bomber aircraft were obtained from the USSR to support these objectives, and efforts to train national personnel were intensified. Personnel training was primarily conducted through apprenticeship training domestically until the 1930s.

In addition to providing specialized training for pilots and technicians, the Fifth State Great Khural of 1928-1929 implemented measures to enhance the staffing and personnel of the aviation unit. This included extending the military service term for unit members to 3 years, in line with other military specialists, and increasing aircraft equipment.

Promotional flights were carried out in various locations, including the capital and Uliastai, Khovd, Ulaangom, and Bayankhongor, to showcase aircraft and engage in propaganda efforts. These initiatives not only played a crucial role in promoting government policies and scientific advancements in aviation but also demonstrated the capability of Mongolian individuals to operate and master such technology.

However, the Mongolian Aviation Force faced challenges in operating at full capacity and effectiveness until 1930 due to economic, financial, and personnel constraints. The efforts to enhance the operations and enhance the quality of the MPRA's Aviation Force began in 1930-1931, marking the start of the next phase of Aviation Force development.¹ In the challenging external and internal circumstances of Mongolia at that time, the People's Government and military leadership, led by G. Demid, prioritized strengthening the country's defense forces, including transforming the military aviation unit into a genuine combat unit.

The goal of further strengthening and developing the MPRA's aviation unit focused on increasing the aircraft fleet, training skilled personnel, and expanding the utilization of aviation technology.

The government and the people showed significant commitment to increasing the number of aircraft and acquiring them.

¹ Sambuu, Zh., Galdan, Ch., Shagdarsuren, Ch., Ochir, Ts., & Tsendendorj. (1935). *Ten years of history of army aviation force*. Ulaanbaatar. (Translated from vertical Mongolian script to new script by M. Shagdarzhav, 2020).

Therefore, with the assistance of numerous individuals, three aircraft were purchased from the USSR in 1931 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) and MPRA. The funds for the purchase were collected nationwide and the aircraft were transferred to the aviation unit. A total of 15 aircraft were acquired in 1931-1932, consisting of 11 R-1s and 4 PO-2s.

The aircraft were transported by train to Ulan-Ude city, where aviation instructor-mechanic Sorokov, motorist Zhigalin, Mongolian motorists Sh. Mongoo, O. Zhigzhidsuren, N. Nyamdorj, Ts. Shagdar, D. Luvsanbaldan, Ragchaa, and others assembled and prepared them for flight. Subsequently, pilots Ch. Shagdarsuren, D. Zhambaa, and B. Battseren tested the aircraft in the air before organizing the logistics to bring them to Ulaanbaatar.¹

Due to the implementation of these measures in leadership, organization, personnel, and economy, the unit experienced significant success within a short period. The aviation technical force grew, and there was a notable advancement in the training of skilled personnel capable of operating it. Specifically, the unit's flight and political readiness improved.² This progress was attributed to the effective and strategic policies adopted by the party, government, and military leadership, as well as the support from the USSR, and the dedication and hard work of the aviation unit's personnel. These factors had a positive impact on the unit's operations and primary responsibilities.

Since the MPRA's aviation unit transitioned into a genuine combat unit, its primary role shifted to conducting combat training exercises, defending the country's borders from the air, suppressing internal rebellions, participating in operations, and establishing new air routes.

The combat training and long-distance flights undertaken by the unit yielded valuable experience and results, laying the groundwork for aerial defense of the homeland. This became especially crucial in the tense external and internal circumstances of the 1930s. The contribution of various aviation specialists trained domestically and at aviation schools in the USSR was instrumental in the advancement of aviation in Mongolia. Opening air routes across Mongolia's expansive territory was a key responsibility for the initial pilots.

In May 1930, Ch. Shagdarsuren and D. Zhambaa piloted an R-1 aircraft on a round trip spanning over 2,000 km from Ulaanbaatar-Undurkhaan-Bayankhongor-Tamsagbulag, establishing a new air route. This series of new air route openings not only aimed to popularize aviation but also marked a significant period in the country's aviation history, strategically enhancing its development and defense capabilities. In recognition of their achievements, Ch. Shagdarsuren and D. Zhambaa were awarded the Military Merit Red Banner Order by the Party and government at that time.

