



Many of the Mi-2 'Hippits' have been withdrawn from service and the remaining aircraft are exclusively operated by the Air Force Academy for basic training. This example is the last to be found on an army base, guarding the gate at Brody.

On 26 August 2004 the regiment was reformed and named 3rd Independent Helicopter Brigade of Army Aviation, reporting directly to the Commander of Army Aviation of the Western Operational Command. The unit has some 700 people attached to it. As with the brigade at Novi Kaliniv, many of the senior officers in service have seen real combat action in Afghanistan and/or have served in different units located in the former German Democratic Republic (DDR).

Today's main tasks of the unit is to train helicopter crews for peacekeeping and rescue operations, as well as the transport of personnel and cargo, and to carry out VIP flights for army commanders.

The 3rd Brigade also maintains two Mi-24 'Hinds' on permanent alert (day missions only) for anti-aircraft defence, receiving orders from

the air defence section of the Air Force in case low-speed/low-altitude aircraft illegally cross the border. If the occasion arises they would need to intercept and target the aircraft with their guns.

Providing support to the surrounding civil population, one specially fitted Mi-8 stands on an all-weather 24-hour SAR alert and has an action radius of 250 km (155 miles).

The unit was prepared to send helicopters in support of the Ukrainian forces in Iraq, but to date this has not materialised and as it is most likely that the Ukrainian contribution to the Coalition Forces in the country is to be returned, it will probably never happen.

Elements of the 3rd Brigade are part of the newly created Rapid Reaction Force, allowing the flight crews to fly additional hours. Currently, flight crews not assigned to UN oper-

ations abroad fly between 50 and 80 hours annually, while those on deployment accumulate between 100 and 250 hours on average. Live air-to-ground firing is practised on a regular basis at the Kaminkubuska Air Force shooting range nearby, keeping the unit's combat proficiency high.

Furthermore, regular shooting camps are organised across the country in which the Brody delegation, together with other brigades, are gathered for a two-week firing exercise in the field operating a mix of 'Hips' and 'Hinds'.

In the past Brody played an important role as it was located relatively central in the former USSR. Containerised helicopters were transported from the main factory to Brody by train to be assembled locally, test-flown and distributed among the many helicopter regiments and squadrons in the western part of the Soviet Union.

In contrast, today Brody plays another role, as opposite the helicopter base (which houses two operational squadrons) is located a separate compound responsible for the collection and destruction of surplus helicopter components, mainly older Mi-24Ds and Mi-8Ts. In mid-2004 at least 55 'Hinds' and 21 'Hips' were gathered with

Ukraine's peacekeeping missions

Today Ukraine is one of the leading contributors of troops to the United Nations (UN) for peacekeeping activities, providing military and civilian personnel for operations around the globe.

Ukraine has already made significant contributions to NATO's peacekeeping activities in the Balkans. The country's decision to actively take part in peacekeeping operations took place in July 1992, when parliament adopted a resolution on the participation of its Armed Forces in UN Peacekeeping Forces in conflict zones in the territory of former Republic of Yugoslavia. Since 1992, Ukraine has participated in operations like UNPROFOR, SFOR and IFOR, and in countries including Croatia, eastern Slovenia, Kosovo, Moldova, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Lebanon, Guatemala, Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 1993 the Ukrainian Army Aviation was called into action to take part in the operation to evacuate refugees from the conflict zone in Georgia-Abkhazia.

From 1992 to 1995 Ukraine took part in UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) in former Yugoslavia, sending two battalions 60th and 240th Special Battalion tasked with conveying cargo with relief goods, stopping combat actions and patrolling the zones of responsibility. Here the 15th Independent Helicopter Squadron provided rotary support in the form of three Mi-8 helicopters and two Mi-24s. During September-December 1995, the Ukrainian UNPROFOR peacekeeping units were retrained from former Yugoslavia.

From 29 March 1996 onwards, the 17th Independent Helicopter Squadron served during the UN mission in Eastern Slovenia (UNTAES) being replaced on 10 April 1996 by the 8th Independent Helicopter Squadron until January 1998. Here the main tasks were to observe the implementation of agreements about transferring authority under the control of the UN administration, to patrol the zones of responsibility, to transport UN personnel and to convey humanitarian cargo. More than 1,000 servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine took part in the UN mission to Eastern Slovenia.

