

Air power

In the first of a two-part feature on the little-known Belarusian Air Force and Air Defence, **Patrick Roegies**, **Stefan Goossens** and **Erwin van Dijkman** chart the history of the service's formative years after the demise of the Soviet Union.



Right: It's believed that eight 'Fulcrums' have been upgraded to MiG-29BM standard (including three modernised MiG-29UBM trainers) and that these had been redelivered by November 2015; an acceptance ceremony followed at Baranovichi on December 1. Recent acquisition of Su-30SMs means the days of the remaining MiG-29s could be numbered. All photos Patrick Roegies unless stated

Most of the Soviet assets based on Belarusian territory had been subordinated to the local Belorusskiy Voyennyi Okrug (BVO, Belarussian Military District), which was a second-tier echelon force of the Western Strategic Direction. In case of hostilities, its well-equipped formations were intended to be rushed in at a moment's notice to support and relieve the first-tier echelon force – comprising Soviet and Warsaw Pact units based in Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland. The assets of the Voenno-

Vozdushnyye Sily (VVS, Soviet Air Force) in Belarus were predominantly subordinated to the 26 Vozdushnaya Armiya (26 VA, 26th Air Army) – the air arm of the BVO. The importance of the BVO was reflected not just in the sheer number of VVS units and aircraft, but also in their quality – its units were highly trained and equipped with some of the latest fighters, fighter-bombers, ground attack and reconnaissance aircraft, as well as bombers.

In addition, there was also a sizeable quantity of aircraft from the two independent strategic

branches of the VVS – the heavy bombers of the Dalnyaya Aviatsiya (DA, Long-range Aviation) and heavy transports of the Voenno-Transportnaya Aviatsiya (VTA, Military Transport Aviation).

Due to the strategic importance of the area, Belarus was also the home of significant air defence (AD) assets – including some of the most modern interceptors – tasked with knocking out hostile aircraft that might penetrate the first tier of AD units stationed in the Baltic and prevent them from

reaching further into Soviet territory, towards Moscow.

These AD assets were subordinated to the 11 Korpus Protivovozdushnoy Oborony (11 K PVO, 11th Air Defence Corps), part of the 2 Otdelnaya Armiya Protivovozdushnoy Oborony (2 OA PVO, 2nd Independent Air Defence Army) of the Voyska Protivovozdushnoy Oborony (Soviet Air Defence Forces, VPVO). Last, but not least, Belarus was

Power *Between Russia and the West*



home to an additional quantity of nuclear-capable heavy bombers from a division of naval missile-carrying aircraft of the Soviet Baltic Fleet, plus a fleet of attack and transport helicopters belonging to local Ground Forces and Strategic Missile Forces units.

Once independent, Belarus also gained control of a modest number of military defence enterprises able to manufacture electronic systems and perform aircraft overhaul and modernisation. Of these, the 558

Aviatsionnyy Remontnyy Zavod (ARZ, Aircraft Repair Plant) at Baranovichi is one of the better-known facilities.

Early days

Belarus became de facto independent in December 1991, when the USSR ceased to exist, and in the process took over most of the inventories of the Soviet 26 VA and 11 K PVO. Six months later, on June

15, 1992, the Air Force Command of the Republic of Belarus was established and began to formally gain control over former VVS assets based on Belarusian territory, starting with the 26 VA. On August 1 that year, the 2 OA PVO of the Soviet VPVO was transformed into the PVO of Belarus (ie, the HQ of 2 OA PVO became the HQ of the Belarus PVO) – the VVS and PVO would merge in 2001.

Belarus established an air arm that

* In Russian, unit names up to and including a division are written with a lower-case first letter, including their abbreviations. Capital letters begin the unit names of corps and higher units. However, in this article, the usual Western standard has been adopted, with the abbreviations in capitals (for example, IAP instead of iap).

was considered the best maintained and organised within the newly created Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). On gaining independence, an estimated 700 military aircraft of various types were deployed on Belarusian territory, but by no means all were taken over by Belarus. The heavy bombers of the DA were of no interest to Belarus. There was a single naval missile-carrying division with two regiments at Bykhov that was disbanded ▶

Air Defence

2 Otdelnaya Armiya Protivovozdushnoy Oborony (2 OA PVO, 2nd Independent Air Defence Army)

Military Unit: 03520

Location: Minsk, Minsk Oblast

The highest-level AD unit on Belarusian territory, controlling AD assets that covered most of Belarus (11 K PVO, see below) and western Ukraine (28 K PVO, taken over by Ukraine in 1992). In 1992, this formation served as the basis for the new Belarusian AD forces.