In line with the MPRA's growth strategy, there was a focus on increasing the number of technical troops and mechanizing the Armed Forces. Emphasis was placed on acquiring new aircraft, training pilots, and enhancing their flight skills. To support the development of the aviation force, efforts were made to raise funds from workers, taking advantage of the country's economic capabilities. In 1929-1930, workers in Ulaanbaatar city and provinces voluntarily contributed many thousands of tugriks to purchase new aircraft.

In 1933, the Aviation Force incorporated 3 R-5 aircraft from the USSR into its arsenal, enabling Mongolian pilots to carry out combat missions with these aircraft.

It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of key leaders such as Marshal of the MPRP Gelegdorjiin Demid, Khorloogiin Choibalsan, Army General Batyn Dorj, Colonel General Zhamyangiin Lkhagvasuren, General Zhanchiv, Colonel General Butachiin Tsog, Zarantain Avkhia, who served as Ministers of Defense, as well as pioneering individuals like Brigade Commander Tserendashiin Ochir, Choymbolyn Shagdarsuren, Colonel General Matrosyn Zaisanov, Dugaryn Gungaa, Sandagiin Sanzhmyatav, and others in the establishment and development of Mongolia's aviation force.

The Aviation Force of the MPRA emerged as the primary military force responsible for quelling internal conflicts and defending the homeland. Its ability to swiftly suppress domestic uprisings and movements was attributed to the utilization of aircraft, a modern weapon known for its speed, maneuverability, and firepower. This demonstrated the Aviation Force's readiness to fulfill any combat mission. The 1936 battle marked a significant milestone in our aviation history, serving as a crucial assessment of the training, readiness, and combat effectiveness of the MPRA's Aviation Force. This engagement provided valuable experience in engaging ground forces, leading to enhancements in combat tactics and a deeper understanding of areas needing improvement.

¹ Lkham, D. (1985). *Mongolian pilot's vessel*. Ulaanbaatar.

² Sambuu, Zh., Galdan, Ch., Shagdarsuren, Ch., Ochir, Ts., & Tsendendorj. (1935). *Ten years of history of army aviation force*. Ulaanbaatar. (Translated from vertical Mongolian script to new script by M. Shagdarzhav, 2020).

Colonel General M. Zaisanov played a crucial role in reorganizing and strengthening Mongolia's aviation force. He led war operations against Japanese aggressors in 1939 and 1945, as well as battle operations to suppress Xinjiang bandits in the mid-1940s. Zaisanov focused on mastering modern combat aircraft in Mongolia and enhancing the combat preparedness of the aviation force's flight-technical personnel. His work is documented in "The History of the Army Aviation Unit and Formation for 25 Years," written in May 1950 to commemorate the MPRA's Aviation Force's 25th anniversary, serving as a valuable research source.¹

The aviation force recognized the need to prepare for future challenges, including facing well-armed enemies. This realization prompted urgent efforts to strengthen and modernize the aviation force in terms of weapons, technology, and personnel training.

Through its participation in battles and clashes during the 1930s, the MPRA's Aviation Force significantly improved its combat readiness and capability, becoming a specialized military force capable of fulfilling decisive duties in various battles.

Current Situation of Military Aviation Training Preparation

The military aviation force of Mongolia has evolved from 1966 to the present day. The Air Force of the Armed Forces of Mongolia was initially formed as a fighter aircraft squadron in 1966, followed by the establishment of a military communications flight squadron in 1970 and a combat helicopter fire support squadron in 1984.

The civil air transport sector in Mongolia has also seen significant development. It started as the transport squadron of the Ministry of People's Army Affairs and later became Civil Air Transport, playing a crucial role in national economic transport. Over the years, it has become an integral part of the international civil air transport network. Mongolian Civil Air Transport was established in 1957 and is now celebrating its 68th anniversary.

