



their rotor blades removed, awaiting their destruction.

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 Konosop Aviation Repair Plant 'Aviokon' (formerly 57th Repair

Base), a state-run Ministry of Defence plant in the north of the country. Currently the Ministry of Defence is studying the possible procurement of some Mi-171 helicopters and upgrading a limited number of low-hour 'hips' with night operation capabilities.

Marnix Sap and Carlo Brunner/MIAS

Virtually all of Ukraine's active Mi-26 fleet is operated by the 7th Brigade's 1st Squadron at Novi Kaliniv. The 'Halo' is very useful for carrying large numbers of troops and heavy military loads such as vehicles, but can also be called upon for the transportation and positioning of outside underwing loads. Mi-26s have on occasion been provided by Ukraine to add heavy-lift muscle to United Nations operations.

with the UN medal of honour for their outstanding performance since the arrival of the unit in 2001.

Following developments in neighbouring Liberia, the attention of the United Nations shifted to the south. With UNAMSIL dwindling in size, an important mission for the Ukraine Aviation Unit was Operation Blue Vigilance II, in which the unit carried out flights along the country's borders with Guinea and Liberia to deter cross-border activities. Ukraine's mission in Sierra Leone ended in October/November 2004, and many of the crews and ground personnel have moved to Liberia to form the 50th independent helicopter unit. They contribute to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a mission which is expected to become the largest United Nations peacekeeping mission.

To date a total of 15,632 uniformed personnel, including 14,337 troops and 198 military observers, 1,097 civilian police supported by 475 international civilian personnel and 565 local staff is present in Liberia. Ukraine contributes with 320 personnel and the contingent is stationed at Roberts International Airport, Monrovia, operating eight Mi-8s and four Mi-24s.

In February of this year, helicopter gunships attached to the UN peacekeeping force in Liberia began regular patrols of the country along the land border with Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone to control illegal logging and other unauthorised cross-border movements. Currently another six helicopters are being prepared to take part in the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which started

on 4 April 2004. Once ready, they will be tasked with controlling the imposed arms embargo and monitoring the commitments under the existing peace process.

Fire-fighting in Turkey

Another important non-UN contribution is Ukraine's support to Turkey. Since 1999, every year Ukraine deploys helicopters to Turkey during the fire season, which runs from June to October. In 2004 10 helicopters flew to Turkey to be dispersed over 10 different zones, where they are used as aerial fire-fighters. They are equipped with the underslung 'Bambi' bucket, which has a maximum load of 3 tons of water. Although military-owned, the helicopters are flown by civilian pilots with military co-pilots and engineers who are detached to Turkey for the duration of the mission. The entire mission is overseen and administrated by the Ukrainian civil company Rosavia.

For some time now, Ukraine's defence forces have undergone significant structural changes to optimise the force to reflect the current balance of power, while transforming part of the military mission to that of peacekeeping. In this transformation process, Army Aviation has already changed into a leaner and meaner organisation and has become increasingly important in undertaking peacekeeping missions. Doing so with great success has allowed the Ukraine government to effectively engage and play its role in envisages for itself in the international community.



The 20th Independent Helicopter Detachment (above) operated Mi-8s in Sierra Leone. Some of the Mi-26 fleet is painted white for UN peace support operations (right).

