Hovercraft continue to support Russian Naval Infantry

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* covered the landing of two companies and 10 BTR-82 personnel carriers of Naval Infantry in the Baltic. The Naval Infantry was transported on two "small landing hovercraft" called Zubr [Bison]. These "small" hovercraft have been around since 1988 and are the world's largest military hovercraft. They are not small in the hovercraft world, but are small as far as amphibious landing ships are concerned. The Greek and Chinese navies also have these hovercraft and there have been articles about Russia restarting the project, but there are constraints on the military budget, so the Russian navy will probably continue with just their two craft for some time yet. The Russian navy wants to upgrade its over-the-horizon amphibious landing capability. Most of the Russian Naval Infantry has the BTR-82A amphibious personnel carriers, but these lack the combat power needed when the infantry hits a contested shore. The Russian Ministry Of Defense is determining whether to upgrade its Naval Infantry with the seaworthy BMP-3F to provide that combat power (see "Potential Equipping of Russian Naval Infantry with the BMP-3F," *OE Watch,* November 2020). In the meantime, the Zubr will provide a rapid way of closing from the horizon to the shore. The hovercraft are reportedly capable of carrying 555 tons or three main battle tanks or eight personnel carriers. Evidently, neither hovercraft was loaded to full capacity for this exercise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

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Source: За иллюминатором облака водяной пыли, вылетающей из-под днища ("Flying over the Waves")," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 18 November 2020. http://redstar.ru/polyot-nad-volnami/

The Yevgeniy Kocheshkov and Mordoviya are rushing to the shore at a speed that is unthinkable for a ship. Each of these MDKVP [small landing hovercrafts] carries five BTR-82A armored personnel carriers -- an amphibious assault company of the naval infantry formation -- in its lower holds. Scheduled exercises have been held in the Baltic Fleet on the landing of equipment on an unimproved coast.

… The world's largest ships of this type were created in the USSR-designated as small landing hovercraft (MDKVP) of Project 12322 Zubr [Bison]. Both of the still functioning ships of this project are serving in the Baltic Fleet.

The ship turns about by the shoreline and begins to speed up: the assault force is already aboard the craft, and the armored personnel carriers are secured in the hold with sturdy chains. The ship's missions include firing at surface and airborne targets using AK-630 artillery mounts, rehearsing damage control, and practicing radiation, chemical and biological defense at sea. But the main mission set for the crews is to land an amphibious assault force on an unimproved coast. These ships were created precisely for this purpose...

Putting out to sea on a hovercraft resembles a flight aboard an aircraft: instead of the up and down or sideways motion of the waves, the deck shakes like the cabin of an airliner that has entered turbulence. In principle, that is precisely how it works -- the engines (which, in fact, are aviation engines) create an air cushion "zone of turbulence" under the bottom of the ship that lifts the MDKVP above the surface of the water. The altitude of the "flight" can reach up to 40 centimeters [15.7 inches].

There is no helmsman on the bridge: the ship's commander, Captain 3rd Rank Sergey Konov, steers the MDKVP with the aid of an aircraft-like hand wheel. In contrast to a conventional ship, where one can sense the slightest change in speed, here only the lag time indicates that the Yevgeniy Kocheshkov is traveling at 36 knots, which is unthinkable for a modern ship.

… "The ship was tasked to land an assault force on the coast. The task was accomplished as prescribed, both in place and in time, and the amphibious force has been landed. The weather today favored our efforts, but in principle, the ships of this project are capable of operating in a WMO Sea State Code 5 storm. We can deliver an amphibious force to any point of the Baltic Sea on one refueling cycle with a maximum speed of 55 knots. The peculiarity of today's exercises is that we had to work together with the MDKVP Mordoviya, coordinating our movement in such a way so as to approach the shore and land our amphibious forces simultaneously."