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PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL SUPPORT FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL OPERATING IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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Abstract:

This article examines the specific aspects of moral and psychological support for operations in mountainous terrain, the impact of mountains on the mental state of service members, and the psychological preparation of service members for such operations. It identifies and recommends the most relevant approaches to moral and psychological support for actions in mountainous environments.

Keywords: mountainous terrain, morale and psychological support, the mental state of military personnel, stressors, psychological training, psychological readiness.

Introduction

Protecting and safeguarding the nation's borders has always been considered a cherished duty and obligation of every citizen. Furthermore, the military has consistently been viewed as an integral part of society, reflecting all socio-economic and political developments within it.

Before examining the specific aspects of military professional activity, it's important to acknowledge that human endeavor is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Various factors influence the activities of military personnel.

For example: Psychological, physical, and social factors.

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Psychological factors – these include mental processes (the characteristics of cognitive, emotional, and volitional functions), states (such as excitement, fatigue, joy, sadness, anger, weariness, and others), traits (temperament, aptitudes, abilities, and others), qualities (orientation, character traits, and others), and formations (knowledge, skills, professionalism, life experience, and others) of the individual.

Social factors – a person's social needs: communication, career choice, finding one's place in a group, and so on.

Physiological factors – these include basic human needs such as food, warmth, shelter, and a normal standard of living, among others.

Military service is a form of human endeavor that possesses not only significant social importance but also transcends the everyday, being intrinsically linked to exceptional circumstances.

There are both general psychological factors affecting all service members and specific factors related to their individual roles and specializations, impacting their mental well-being. Understanding and addressing these factors will allow for the optimization of military service conditions, the prevention of negative psychological states, improved professional development, and the effective organization of training and education for all personnel.

The actions of military personnel in mountainous terrain differ significantly from those in flatland environments.

High altitude – a natural factor – can impact a person's psyche more profoundly than many medications. What psychological changes occur at high altitude? What mechanisms drive these changes? To what extent are they beneficial, and to what extent are they dangerous?

Prolonged physical exertion or the movement of soldiers in full gear in pre-mountainous regions (600-1800 meters above sea level) leads to psychophysiological fatigue. The monotonous landscape of rocky or clay-rich mountains can have a demoralizing effect on soldiers' mental state.

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At an altitude of 2000 meters above sea level, the reaction time of personnel slows down slightly. Individuals begin to drink more water than usual and don't feel satisfied.

Such conditions are considered extreme. Analysis shows that inadequate hydration in mountainous terrain is one of the causes of human psychological and physical exhaustion.

In the mountains, thought shifts, emotions change, memory and willpower are tested. This manifests externally as a change in reaction to one's surroundings.

Firstly, the reaction time becomes somewhat slower. Simultaneously, it becomes more emotional. During a rapid ascent to an altitude of 2000 meters (by helicopter), the surrounding world begins to be perceived with greater intensity and novelty. The brain, as it were, re-examines the properties of the environment. Having spent a lot of time in the mountains and grown accustomed to observing yourself and others, you easily notice changes in people's behavior. At an altitude of 2000 meters, people speak louder, express emotions more intensely. Sometimes, you see an excess of certainty in their judgments, a bluntness, even rudeness.

After gaining 3000 meters (approximately 9800 feet) of altitude, pressure changes in the brain become increasingly pronounced with each additional 300 meters (roughly 1,000 feet), leading to more noticeable shifts in thought and behavior. Beyond 4000 meters (around 13100 feet), changes become significant every 100-200 meters (330-660 feet). There's a point beyond which effective communication between people becomes challenging. This is what's known as the "moral loss altitude." It's the point at which a person can only focus on preserving their life. Finer aspects of the psyche – things like morality, friendship, creativity, and responsibility – simply cease to function at that altitude.

At an altitude of 3000 to 4000 meters. It's a height where a person can only think about preserving their life and where their actions become noticeably slowed.

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When traveling in mountainous terrain, you will encounter rushing rivers, cliffs, impassable gorges, mountain ranges, passes, crevasses, icy and snowy slopes, and other obstacles. Rockfalls, icefalls, thunderstorms, and snow avalanches are inherent hazards of the mountain environment.

