



Ukrainian Army Aviation

Challenges with the UN in Africa

After several visits to Ukraine's 16th Independent Helicopter Brigade of Army Aviation in Brody (OBr AA) close to the city of Lviv, the 18th OBr AA at Poltava, the 12th OBr AA at Novy Kalyniv and the 11th OBr AA at Kherson the challenges faced by Ukrainian army aviators in meeting its demanding tasks become quite clear. For years, these units have coped with the challenging duties of UN deployments in Africa. Not often recognised in Western Europe, Ukrainian helicopters have been tremendously successful in Africa. Painted white and marked with the UN identifier they have fulfilled their tasks for more than a decade. Furthermore, since the beginning of ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) in 2014, Ukraine's rotorcraft are also deployed permanently in eastern Ukraine and at the border with Crimea.

The 'Fighting Bees'

The 16th Independent Helicopter Brigade, the 'Fighting Bees' of Brody on the Ukrainian western border, were established in 1981 during Soviet era as the 119th Independent Helicopter Regiment. After foundation of the Ukraine and the accompanying reorganisation of the armed forces, the unit carried the names 3rd Brigade and 3rd Regiment until 25 December 2012. The *Fighting Bees* participated in their first UN missions under those designations, the long list of deployments stretching from UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) 1995-1996 via UN Confidence Restoration Operation (UNCRO) in Croatia 1995-1998 and KFOR in Kosovo 1999-2001 to the UN mission in Sierra-Leone (UNAMSIL) 2001-2005. Presently, after the end of UNOCI, they are committed to two African

peacekeeping missions simultaneously: MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and UNMIL in Liberia.

The deployment in Liberia started on 11 January 2014 with a vanguard of 18 men who were later joined by the 56th Independent Helicopter Detachment. Transport of Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters as well as necessary spare engines and parts was carried out by An-124 cargo aircraft flying into Roberts International Airport near Monrovia, while additional cargo and troops were sent to Africa in Tu-154s or by sea, eventually growing to a contingent of 300 Ukrainian personnel. The mission was a challenge from the outset, with temperatures of 40°–45°C and humidity over 90% to contend with, plus heavy rain for long periods every year and long distances to cover by air. The strategically