



Airmobile Brigades Getting Helicopter Augmentation

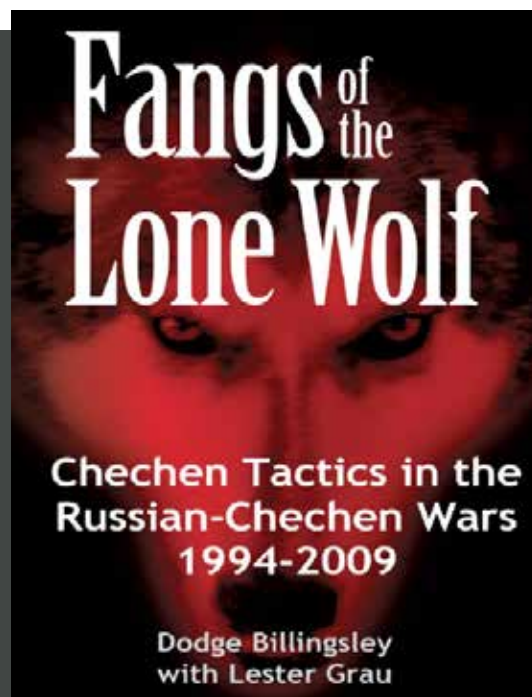
OE Watch Commentary: Soviet/Russian airmobile units and training have been around for a long time, but according to these two excerpted *Izvestia* articles, Kavkaz 2020 gave the boost to collocate necessary helicopters with re-energized air assault regiments. Unlike the US Army, Russian Army Aviation actually belongs to Russia's Aerospace Forces, so this will require collocating forces from separate services. Russian airborne and airmobile forces are mechanized forces once they land, so their insertions demand a quantity of air transport and specialized combat vehicles.

The 31st Air-Assault Brigade will be the first upgraded test unit. The 31st Air-Assault Brigade was formed from the disbanded 104th Airborne Division at Ulyanovsk in the Central Military District. The 31st was reported to have been in the Crimea in 2014 and had some apparent connections to the fighting in the Donbas. There is an active airfield at Ulyanovsk (located on the Volga River). During Soviet times, there were 16 airmobile regiments, one for each military district. Although these airmobile forces were trained for both parachute and helicopter insertion, they were sometimes second-class citizens since they were in the airborne community, but not under their direct command. It will be interesting to see if each of the four military districts receives an air assault regiment or if air assault will stay primarily under airborne command.

Unlike in the US Army, Russian airborne and air assault forces are a separate branch and do not belong to ground forces, but they cooperate closely with them when deployed. Airborne and air assault forces are Russian rapid reaction and strategic reserve forces. Training of motorized rifle ground forces subunits for airmobile insertion is coming back as well. While the 31st is located in the Central Military District, the announced training of ground force subunits in airmobile insertions will be conducted in the Southern Military District. The first article briefly discussed fast-roping helicopter troop landings from hovering helicopters. Fast-roping is nothing new, but evidently some of the Russian fast-rope gear is.

According to both of these Kavkaz-related *Izvestia* articles, airmobile forces are particularly useful on a fragmented/nonlinear battlefield. This goes hand-in-glove with the Russian pronouncement that maneuver defense, rather than positional, is now the primary form of tactical defense.
End OE Watch Commentary (Gau)

“During the “Kavkaz 2020” exercise, airmobile units conducted successful heliborne assaults. Which paratroop regiments will become airmobile regiments is currently being determined. These units will radically increase Russian forces defensive and offensive capabilities. Experts determined that airmobile insertions are effective during maneuver where there is no solid front line.”



Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>



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Source: “Включили аэромобильник: части ВДВ усилили вертолетами (Airmobile included: Airborne units augmented with helicopters)”, Izvestia, 19 October. 2020, <https://iz.ru/1075255/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/vkliuchili-aeromobilnik-chasti-vdv-usilili-vertoletami>

During the “Kavkaz 2020” exercise, airmobile units conducted successful heliborne assaults. Which paratroop regiments will become airmobile regiments is currently being determined. These units will radically increase Russian forces defensive and offensive capabilities. Experts determined that airmobile insertions are effective during maneuver where there is no solid front line.

Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu noted after the “Kavkas 2020” exercises that the joint efforts of the independent air assault brigade and Army Aviation subunits significantly increased the probability of the destruction of enemy forces. During the maneuvers, a reinforced battalion of the 31st Air Assault Brigade was airlifted by several dozen Mi-8 and Mi-26 helicopters. In addition to the soldiers, Army Aviation airlifted light motor vehicles, two batteries of D-30 towed howitzers and pallets of artillery ammunition. Two dozen Mi-28N and Ka-52 attack helicopters covered the landing and assisted the airmobile troopers in breaking enemy resistance and disrupting the advance of their reserve. The attack helicopters escorted the transport helicopters to the landing site. Other exercise participants took advantage of the confused enemy situation to surround and defeat the main enemy force.

A portion of the airborne troops disembarked from the helicopters above the ground using the new parachute-less system. They departed the aircraft in full gear at an altitude of 20-25 meters along ropes, thanks to special rappelling devices. So, one can rapidly disembark soldiers even on terrain, which has not been adapted for a helicopter landing. The aircraft delivered motor vehicles-dune buggies with machineguns and anti-tank missiles, along with their crews for raids in the enemy rear.

Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy stated “This system was already tested in Soviet times, when the air assault brigades were created, and whose composition included helicopters. They are designed to accomplish the missions of enveloping or evading the enemy at the tactical and operational level, fording water obstacles, seizing important areas and lines in the depth of the enemy defense, and conducting an engagement on rugged terrain. These formations can participate in maneuver combat when there is no solid front line. The employment of air assault subunits was supposed to ensure rapid penetration into the enemy combat formations and to defeat him in detail. Those missions will be assigned to the contemporary air-mobile formations. The main problem is the helicopters. Approximately 160 combat and transport helicopters are need for one such brigade. Therefore, we will have to form new units in order to saturate the troops with Army Aviation.”

Previously, the airborne forces and their armored vehicles were optimized for a paradrop from Il-76 military transport aircraft. The reappearance of airmobile units will require changes. Izvestiya previously reported that the first Airborne Army Aviation Brigade should be formed in the next few years. They are equipping it not only with aircraft but also with helicopters. They will begin to cover the disembarkation of the assault forces and provide fire support of subunits on the battlefield. The new unit will be operationally subordinate directly to the VDV commander and be constantly at the “Winged Infantry’s” disposal.

Modernized Mi-26T2V super-heavy helicopters are already arriving in the troop’s location. They are capable of transporting up to 82 airborne troops or outsized cargo - including armed motor vehicles and ATVs - for them at any time of day. The delivery of even heavier equipment based upon the “Tigr” armored motor vehicle was also worked out.

The Ministry of Defense has also ordered the first lot of 15 of the latest Mi-38 helicopters for Army Aviation. Based upon their performance specifications, they occupy the intermediate position between the gigantic Mi-26s and the medium Mi-8 transport helicopters. The new aircraft is capable of transporting up to 40 soldiers. They can transport up to five tons of cargo, guns, and vehicles in the internal cabin or on sling loads.

A family of light enhanced cross-country motor vehicles, which were developed for transport on helicopters, was displayed at the “Army-2020” Exhibition. Both mobile 120-millimeter mortars and the powerful “Kornet” anti-tank missile systems can be mounted on these vehicles. Armed ATVs for the new air assault formations have frequently been shown at parades. A machinegun can be mounted on the two-seat vehicle or it can be used to deliver anti-tank missiles or portable air defense missile systems.

