



four-barrel 12.7mm gun. They are operated alongside 26 Mi-8Ts, three M-8MTs, four Mi-8MTV-2s, six Mi-9 airborne command posts and 16 heavy-lift Mi-26 'Halos'. The last Mi-6 'Hooks' were phased out around 1996, while the Mi-24D 'Hind-D' is no longer used by any of the remaining brigades in Ukraine.

The brigade incorporates two helicopter squadrons, both using a mixture of

'Hips' and 'Hinds' of different sub-types, while the 1st Squadron operates all but two of the remaining Mi-26 'Halos' in Ukrainian Army service. The 2nd Helicopter Squadron is the Army Aviation unit designated to work within NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework agreement. Together with other elements of the Ukrainian armed forces, the squadron trains in PfP exercises to achieve interoperability with NATO military formations. As such, it is prepared when called upon to participate in NATO-led peacekeeping operations.

A total of 70 crews is assigned to the brigade, each comprising a pilot, co-pilot and engineer. It receives between six and 10 new pilots every year once they have gone through the training process. Pilot training takes about four years, the first of which teaches theory only. In Ukraine, the Air Academy is run by the Air Force and is the sole operator of the remaining Mi-2 'Hoplites' for basic training. In addition, it has Mi-8s and Mi-24s on charge for advanced helicopter instruction. Depending on the capability of the student pilot, between 100 and 200 flight hours are logged while at the Academy before the young graduate moves to the assigned unit. Then at the brigade level they fly for two or three years as a co-pilot before they move on to become a commander pilot.

As with the other two Brigades, maintenance is done at six, 12 and 24-month intervals at the unit level. For overhaul and upgrades, helicopters are sent to the Konotop Aviation Repair Plant 'Aviakon' (formerly the 57th Repair Base), a state-run Ministry of Defense plant in the north of the country. Currently the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense is studying the possible procurement of some Mi-171 helicopters and upgrading a limited number of low-hour 'Hips' for night operations.

Keeping the peace

Ukraine is today one of the leading troop contributors to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping activities, providing military and civilian personnel to operations around the globe. At the time of writing, more than 17,000 servicemen of the Ukrainian armed forces have taken part in such operations, and in many of these the Ukrainian Army Aviation plays a vital role performing tasks including transportation, delivery of medical or food aid, VIP transport, medical evacuation (Medevac) or border patrols.



An early example of this came in 1993 when it was called into action to take part in the operation to evacuate refugees out of the conflict zone in Georgia-Abkhazia. Ukraine's contribution to NATO peacekeeping activities in the Balkans started in 1996 when an infantry battalion of 550 soldiers was deployed to work alongside NATO member and partner countries in Bosnia-Herzegovina under the aegis of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR). It later took part in the Stabilization Force (SFOR), and continued to provide significant contingents to the international peacekeeping activities undertaken by KFOR in Kosovo (KFOR). The Ukrainian Army contributed a mechanized company and a helicopter squadron to the latter; from September 1999 onwards, the 14th Helicopter Squadron participated in the operation in Kosovo with four Mi-8 helicopters executing a total of 5,640 missions. They accumulated some 2,990 hours transporting 20,500 passengers and 198,000kg of cargo. In July 2000, the newly created Polish-Ukrainian battalion

below: Although the Ukrainian Army still has a large Mi-24 fleet, it is having to be scaled down to comply with international treaty obligations.

