



## Russian Aerospace Forces Reinststitutes Provisional Airfield Capability

**OE Watch Commentary:** In Soviet times, the Soviet Air Force had engineer-airfield battalions that were designed to create provisional airfields. These units were capable of preparing unpaved landing strips and parking areas, deploying fueling tank, and operating and maintaining equipment necessary for servicing aircraft. At some point, presumably after the collapse of the Soviet Union when the Russian military was at its low point, the engineer-airfield battalions were disbanded and the use of provisional airfields became less common. The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya*, discusses Russian plans to reintroduce engineer-airfield battalions into the organizational structures of the Military District's respective Air and Air Defense Armies. Apparently, the Aerospace Forces now see a need for this capability. As Lieutenant General (ret.) Valeriy Gorbenko, the former commander of the Southern Military District's 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army, states: "This is especially relevant in modern conditions, when airfields are marked on the maps and everyone knows what is based where. It is quite another matter, when aircraft takeoff on a combat mission and then land on a provisional airfield." Gorbenko's comment makes it clear that he sees reliance upon fixed, well known airbases, in an era of precision guided long-range munitions as folly. Aside from the tactical considerations of airfield protection, provisional airfields will be particularly valuable for Russia's growing expeditionary military capabilities, as the VKS has already been experimenting with provisional airfields in the Arctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



*Mi-26 Heavy Transport Helicopter.*

Source: Dmitry Terekhov from Odintsovo, Russian Federation, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mil\\_Mi-26\\_\(4322158204\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mil_Mi-26_(4322158204).jpg), CC BY-SA

***“This [provisional airfields] is especially relevant in modern conditions, when airfields are marked on the maps and everyone knows what is based where. It is quite another matter, when aircraft takeoff on a combat mission and then land on a provisional airfield.”***

***-Lieutenant General Valeriy Gorbenko, former commander of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army***

**Source:** Roman Krezul and Alexey Ramm, “Посадить в поле: ВКС смогут оборудовать аэродромы в любой местности [Setup in the Field: The VKS Will Be Able to Create Airfields on Any Terrain],” 7 September 2020, <https://iz.ru/1057563/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/posadit-v-pole-vks-smogut-oborudovat-aerodromy-v-liuboi-mestnosti>

*Russia's Aerospace Forces (VKS) will be able to create provisional airfields in an open fields. Unique military units — special engineer-airfield battalions — will perform this. The question of forming such units in each air and air defense army is currently being addressed. Whenever necessary, they will build a rough airstrip and will erect the entire infrastructure for the landing of helicopters and aircraft. According to experts, this will make it possible to promptly redeploy aviation to any area where it is needed.*

*The first separate engineer-airfield battalion was deployed on the base of the State Flight Test Center. In August, it took part in maneuvers in the Southern Military District, having built an unpaved airfield. In the future, such units will appear in all the VKS armies, Izvestiya's sources in the military department reported... “We are resorting to previous experience,” Lieutenant General Valeriy Gorbenko, former commander of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army, told Izvestiya. “There were such battalions in Soviet times. They stood the test of the Great Patriotic War, where they played a serious role. I had three such battalions in the Army. During the tough times, however, the Armed Forces began to reduce everything, including these units. But they are necessary. We still have aircraft that take off from rough airstrips. But the runway has to be prepared for the landing and takeoff of the vehicles.” According to Valeriy Gorbenko, previously, each aviation regiment had both a base airfield and a field airfield — the so-called staging airfield. “This is especially relevant in modern conditions, when airfields are marked on the maps and everyone knows what is based where. It is quite another matter, when aircraft takeoff on a combat mission and then land on a provisional airfield.” the expert noted...*

*In recent years, the leadership of the Defense Ministry and the VKS command have been paying a lot of attention to issues related to the operational redeployment of aviation groupings from one direction to another. In addition, technologies are being developed that allow aviation to depend on permanent airfields to a lesser extent. Since the beginning of the 2010's, aircraft have begun to regularly perform landings on highways during exercises. Initially, these missions were performed by fighters and bombers. Two years ago, an An-26 military transport aircraft landed on a highway for the first time...*

*Last year, the Baltic Fleet aviation tested the first mobile airfield. During special tactical exercises in the Gulf of Finland, the engineer services built a complete infrastructure with five landing grounds for combat and transport helicopters on the island of Gogland. All the equipment and technical assets were delivered by a single Mi-26 helicopter. The temporary airfield was ready to receive and service aircraft within a few hours from the start of the works. If necessary, such facilities will be able to take in all types of Navy combat and transport helicopters, as well as some frontline aviation aircraft...*