



above: Among Ukraine's 'Hind' inventory are a small number of Mi-24Rs. The Mi-24R was developed specially for the NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) reconnaissance role.

cht: The Mi-24P is the most numerous 'Hind' version still in use, as the airframes are relatively young. The Mi-24Ds have been retired, but a few Mi-24Vs remain in service.



left: The two Mil designs that constitute most of the Ukrainian Army's helicopter fleet, the Mi-24 and Mi-8, work together in both brigades.

operations, transport personnel and cargo and execute VIP flights for Army commanders.

The 3rd Brigade also maintains two Mi-24 'Hinds' on permanent alert (daylight missions only) for anti-aircraft defense purposes, receiving orders from the Air Defense section of the Ukrainian AF in case low-speed or low-altitude aircraft illegally cross the country's border. If such a thing were ever to happen, the 'Hinds' would intercept and target the aircraft with their guns. Meanwhile, providing support to the surrounding civil population, one specially-equipped Mi-8 stands on an all-weather 24-hour SAR alert and has an action radius of 250km.

The unit was geared-up to send helicopters in support of Ukrainian forces in Iraq, but to date this has not materialized. As it is likely that the Ukrainian contribution to the coalition forces in the country is to be brought home, the deployment will probably never happen. Elements of the 3rd Brigade are however part of the newly-created Rapid Reaction Force, allowing its crews to fly extra hours. Currently, flight crews not assigned to UN operations abroad fly between 50 and 80 hours annually, while those sent out on such missions accumulate on average between 100 and 250 hours per annum. Live air-to-ground firing is practiced on a regular basis at the Air Force's nearby Kaminkubuska shooting range, keeping the unit combat proficiency high. Regular shooting

camps' are organized across the country, at which helicopters from Brody together with those of other Brigades gather for two weeks of live firing exercises involving a mix of 'Hips' and 'Hinds'.

In the past, Brody played another important role. As the base was located relatively centrally in the former USSR, trains transported containerized helicopters from factories to Brody where they were assembled, test-flown and distributed among the many helicopter regiments and squadrons in the western part of the Soviet Union. By contrast, Brody now sees the end of many helicopters' useful lives, as opposite the operational base is a separate compound responsible for the collection and destruction of surplus airframes, mainly older Mi-24Ds and Mi-8s. At the time of the author's visit, some 55 'Hinds' and 21 'Hips' were gathered there with their rotor blades removed awaiting destruction.

7th Independent Brigade

The biggest brigade within the Western OC, and thus in the whole country, is the 7th Independent Brigade of Army Aviation. It is based at Novi Kaliniv, around 80km south-west of Lviv. Although the nearby village is small in size, some 5,000 people reside in the housing complex adjacent to the base



(and away from the village) which has its own primary school, supermarket and other facilities. In its entirety, the station covers an area of some 360 hectares.

On April 1, 2004, the unit celebrated its 50th anniversary, having originally been an air transport regiment at Nezhin air base equipped with the Lisunov Li-2. In 1955, the unit transitioned to its first helicopters in the form of the Mi-4 and Mi-6. The Mi-8 'Hip' entered service in 1970 and during 1986 the unit received the first Mi-26 'Halo'. Five years later, the unit provided helicopters to fight the Chernobyl reactor fire started by the explosion at the nuclear powerplant, losing many of its crews in the aftermath. In 1995-96 the unit flew Mi-26s to Zagreb followed by Mi-24 and Mi-8s to Croatia as part of Ukraine's peacekeeping contribution to the United Nations, while 1999 and 2001 saw some of its Mi-8s being based in Kosovo.

Until 1988, Novi Kaliniv housed the Soviet AF's 368th Attack Air Regiment equipped with Su-25 'Frogfoots' and a single mixed helicopter regiment. Upon the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the latter was joined by Army Aviation's 335th Helicopter Regiment (previously based at Gazni, Afghanistan) when it returned to the motherland. Today, only the 7th Brigade remains, but the remnants of the two helicopter regiments that used to be located there are still evident as the brigade has some 48 helicopters on strength and 69 helicopters still reside on the base.

Although not all active, the actual aircraft composition of the Brigade is typical in its diversity as it has six Mi-24V 'Hind-Es', 15 cannon-equipped Mi-24P 'Hind-Fs', three Mi-24RCnR 'Hind-G1s' specially modified for nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) warfare analysis and seven Mi-24K 'Hind-G2s' for battlefield reconnaissance and artillery fire correction. The unit also operates a trio of unique Mi-24VPs with the twin-barrel 23mm nose gun in place of the