25 otdelnaya transportnaya aviatsionnaya eskadriya (25 OTAE, 25th Independent Transport Aviation Squadron)

Military Unit: 11154

Location: Machulishchy, Minsk Oblast

The organic transport aviation unit of the 2 OA PVO, operating a number of fixed-wing transports and helicopters. Taken over by Belarus in 1992 and later merged with the 50 otdelnyy smesharnyy aviatsionnyy polk (50 OSAP, 50th Independent Composite Aviation Regiment) to form the 50 transportnaya aviatsionnaya baza (50 TAB, 50th Transport Aviation Base) at the same location.

11 Korpus Protivovozdushnoy Oborony (11 K PVO, 11th Air Defence Corps)

Military Unit: 30055

Location: Baranovichi, Brest Oblast

The 11th Air Defence Corps comprised two fighter aviation regiments, a large number of anti-aircraft missile regiments and a number of radio-technical regiments (radar units). The two fighter regiments were:

61 istrebitelnyy aviatsionnyy polk PVO (61 IAP PVO, 61st Air Defence Fighter Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 54804

Location: Baranovichi, Brest Oblast

This unit ultimately comprised three squadrons, two equipped with MiG-23s and the third with MiG-25s. Just before transfer to Belarus, the regiment exchanged its MiG-23ML/MLD aircraft for Su-27s, but continued to operate the remaining MiG-25PD/PDS aircraft as air defence fighters for a while longer. The regiment was renamed as the 61st Fighter Aviation Base in 1994.

201 istrebitelnyy aviatsionnyy polk PVO (201 IAP PVO, 201st Air Defence Fighter Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 30181

Location: Machulishchy, Minsk Oblast

This regiment was established at Machulishchy near Minsk in 1951. On its transfer to Belarus the regiment was equipped with the MiG-23ML/MLD. Belarus retained most if not all of its MiG-23s and placed them in storage after the 201 IAP PVO was disbanded, later selling some of them to Angola and Syria.

Russian and Belarusian Spellings

Russian spelling	Belarusian spelling
Bolbasovo	Balbasava
Beryoza	Byaroza
Machulishchi	Machulishchy
Shchuchin	Shchuchyn



Above: The Su-27Ps were withdrawn in December 2010. The fighters had been due for a life-extension programme, including several systems upgrades, but the required budget was lacking. A total of 17 Su-27Ps and four Su-27UBMs were retired. **Below:** The number of transport aircraft has been reduced significantly. Only two Il-76s are still operational, of which at least one has been overhauled by the 360 ARZ at Zhukovsky, Russia. This work was completed in December 2016. **Bottom:** The first eight Su-24s were withdrawn from use in 2010. In February 2012, the remaining 34 Su-24Ms and Su-24MRs were also retired, due to high operating costs. The aircraft were transferred to the 558 ARZ's storage facility at Baranovichi and 12 were later passed on to Sudan.



in March 1991 together with its two Tu-22M3 regiments (also at Bykhov). Bykhov became an aircraft storage base, but by December 1991 all aircraft had apparently been transferred to other units based in Russia. By 1994, all DA aircraft had transferred to Russia as well.

As it was, Belarus took over 400 combat aircraft (combat helicopters not included), most of which had to be retired and scrapped almost immediately as the amount exceeded the limits imposed by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). Under the Tashkent Agreement of May 15, 1992, Belarus was permitted to possess a maximum of 260 combat aircraft and an additional 80 combat helicopters, in line with the treaty.

An overview is presented below to comprehend the sheer size of the air force elements inherited by Belarus. Where known, the Soviet Air Force Military Unit numbers are presented for these regiments.

Restructuring

The aerial armada inherited by Belarus required reorganisation to operate as an independent force while maintaining a high level of combat capability. Structural reforms created two new tactical commands, the Western and Northern Commands.

