

Interview with IAF's No. 126 HU

VAYU: When did the No.126 Helicopter Unit come into existence?

The 126 Helicopter Unit, also known as “The Featherweights”, was formally established on 15 May 1986, at 12 Wing, AF Chandigarh.



Photo by Simon Watson

VAYU: For what role was the unit raised?

Our unit was specifically created to provide heavy-lift capabilities, utilising the unique strengths of the Mi-26 helicopter. Our primary mission is to transport heavy equipment and essential supplies to remote and high altitude regions, where conventional road and rail connectivity is limited or non-existent.



Photo by Simon Watson

VAYU: What rotary-wing aircraft did the unit initially operate?

We initially operated the mighty Mi-26, the largest and heaviest helicopter ever inducted into the Indian Air Force. With its impressive lift capacity of up to 20 tonnes, it was ideal for transporting heavy equipment to forward and high altitude areas.



Photo by Simon Watson

VAYU: What role did the unit perform during operations like Op Meghdoot, Op Pawan & Op Vijay?

During these operations, our unit played a crucial role in strategic airlift and logistical support. We transported heavy equipment, troops and essential supplies to forward areas, including high altitude zones, often under challenging conditions. Our efforts ensured sustained operations and rapid mobility for ground forces.

VAYU: How satisfied was the unit with the Mi-26s before getting the new CH-47(I) Chinooks from the US?

The Mi-26 served us exceptionally well for decades and was highly reliable for heavy-lift missions in demanding terrains. We were fully satisfied with its performance, especially its unmatched lift capability. However, the induction of Chinooks has brought in state-of-the-art technology, enhancing our capabilities even further.

VAYU: What new capabilities did the Chinook bring to the unit and IAF as an organisation?

The Chinook has introduced enhanced agility, modern avionics, and all-weather, day-night operational



Photo by Mayyank Kaul