



Above: In the 7th Brigade (badge right) fleet are three Mi-24VPs. This was the final 'Hind' production version, and only 25 were built. The VP has a GSh-23L twin-barrelled cannon.



Left: Another 7th Brigade 'rarity' is the Mi-24K, the battlefield reconnaissance and artillery fire correction version. The 'Hind-G2' has a large AFA-100 camera and Rata target identification system in the cabin, peering obliquely through a rectangular window in the starboard side where the cabin door should be. The port door is retained for access, and the system is controlled from the front cockpit. Like the Mi-24R, the Mi-24K has no missile capability, and the Raduga-F sight under the starboard nose is replaced by an Iris wide-angle sensor in a revised fairing.



Although not all active, the actual composition of the Brigade is typical in its diversity as it has six Mi-24Vs ('Hind-F'), 15 cannon-equipped Mi-24Ps ('Hind-F'), three Mi-24Rs ('Hind-G1') specially modified for nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) warfare analysis, and seven Mi-24Ks ('Hind-G2') for battlefield reconnaissance and artillery fire correction. The unit also operates three of the rare Mi-24VPs (*Izdeliye 258*) with a twin-barrelled 23-mm nose gun, in place of the standard four-barrelled YakB 12.7-mm machine-gun.

They are operated alongside 26 Mi-8Ts, three Mi-8MTs, four Mi-8MTV-2s and six Mi-9 airborne command posts, as well as 16 Mi-26 heavy-lift helicopters ('Halo'). Around 1996 the

indicative of Ukraine Army Aviation's drive to reduce the numbers of helicopters in its fleet to a realistic and manageable number, 55 Mi-24s and 21 Mi-8s are stored at Brody, awaiting their destruction.

last Mi-6 'Hooks' were phased out. The Mi-24D 'Hind-D' is no longer in use in any of the remaining brigades in Ukraine.

Today the brigade incorporates two helicopter squadrons, each operating a mix 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 brigade has a total of 70 crews, comprising a pilot, co-pilot and engineer, and the brigade receives 6 to 10 new pilots each year.

At the academy, based on the outcome of psychological and physical tests, young recruits are immediately separated to fly fixed-wing or helicopters. Pilot training takes about four years of which the first is mainly theoretical instruction. In Ukraine the Air Academy is run by the Air Force and is the sole operator of the remaining Mi-2 'Hoplites'. It also has Mi-8s and Mi-24s for advanced training. 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 their assigned unit. At the brigade level they fly (depending on their skills) two to three years as a co-pilot before they move on as a commander pilot.

The 2nd Helicopter Squadron of 7th Helicopter Brigade is the designated Army Aviation unit to work within the Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework agreement. Together with other elements of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the squadron trains in PfP exercises to reach interoperability with NATO military formations and, as such, is prepared when called upon to participate in NATO-led Peace Keeping Operations (PKO). Currently the brigade has some 100 officers active in United Nations operations.

Brody

The base of the 3rd Independent Brigade of Army Aviation is located some 12 km (7.5 miles) north of the ancient city of Brody, while the brigade headquarters is located in the city itself. The airfield retains a small west-east orientated runway and old-style revetments, previously in use by B-2 Sturmoviks' during World War II and shortly after.

The current regiment was formed as recently as 1995 when the 119th Independent Helicopter Regiment still reported to the 38th Army Corps, and on 16 November 1995 the unit began flight operations.