Although the inventory had already been reduced significantly as a result of the CFE treaty, there remained a wide variety of combat aircraft, bombers, transports and helicopters. ▣



Above: Three regiments on Belarusian territory were equipped with MiG-25s: the 10 ORAP, 61 IAP PVO and the 151 OAPREB. In 1992 the last remaining MiG-25s assigned to the 10 ORAP at Schuchin were moved to Baranovichi for storage. This is one of the few survivors, a MiG-25PU (c/n 22037313), currently at Borovaya. **Below:** The 50 OSAP relocated to Belarusian territory in April 1989, but after reforms and aircraft reductions only a handful of transports remained. This An-24B (c/n 99902203) is among those withdrawn and now stored at Borovaya.



The 558 ARZ undertakes refurbishment and modernisation programmes for Su-25s of various nations. In April 2014, two Belarusian Su-25UB combat trainers were upgraded to Su-25UBM standard and redelivered to the air force.

Long-Range Aviation

46 Vozdushnaya Armiya (46 VA, 46th Air Army)

Military Unit: 47002 **Location:** HQ Smolensk

At the time of Belarusian independence, the 46th Air Army comprised 167 long-range bombers, although not all its regiments were located in Belarus. The overview below presents the regiments on Belarusian territory at the time of independence.

22 gvardeyskaya tyazhyolaya bombardirovochnaya aviatsionnaya diviziya (22 GvTBAD, 22nd Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Division)

Military Unit: 40401 **Location:** Bobruysk, Mogilev Oblast

The 22nd GvTBAD relocated to Engels in Russia in June 1994. It originally had two heavy bomber aviation regiments (TBAPs) of which only one was in Belarus, the other in Ukraine. However, in 1992 it took over the two TBAPs of the 15 GvTBAD (headquartered in Ukraine and taken over by Ukraine) – the 121 GvTBAP and the 203 GvTBAP.

121 gvardeyskiy tyazhyolyy bombardirovochnyy aviatsionnyy polk (121 GvTBAP, 121st Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 15486 **Location:** Machulishchy, Minsk Oblast

The 121st was based at Machulishchy from 1952 until June 1, 1994, when the regiment relocated to Engels in Russia. In 1992, the unit was transferred to the control of the 22 GvTBAD since its parent unit, the 15 GvTBAD, was taken over by Ukraine.

200 gvardeyskiy tyazhyolyy bombardirovochnyy aviatsionnyy polk (200 GvTBAP, 200th Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 13655 **Location:** Bobruysk, Mogilev Oblast

Equipped with 20 Tu-22M3s, plus 18 Tu-16Ks assigned to the 4th squadron.

203 gvardeyskiy tyazhyolyy bombardirovochnyy aviatsionnyy polk (203 GvTBAP, 203rd Guards Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 24758 **Location:** Baranovichi, Brest Oblast

This regiment was based at Baranovichi from 1953 until June 1, 1994 when the unit – at that time flying Tu-22Ks – was relocated to Engels in Russia and transformed into the 203rd Guards Tanker Aircraft Aviation Regiment on Il-78s.

290 otdelnyy dalnyy razveditelnyy aviatsionnyy polk (290 ODRAP, 290th Independent Long-Range Reconnaissance Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 65358 **Location:** Zyabrovka, Gomel Oblast

This unit was activated in 1941 in Ukurey, Chitinskaya (Chita) Oblast, as the 290th Long-Range Bomber Aviation Regiment and was renamed as the 290th Long-Range Reconnaissance Aviation Regiment in 1953. At the time of independence, this regiment comprised three squadrons: two equipped with 29 Tu-22Rs and one with 13 Tu-16 bombers. Withdrawn to Russia in 1994, this unit's Tu-22Rs were scrapped almost immediately after landing.

402 tyazhyolyy bombardirovochnyy aviatsionnyy polk (402 TBAP, 402nd Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 32901 **Location:** Bolbasovo/Balbasava, Vitebsk Oblast

This regiment started life on March 1, 1951 at Bolbasovo, Vitebsk Oblast. Until 1983, the regiment had operated an estimated 26 Tu-16Ks that were replaced by an unknown number of Tu-22M3s. From May 1988, deployments were made to Mary, Mary Oblast, on a rotational basis for combat missions over Afghanistan. The last of 537 missions was completed on February 14, 1989. It was under the 326 TBAD in Tartu (Estonia), whose HQ was relocated to Soltsy in 1992. The unit's aircraft went to Russia.

Keeping these assets operational required considerable efforts and budget. Since the government was unable to match this huge demand with adequate funding, the older aircraft were rapidly withdrawn from use to save costs.