In 2018, VDV Commander Andrey Serdyukov announced that airborne was creating a new type of formation. This was the experimental Ulyanovsk 31st Air-Assault Brigade... A battalion of the subunit was tested during the “Vostok-2018” Strategic Exercises, which was the largest-scale exercise in Russia’s contemporary history. Approximately 1,500 airborne troops and their weapons disembarked from helicopters at the “Tsentr-2019” Exercises the following year. This required 124 helicopter flights. They also transported Special Forces teams from Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan together with Russian military personnel. “Kavkaz -2020” was the final “graduation examination” for the upgraded airborne subunits.

The MOD also plans to add additional air-mobile capabilities to conventional motorized rifle forces. The Ministry of Defense stated that this experiment is being conducted in all Southern Military District motorized rifle units.



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Source: “Спустились с небес: подведены итоги экспериментальных воздушных учений (They Brought Them Down to Earth: Results of the Experimental Air Exercise),” *Izvestia*, 29 October 2020. <https://iz.ru/1079781/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/spustilis-s-nebes-podvedeny-itogi-eksperimentalnykh-vozdushnykh-uchenii>

The Russian Aerospace Forces Command Authorities summed up the results of the experimental exercises. The maneuvers simultaneously occurring in Karelia, Voronezh, Tver, and Kursk Oblasts, and also at ranges in the Astrakhan area. For the first time, more than 100 combat aircraft were operating based upon a single concept at a distance of 1,000 kilometers from each other. The latest automated communications systems as well as the “Military Internet”, called the “Secure Data Transmission Segment”, were involved for the command and control of dissimilar air forces in real time. Over the course of the day, the aviation grouping repelled a massive enemy strike, intercepted its targets, and simultaneously destroyed ground-based facilities and air defense systems in real time.

Although the exercises concluded at the end of September, the analysis of results took several weeks. Military Department sources state that the experience, which was obtained at the Aerospace Forces large-scale exercises, was successful. Thanks to the new command and control systems, the Aerospace forces will be able to cover entire regions with an impenetrable shield....

The aircraft of Western Military District’s 105th Guards Composite Aviation Division were the experimental maneuvers’ main participants. MiG-31BM, Su-30SM, Su-34, and Su-35 aircraft are assigned to the Division’s regiments.

The aviation grouping repelled a massive notional enemy strike and intercepted its targets, including hypersonic missiles, and simultaneously destroyed ground targets and air defense systems....

The preparation for the exercises took several days. The main phase took less than a day. Su-34 bombers destroyed ground targets and missile launchers at night. In Karelia, MiG-31BM high-altitude fighter aircraft and Su-35S fighter aircraft participated in aerial engagements with the notional enemy - in particular, the supersonic aircraft refined their capability to intercept hypersonic targets at high altitude.

Aerial engagements simultaneously unfolded over Ashuluk Range, Astrakhan Oblast. There, a group of Su-30SM fighter aircraft conducted a strike against ground-based air defense systems and then destroyed airborne targets using “air-to-air” missiles....

During the operations at Ashuluk Range, the Su-30SM fighter aircraft supported the ground forces participating in the “Kavkaz-2020” Strategic Exercise. According to the scenario, they repelled a massive air strike and suppressed the fire of a number of ground targets....

General Staff Chief Valeriy Gerasimov praised the troops’ proficiency. In his words, during the course of the play of the main phase, a new element of an operational formation was demonstrated in practice - the so-called mobile echelon. In contrast to the traditional elements (the first echelon, second, and so forth), for which they defined a front and direction of movement at the outset, the mobile echelon can operate in a broad radius based upon the command authorities’ decision. For example, to rapidly create a defensive line on a dangerous axis or to detain the withdrawing enemy. Airmobile subunits, which move in helicopters, constitute its foundation.

In the main phase, they also demonstrated the work of the reconnaissance-fire complex and four main methods of destroying “Jihad-Mobiles” [machine guns and antitank weapons mounted on pickup trucks].