The aforementioned challenges and climate conditions, impacting a person's mental state, necessitate increased energy expenditure. Soldiers experience fatigue and exhaustion. Rapid changes in mountain weather reduce both physical and mental performance, exacerbate illnesses, increase the number of errors in their actions, and contribute to a rise in aggressive behavior among the troops. A service member's behavior and emotions are significantly influenced by the social environment within their unit, interpersonal relationships, and military discipline. Furthermore, their mental well-being is affected by the availability of specialized mountaineering equipment, food supplies, and medical provisions.

Psychological preparation is a component of psychological support – a structural element of the overall moral and psychological support provided to military personnel. It involves a focused process of developing psychological qualities within personnel that enhance their ability to perform tasks related to the protection and safeguarding of the state border, to act effectively in stressful and hazardous situations while adhering fully to ethical principles of conduct and their approach to military duty and their functional responsibilities.

Primary objectives of psychological preparation:

- a) Developing emotional and volitional resilience within personnel, their ability to withstand danger, and to endure the negative emotional and physical impact on their psyche caused by the demands of training, combat, and service environments.
- b) Cultivating psychological resilience within personnel – the ability to maintain effectiveness and operational capability in challenging and hazardous conditions.

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Objectives of psychological preparation for operations in mountainous terrain include:

instilling in military personnel a correct understanding of regulations and the specific procedures for operations in mountainous terrain;

restructuring the mindset and awareness of personnel to prepare them for climatic and psychophysiological challenges;

developing psychological resilience, readiness to overcome challenges, and the ability to perform effectively in demanding, fast-paced environments;

developing and fostering emotional and volitional resilience, as well as qualities like courage, combat readiness, perseverance, and the ability to resist fear and panic, in military personnel;

enhancing the readiness and proficiency of professional and combat skills to ensure timely task execution;

cultivating and instilling in each service member psychological traits such as resilience, moderation in desires and needs, which should diminish the inclination towards comfort and enable operations in adverse weather, climatic, and challenging conditions;

fostering strong unit cohesion within military units, built upon a foundation of camaraderie, mutual support in action, and unquestioning obedience to orders.

Psychological preparation takes into account the specific challenges of mountainous terrain. Key stressors include the threat to life, responsibility for task completion and the well-being of subordinates, insufficient information, time constraints, and others, as well as prolonged deprivation of food, water, and rest.

Personnel must prepare for operations in such conditions well in advance, as part of their combat training. A key factor in the effectiveness of psychological preparation is mirroring real-world actions in the training environment. Therefore, exercises should incorporate elements of tension, surprise, danger, and risk. Personnel should repeatedly practice the techniques and actions being

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studied. Training should involve both a gradual increase in workload and sudden, unexpected spikes pushing personnel to their limits.

For effective psychological preparation within a training environment, all types of stimuli (visual, auditory, and tactile) should be utilized to impact the mental state of military personnel.

When planning combat training, it's crucial to consider that personnel can be categorized as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners, based on their primary method of receiving information about the external environment. Visual learners are particularly influenced by visual factors: the sight of the mountainous terrain itself, canyons, slopes, mountain rivers, rockfalls, thunderstorms, destroyed buildings, the color of blood, the bright flashes of explosions, difficult-to-traverse trails, icy crevasses, the view of firing positions on slopes, and so on. Incorporating the screening of training films into preparation proves to be beneficial.

For those with auditory sensitivity, the sounds associated with combat are the most distressing: the whistle of bullets, the roar of aircraft, the wind's howl in mountain gorges, the rush of rivers and rockfalls, the sounds of explosions, the groans and cries of the wounded, and so on.

For kinesthetic learners, feelings and emotions are paramount; their state is intensified by various tactile sensations: the scent of mountain plants, smoke, blood, festering wounds, chemicals; the taste of that same smoke, dust, dirt, the crunch of sand between their teeth, and so on.

During the psychological preparation of personnel, commanders must demonstrate creativity and initiative, utilizing a variety of exercises to build emotional and volitional resilience (such as tank assault courses, water jumps, obstacle courses under fire, training in defending against incendiary agents, free-fall descents without ropes, and so on), and employing various simulators to develop professional skills in attention, memory, and cognitive ability.