Division of the Belarusian Air Force into Western and Northern Commands was more compatible with the demands of the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States. The number of aircraft and air bases were markedly scaled down in line with financial limitations.

Aircraft considered surplus included those in a poor operational state, long overdue for maintenance, or at the end of their operational life. They were withdrawn from active squadrons and relocated to the 558 ARZ's storage facility.

The now-depleted aviation regiments were either disbanded or merged with other units. As part of this process, all remaining versions of the MiG-25 – PD, RB and BM variants – and the



Above: The remaining Mi-24s were all assigned to the 50th Mixed Aviation Base after the airfield at Pruzhany was closed during the air force's latest reforms. This example, '44 White', is a Mi-24K 'Hind-G2' intended for artillery spotting and combat reconnaissance, with no guided-missile systems. Erwin van Dijkman **Below:** The MiG-23 was one of the first types withdrawn from use after independence. In 2001, 31 MiG-23MLDs and six MiG-23UBs were still in service at Baranovichi and were retired soon after. Most were scrapped or sold abroad, but '88 White' is stored at Minsk-Lipki.



Frontal Aviation

26 Vozdushnaya Armiya (26 VA, 26th Air Army)

Military Unit: 20104

The HQ of 26 VA became the HQ of the Belarus VVS on June 15, 1992, when the fifth decree of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus became effective. However, the transfer of units had begun earlier, and this was just the completion of the process. Originally formed in 1949, the 26th Air Army comprised an estimated 343 aircraft by the early 1990s. These were operated by the following aviation regiments assigned to bases on Belarusian territory.

1 gvardeyskaya bombardirovochnaya aviatsionnaya diviziya (1 GvBAD, 1st Guards Bomber Aviation Division)

Military Unit: 15561 **Location:** Lida, Grodno Oblast

This division was equipped with the following three aviation regiments:

116 gvardeyskiy bombardirovochnyy aviatsionny polk (116 GvBAP, 116th Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 81776 **Location:** Ross, Grodno Region

During the transition of the 116th to the Belarusian Air Force in January 1992, the regiment had an estimated 30 Su-24s within its operational inventory. The regiment kept its original name until 1993 when it was renamed as the 116th Guards Bomber Aviation Base, becoming the 116th Guards Bomber Reconnaissance Aviation Base in July 1994, after receiving the Su-24MR squadron of the 10 otdelnyy razvedivatelnyy aviatsionny polk (10 ORAP, 10th Independent Reconnaissance Aviation Regiment). The unit was disbanded in 2010 and re-formed at Lida – where the 206 shturmovaya aviatsionnaya baza (206 ShAB, 206th Attack Aviation Base) took over its numerical designation and honorary titles and awards – while the Su-24s were withdrawn in 2012.

305 bombardirovochnyy aviatsionny polk (305 BAP, 305th Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 21179 **Location:** Postavy, Vitebsk Oblast

Equipped with 30 Su-24s. Transferred to Russia with the 1 GvBAD and relocated to Krasnodar in 1993.

497 bombardirovochnyy aviatsionny polk (497 BAP, 497th Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 91098 **Location:** Lida, Grodno Region

Originally at Grossenhain in East Germany as of 1989 and equipped with 29 Su-24s. Transferred to Russia with the 1 GvBAD and relocated to Krasnodar.

10 otdelnyy razvedivatelnyy aviatsionny polk (10 ORAP, 10th Independent Reconnaissance Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 21803 **Location:** Shchuchin, Grodno Oblast

Formed at Shchuchin in June 1945, this regiment remained there until transferred to Belarusian control. The 10 ORAP remained at Shchuchin, but personnel from its

MiG-21R squadron (not the aircraft) went to Afghanistan to fly with the 263 OTRAE, a permanent unit with personnel rotated on a regular basis. The MiG-21R was fully replaced by the Su-24MR in 1991, and the regiment also operated MiG-25BM and MiG-25RU aircraft, divided across three squadrons. In 1991, the 3rd squadron – equipped with MiG-25BMs – was disbanded. The regiment was transferred to the Belarusian Air Force in January 1992. In 1993, the unit was disbanded and its Su-24MRs went to Ross, along with the other *Fencers*.