Throughout Mongolia's aviation history, the "Military communications flight squadron" has stood out for its diverse range of responsibilities. From supporting government and military leaders to providing rapid communication during field exercises, the squadron has also been involved in emergency medical assistance, transporting military cargo, aerial reconnaissance, and various other tasks such as chemical radiation measurements, airborne troop landings, parachutist training, sports events, disaster relief efforts, geological exploration, animal transportation and census, aerial filming, photography, and personnel training.

One key difference between the military command communications squadron and civilian and military aviation organizations is the need for flight personnel and engineering-technical workers to be constantly prepared for unplanned duties, regardless of weather conditions. The Air Force of the Armed Forces of Mongolia has gained valuable experience from participating in UN Peacekeeping missions in various locations such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Western Sahara, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Chad, and the Central African Republic.

Here is some additional overview of the current status of military aviation training preparation in Mongolia.

Mongolia's military aviation component is relatively small, consisting mainly of transport helicopters, basic surveillance aircraft, and training platforms. Due to budget constraints and the country's geography, aviation training and operations focus on defense, surveillance, mobility, and disaster response rather than offensive air campaigns.

Mongolia collaborates with international partners for training, professional military education, and capacity building.

Mongolia participated in the Pacific Airlift Rally 25 joint exercise in 2025, which involved the U.S. Air Force, Mongolia's Air Force, and other partners in the Indo-Pacific region. The training covered various aspects of airfield operations, logistics, and disaster response.

¹ Research Institute of the Ministry of Defense. (1950). *History of army aviation unit and formation* [Manuscript]. Manuscript Fund of the Research Institute of the Ministry of Defense.



Multinational Humanitarian Exercise “Pacific Airlift Rally 25”

The exercise brings together air forces and civilian disaster response agencies, including participants from Bangladesh, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga, and the United States.

The goal of Pacific Airlift Rally 25 is to improve regional disaster response readiness and build interoperability among military and civilian agencies responsible for airlift operations during real-world humanitarian emergencies.

Training will include concurrent Tabletop Exercises (TTXs) and Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs), with a focus on airfield operations, aerospace and expeditionary medicine, logistical coordination, and cultural engagement between the U.S. Air Force Band of the Pacific-Asia and the Military Band of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Mongolia.

Mongolia is investing in aviation training readiness, particularly for transport, airlift, and disaster response operations.

Mongolia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand’s Civil Aviation Training Center for training in pilot, air traffic control, aerodrome operations, and aviation security services. NATO supports Mongolia in modernizing its military education system, which likely includes aviation training. The Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand’s aviation training center indicates a focus on formalizing training for various aviation roles.

Infrastructure limitations exist in terms of equipment and training facilities for aviation training.

Challenges include limited resources, lack of advanced fighter pilot training, harsh climate conditions, and the need for specialized training. Opportunities include collaboration with international partners, focusing on niche strengths like disaster response and air mobility, and formalizing training pipelines.

Mongolia is moving towards structured, multi role aviation training, with a focus on mobility, disaster response, and air traffic control. Integration of international standards and interoperability is a key aspect of training preparation. Investment in infrastructure, training curricula, and international partnerships is essential for the full development of military aviation training in Mongolia

Conclusions

Starting in the mid-1930s, Mongolia's aviation force expanded its role beyond combat military operations to include civilian air transport tasks like delivering medical aid, transporting mail, and providing transport services.

The history of Mongolia's Aviation Force is not just a part of the country's proud Armed Forces history but also showcases how young Mongolians embraced and mastered aviation technology, bringing scientific and technological advancements to Mongolia in the 20th century.

Certainly, much has deteriorated and been lost over time, but due to the prevalence of positive and commendable aspects over mistakes and shortcomings, the undeniable achievement of reaching great heights today is evident. The history of Mongolia's aviation force has not always been smooth; in the late 1930s, a severe wave of repression led to the loss of key aviation personnel, resulting in a decline.

Since its inception, the military aviation force has carried out postal transport, emergency medical assistance, and other essential tasks as directed by the government and military command, a tradition that continues to this day. The time is approaching when the pilots and engineering-technical personnel of the Mongolian Armed Forces Air Force will be able to independently fulfill duties in UN Peacekeeping operations using their own aircraft.

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