Ukraine's contribution to NATO peacekeeping activities in the Balkans started in 1996 when Ukraine deployed an infantry battalion of 550 soldiers to work alongside NATO members and partner countries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the framework of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR). Ukraine later also took part in the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), while it continued to provide a significant number of its forces to international peacekeeping activities for the NATO-led force in Kosovo (KFOR), and by sending a mechanised company and a helicopter squadron.

From September 1999 onwards, the 14th Helicopter Squadron participated in the operation in Kosovo with four Mi-8 helicopters executing a total of 5,840 missions, during which 2,850 hours were flown to transport 20,500 passengers and 198,000 kg (436,505 lb) of cargo. In July 2000, the newly created Polish-Ukrainian battalion was deployed to the region and continues to make a significant contribution to the NATO-led peacekeeping operation in Kosovo.

Until now more than 17,000 servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine have taken part in peacekeeping operations all over the world, and in many of those operations Army Aviation has played a vital role, performing tasks such as transportation, delivery of medical or food aid, VIP transport, medical evacuation (Medevac) or border patrol.

Preparing for peace

Being a substantial contributor of military and civilian personnel to UN peacekeeping operations, Ukraine takes specific precautions concerning the security and safety of its personnel. In view of the acuity of the problem (27 Ukrainian peacekeepers lost their lives in the cause of peace and over 65 servicemen were wounded while serving with UN peacekeeping operations), Ukraine initiated the Convention on the Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel, which came into effect in January 1996.

Before being sent on such kinds of missions, people need to be trained and equipment modified for often very different circumstances to those they normally encounter. All participants take a special course prior to being sent on a UN mission. This takes place three months in advance and includes additional training for the crews and physiological preparation. UN requirements dictate that helicopter commanders need a minimum of 1,000 hours. Most of the co-pilots need to have an experience of at least 100 flight hours. Further criteria are laid down in an agreement between UN and Ukraine. The UN checks and tests the crews when they arrive on location.

Specific modifications to the helicopters are carried out to meet UN standards: these include the fitting of a transponder, additional radios and GPS. All these modifications are made at brigade depot level. Most of the Ukrainian army 'Hips' assigned to UN missions also have additional nose weather radar fitted and an external fuel tank attached to the port side.

Due to the difficult conditions in Africa, for safety reasons the helicopters are replaced once every year. The helicopters are transported to and from Africa by An-124, which is capable of transferring up to four helicopters at once. On average, each pilot accumulates about 300 hours per 6 months, which is also the maximum length of the tour.

United Nations mission in Africa

The aim of the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Sierra Leone was to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement and to assist in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration plan. The peacekeeping contingent of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Sierra Leone started in December 2000 and its contribution consisted of the 4th independent repair battalion and the 20th independent helicopter unit of Ukrainian Army Aviation. This detachment operated alongside a Pakistani Army helicopter unit. The 4th independent repair battalion of the Armed Forces of Ukraine located at Lungi airport and Hastings carried out its UN tasks with 524 servicemen. They included maintenance and repair of military cars, trucks and trailers, training of armoured troop-carrier crews and truck drivers, and escort for humanitarian cargoes.

From 12 March 2001 four Mi-8 'Hios' of the 20th independent helicopter unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were assigned to the UN mission in Sierra Leone. Based at Hastings airport (20 km/12 miles southeast of the capital Freetown), the Ukraine Aviation unit was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tansh Shliukharshchuk and was made up of 110 servicemen of whom 57 were officers. Since its inception the unit has successfully accomplished several medical evacuations, search and rescue operations and movement of personnel and cargo in about 13,500 flights and 6,000 hours. The Russians joined the Ukrainians when on 24 April 2004 four Russian Mi-24 'Hinds' arrived in Sierra Leone, with 110 officers and warrant officers.

On 27 August 2004, UNAMSIL Force Commander Major General Sajjad Akram honoured all the members of the Ukraine Aviation Unit when they were offered