50 otdelnyy smeshanny aviatsionny polk (50 OSAP, 50th Independent Composite Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 97978 **Location:** Minsk, Minsk Oblast

This unit was formed in 1980 specifically for use in Afghanistan. It was transferred to Minsk-Lipki, Belarus, absorbing the local 66 OSAE (a mixed aviation squadron) of the Belarusian MD and 248 OSAE of the 26 VA and becoming its dedicated mixed aviation regiment (50 OSAP of 26 VA). It came under Belarusian control in 1992, moving to Machulishchy in 1994, becoming the 50 TAB after merging with the local 25 OTAE (ex-VPVO unit).

151 otdelnyy aviatsionny polk radioelektronnoy borby (151 OAPREB, 151st Independent Electronic Warfare Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 55629 **Location:** Shchuchin, Grodno Oblast

This regiment was based at Brzeg in Poland from 1960 until August 1989, at which point it relocated its aircraft to Shchuchin, Grodno Oblast. Afterwards it received additional MiG-25BMs and became a 'supersized' unit (each of the two squadrons had twice the normal complement of aircraft). Here, it was transferred to Belarus and remained there until January 1993 when the regiment was disbanded.

206 otdelnyy shturmovoy aviatsionny polk (206 OShAP, 206th Independent Assault Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 19764 **Location:** Pruzhany, Brest Oblast

This regiment was based at Pruzhany, Brest Oblast, as of August 1984. It received Su-25s from November 4, 1985 and transferred to Belarusian control in January 1992. The regiment was renamed as the 206th Aviation Base on March 4, 1993, before becoming the 206th Assault Aviation Base on March 26, 1993. The unit was transferred to Lida in 1993.

302 otdelnaya vertolyotnaya eskadriya radioelektronnoy borby (302 OVEREB, 302nd Independent Electronic Warfare Helicopter Squadron)

Military Unit: 36558 **Location:** Kobrin, Brest Oblast

The regiment was based at Shindand, Afghanistan, from January 1980 until February 1989 when it returned to the USSR and was disbanded at its original home base in Kagan in April. It was re-formed at Kobrin in May 1989 as the 302 OVEREB, from an electronic warfare squadron of the 65th Independent Helicopter Regiment. Between 1989 and 1992, it was equipped with Mi-8PPA and Mi-8SMV *Hips*. It was transferred to the Belarusian Air Force in January 1992.

Army Aviation

When Belarus declared independence, around 260 Army Aviation (ie, Soviet Ground Forces) helicopters were deployed on its territory as part of independent helicopter regiments. Others served with squadrons of the air defence force, air force and strategic rocket forces.

65 otdelnyy vertolyotnyy polk (65 OVP, 65th Independent Helicopter Squadron)

Military Unit: 64683
Location: Kobrin, Brest Oblast

This regiment formed at Kobrin on August 1, 1962. It sent more than one rotation to Afghanistan as part of the 50th Independent Composite Aviation Regiment. When transferred to Belarusian control, the 65 OVP was directly attached to the BVO and was an Army Aviation unit, equipped with 37 Mi-8Ts and 26 Mi-6s (being replaced by Mi-26s). It later transferred to the air force in independent Belarus.

181 otdelnyy vertolyotnyy polk (181 OVP, 181st Independent Helicopter Regiment)

Military Unit: 02181
Location: Pruzhany, Brest Oblast

The 181 OVP was formed at Dzhambul in May 1973 and transferred to Pruzhany on August 5, 1988 following a deployment to Afghanistan. Several independent helicopter regiments based in the Soviet Union – including the 65 OVP in Belarus – detached crews to the 181st on a rotational basis, beginning from 1981 usually for a one-year duration. The regiment was equipped with 18 Mi-8 and 43 Mi-24 helicopters when transferred to Belarusian control.

276 otdelnyy vertolyotnyy polk (276 OVP, 276th Independent Helicopter Regiment)

Military Unit: 13996
Location: Borovtsy, Vitebsk Oblast

The 276 OVP was formed at Borovtsy on January 20, 1982. It comprised three squadrons (the fourth, flying Mi-26s, was transferred to the 65 OVP in 1990). When transferred to Belarusian control the 276th was equipped with approximately 22 Mi-8 and 38 Mi-24 helicopters.