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Methods for creating stress during combat training. Execution of sustained tactical operations day and night, without rest, including diverse field exercises in mountainous terrain and mountain marches, utilizing simulation elements (explosions and loud noises, hand grenade deployment, smoke grenades, extended charges, blank ammunition), and various drills; forcing river crossings, undertaking long-distance foot marches without rest (while employing deception tactics and simulating enemy actions); negotiating an obstacle course in full gear and with weapons; Conducting athletic competitions incorporating obstacle course elements, high-altitude training, and the evacuation of casualties, ammunition boxes, and so forth.;

conducting training in bad weather (the worse the weather, the better for creating tension. Mud, rain, and a low, grey sky close to the ground will help create the desired atmosphere of oppression);

Rapid changes in environment and conditions, demanding immediate and decisive action from personnel;

concealed preparation and the unexpected deployment of various obstacles and barriers during active troop maneuvers.

The introduction of various challenges and hazardous situations into the training environment should be adapted to the specific conditions of mountainous terrain and progressively increased as personnel gain experience and develop emotional and volitional skills in overcoming fear.

The methods and approaches for developing essential psychological qualities in soldiers during combat training can vary. They primarily depend on the methodological expertise of the command staff and the condition of the materiel and equipment base of units and subunits.

To recreate the psychological factors of combat, various methods of simulating combat situations are employed. These are typically classified according to the following criteria:

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- through modeling;
- According to the mode of influence (on visual, auditory, tactile, or other perception);
- through the mechanisms of influence on military personnel.

When conducting training exercises simulating various combat scenarios, following the recommendations of military psychologists, workloads are created that should convince service members of the value of rigorous combat training and demonstrate that their physical and mental reserves are greater than they themselves believe. Training sessions should be designed on the principle that the more intense they are, the more they contribute to psychological resilience. For example, altitude training should initially be conducted in optimal conditions, in a calm setting, and then, to create stress, the session should be organized in adverse weather. This should include utilizing sound recordings, smoke grenades, reproducing the sounds of the battlefield, simulating grenade explosions, and so on.

Psychological readiness of a service member for action - One of the key components of a unit's readiness for specific operations. It involves, first, a service member's awareness of responsibility, confidence in themselves, their comrades, their equipment, and their weapons. Observable indicators of a service member's psychological readiness to act include:

composure and evenness of demeanor; a lack of either fussiness or withdrawal; precise and flawless execution of orders and commands; a normal physiological state (including heart rate, breathing, skin tone, etc.).

Three levels of psychological readiness for action are distinguished:

With **low levels** the service member lacks confidence, shows a lack of initiative, is indecisive, appears either overly hasty or withdrawn, and makes mistakes when carrying out even the simplest orders.

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For **intermediate level** a characteristic combination in a soldier is self-assuredness coupled with a reluctance to act. He makes minor errors in executing orders, and his psychophysiological state is close to normal.

High level - this expresses a desire, a certainty in the service member, a drive to test oneself and achieve high results. A moderate level of psychological readiness is considered most suitable prior to engagement. Therefore, it's vital for a service member to be able to maintain this. However, when transitioning to action, it's necessary to be able to elevate one's psychological readiness to a high level.

Simultaneously with the development of psychological readiness for action in extreme situations, training cultivates assertiveness, animosity, and ruthlessness towards the enemy, fosters an offensive drive, a desire to be first, a sense of excitement and determination, and resilience in the face of suffering and destruction (obstacles).

A highly effective way to prepare for combat is to mentally rehearse the sequence of your actions, initially at a slow pace, then with greater energy. This allows the service member to mentally immerse themselves in the situation to the point where they involuntarily begin to perform the necessary actions, indicating the establishment of a strong connection between thought and action.

Ensuring timely leave and utilizing various psychophysical relaxation methods promotes the physical and psychological recovery of military personnel.

In conclusion, every commander, before deploying their unit to the mountains, must thoroughly study safety measures and the psychological characteristics of their personnel. Understanding the psychological traits and physical capabilities of their subordinates allows each commander to effectively organize psychological preparation for the unit, ensuring the goals of mountain training are achieved.

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