378 otdelnyy shturmovoy aviatsionnyy polk (378 OShAP, 378th Independent Assault Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 62234 **Location:** Postavy, Vitebsk Oblast

Operating from Bagram, Afghanistan, from October 1984 to February 1989, this regiment transferred to Postavy in February 1989 from where it operated Su-25s and L-39s. When it was transferred to Belarusian control in January 1992, the regiment comprised an estimated 32 Su-25s, but it was disbanded the following year. Some of the Su-25s found their way to the Peruvian Air Force.

397 otdelnyy shturmovoy aviatsionnyy polk (397 OShAP, 397th Independent Assault Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 23519 **Location:** Kobrin, Brest Oblast

This regiment was originally formed at Kobrin in July 1986 and was equipped with Su-25s and L-39s. In accordance with the Directive of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus No 5/03, the regiment's 32 operational Su-25s were reassigned to the 206 OShAP and 378 OShAP on January 4, 1993, but the regiment was disbanded on June 1 that year.

911 aviatsionnyy polk istrebitel'ey-bombardirovshchikov (911 APIB, 911th Fighter-Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 18556 **Location:** Lida, Grodno Oblast

This unit was originally stationed in Belarus until departing for East Germany in 1989. Its stay there was brief, and the unit returned to its original home in Lida in July 1992. In August it transferred to Baranovichi, where it was disbanded the following year.

927 istrebitelnyy aviatsionnyy polk (927 IAP, 927th Fighter Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 55782 **Location:** Beryoza, Brest Oblast

The 927th was activated in 1942 and transferred to Beryoza on September 1, 1955. It was deployed to Afghanistan where it flew MiG-21s from Bagram between 1983 and 1984. The regiment returned to Beryoza on July 26, 1984. It re-equipped with MiG-29s in 1986 and in 1992 transferred to Belarusian control, renamed as the 927th Fighter Aviation Base.

953 bombardirovchnyy aviatsionnyy polk (953 BAP, 953rd Bomber Aviation Regiment)

Military Unit: 15550 **Location:** Bobrovichy, Gomel Oblast

Formed in April 1943, this regiment transferred to Pruzhany air base on Belarusian territory on August 8, 1945. It moved to Bobrovichy in 1959 where it remained until 1992. The 32 BAD to which it was originally subordinated was stationed in Ukraine – as such it was taken over by Kiev in 1992 and the unit transferred directly under the 26 VA. However, being surplus to Belarusian requirements it was transferred to Russia in 1994, going to Kamenka, Penza Oblast, where it was absorbed by the local fighter-bomber regiment (which became a bomber unit on Su-24s afterwards).

few remaining Yak-28PPs were withdrawn from use. In 1992, the last MiG-25s assigned to the 10 ORAP at Shchuchin were relocated to the 558 ARZ and put in long-term storage. Some of the remaining MiG-23ML fighters and older MiG-29s aircraft were also retired: the 201 IAP PVO was disbanded and all its MiG-23ML/MLDs withdrawn, going into storage at Machulishchy and later with the 558 ARZ at Baranovichi.

Between 1992 and 1993, the 10 ORAP at Shchuchin, 378 OShAP at Postavy, 397 OShAP at Kobrin, and 911 APIB, also at Shchuchin, were all disbanded. The Su-24MRs were transferred to Ross while all Su-25s were redeployed to Lida. The remaining aircraft were all stored at Baranovichi.

The number of combat and transport helicopters within the operational inventory was also significantly reduced. The 65 OVP, 181 OVP and 276 OVP were all transferred to the air force command and reorganised as helicopter bases.

In 1994, the 50 OSAP at Lipki and the 25 OTAE of the VPVO at Machulishchy were merged into the 50th Transport Aviation Base at the latter location, although it was not until 1996 that all remaining Il-76s assigned to the 339 VTAP at Vitebsk North were also relocated to Machulishchy, where some became part of the Transaviaexport company.

In 1996, the former 248 OSAE – which had flown fixed-wing aircraft too, before being disbanded in 1989 – was recreated as the 248 OVE ON at Lipki; it received all the helicopters previously assigned to the 50 OSAP. The remaining aircraft assigned to independent helicopter squadrons and helicopter regiments were redeployed to Luninets – home of the 1169th Equipment Aviation Storage Base. **AFM**

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Above: The 50th Mixed Aviation Base operates assets including Mi-3MT helicopters, of which '29 White' has been noted flying recently. The base also flies a handful of older Mi-8Ts, but with delivery of the new Mi-8MTV-5 helicopters, it's expected that the ageing 'Hip-Cs' will soon be withdrawn.