



## VDV Reorganization to Include Organic Aviation

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted articles from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* and *Izvestiya* discuss the subordination of the Russian Aerospace Forces' assets to the Airborne (VDV). Typically, Russian VDV formations (brigades and divisions) are supported by attached army aviation brigades belonging to the Russian Aerospace Forces (the Russian Ground Forces VDV, and Naval Infantry currently have no manned aviation assets). In current practice, this means that request for aviation support for the VDV are routed through the Military District/Joint Strategic Command. As mentioned in the *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* article, the Vostok-2018 exercise included an experiment involving the direct assignment of an aviation brigade to a VDV maneuver brigade. Apparently this experiment was deemed a success, as the Russians are planning to permanently assign an army aviation brigade to the VDV around 2020-2021. Not only will the army aviation brigade be assigned to the VDV, but this unit will be somewhat modified. The brigade (48-50 helicopters) will reportedly have four helicopter squadrons: one squadron of Mi-35M (HIND-E) strike helicopters, one squadron of heavy lift Mi-26T2 (HALO) helicopters, and two squadrons of Mi-8AMTSh-V (HIP) combat-transport helicopters. If this command and control relationship proves beneficial, other army aviation brigades could be subordinated in a similar manner. The other accompanying excerpt, is an interview of Airborne Troops Commander, Colonel General Andrey Serdyukov, in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. It mentions some other possible changes in the VDV, including the possibility that some VDV brigades may be upsized into divisions in the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Airborne Troops Commander Colonel General Andrey Serdyukov.  
Source: By Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70308848>.

*“Measures to reconstitute brigades into divisions are regarded as just one stage in the prospective evolution and building of the Airborne Troops.”*

**Source:** Pavel Ivanov, “«Крылатая пехота» становится мобильнее Реформа: ВДВ России сделает их глобальной силой (Winged Infantry is Becoming More Mobile: Reform of Russia's Airborne Troops Will Make Them a Global Force),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 19 February 2019. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/48469>

*...Even before the start of the exercises, Airborne Troops commander Andrey Serdyukov stated that Vostok would be a validation of the new organizational structure of Airborne Troops units and subunits. So, what was the colonel general talking about?*

*According to the *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, the experiment to create a new organizational structure for the Airborne Troops began in 2017. And it was done on the basis of the 31st Airborne Brigade. The main task was to radically improve the maneuverability of the brigade, in particular, on the battlefield. To do this, it was planned to use helicopter units.*

*Therefore, the brigade formed two airmobile battalions. Compared to conventional airborne assault brigades they were provided with a somewhat lighter organizational structure. Also, the mortar and antitank units were equipped with vehicles—Rys and UAZ trucks.*

*The brigade command quickly took charge of helicopter squadrons, one combat and three military transport squadrons based on Mi-8AMTSh and Mi-26 helicopters. Units are transferred from the Aerospace Forces structure. Helicopter pilots were not just attached to the brigade command. During the experiment, they became regular units of the 31st Airborne Brigade. This made it possible to build cooperation between personnel and pilots, as well as to teach the command to plan and manage the joint combat work of the new airmobile battalions and helicopter squadrons...*

*As officially reported by the Defense Ministry, during the Vostok-2018 exercises a landing was performed by tactical assault troops as part of the airmobile battalion of the 31st Airborne Brigade. This involved more than 40 Mi-8AMTSh helicopters, two Mi-26 heavy multirole transport helicopters, and more than 10 Mi-24 fire support helicopters.*

*Trucks were delivered to the specified area on the external pylons of Mi-8 helicopters. Using the landing method, Mi-26 helicopters landed eight all-terrain vehicles and four Rys armored vehicles equipped with Kornet antitank guided missiles, and Kord heavy machine guns.*

*The reform gives a new vector of development to the Airborne Troops. They are becoming more modern and responsive to current military and political objectives. But the effectiveness of the reform is a matter of time.*

(continued)



## Continued: VDV Reorganization to Include Organic Aviation

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm, Aleksey Kozachenko, Bogdan Stepovoy, and Konstantin Valentinov: “ВДВ окрыляют: десантники получают собственную авиацию (Airborne Troops Acquire Wings: Airborne Troopers Will Get Their Own Aviation),” *Izvestiya*, 19 February 2019. <https://iz.ru/847090/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi-konstantin-valentinov/vdv-okryliaiut-desantniki-poluchat-sobstvennuu-aviatciiu>

...Several sources in the military department have told *Izvestiya* that the proposal to form one army aviation brigade in the Airborne Troops has, on the whole, been approved. But the unit will not be created before 2020-2021: New helicopters have to be ordered for it. According to *Izvestiya*'s sources, the aviation brigade will be directly subordinate to the Airborne Troops Commander.

The aviation unit will be based in either Ryazan', Voronezh, or Orenburg. It will incorporate four helicopter squadrons. One will be equipped with Mi-35M strike helicopters, and this model has not been chosen by chance: As distinct from the Mi-28N and Ka-52 main strike helicopters, the Suprekrokodil can transport up to seven airborne troopers. Another two squadrons will be armed with Mi-8AMTSh-V combat transport helicopters, and the fourth with superheavy Mi-26T2 helicopters.

The creation of an army helicopter brigade in the Airborne Troops will enable airborne subunits to operate far more efficiently and diversely, Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, head of the Executive Committee of the Russian Airborne Troopers Union, told *Izvestiya*. “Use of the Airborne Troops is currently being expanded substantially,” Valeriy Yuryev told *Izvestiya*. “Airborne troopers can be used to reinforce ground forces and also to carry out reconnaissance and sabotage activity. In addition, under conditions of powerful air defense, it becomes the most effective thing to transfer troops in helicopters that are practically inconspicuous at superlow altitudes. It also should not be forgotten that for airborne troopers a helicopter means not only transfer but also fire support.”

Some 48-50 helicopters capable of tackling combat tasks by day or by night will be gathered together in the Airborne Troops Army Aviation Brigade. In the Army the Mi-8 and its modifications, including the AMTSh-V, are dubbed the Kalashnikov assault rifle among helicopters – reliable, trouble-free, hardy, and tenacious. The Mi-8 AMTSh-V has modern ceramic armor, more powerful VK-2500 engines, and new avionics and is fitted with flaps for loading and unloading hardware instead of a hinged ramp. This modification is particularly good for work under desert and high-mountain conditions.

Mi-26T2 heavy transport helicopters will be used to transfer armored vehicles armed with antitank guided missile systems and large-caliber machine guns. The machine has a flight range of 800 km, or 1,905 km with extra fuel tanks. The Mi-26T can carry approximately 80 airborne troopers at a time.

Fire support will be provided by Mi-35M Superkrokodil helicopters. The brigade can, if necessary, be promptly transferred over thousands of kilometers by military transport aviation. All the helicopters, except the Mi-26T, are conveyed within the most massive transport aircraft – the Il-76. The machines can be assembled and prepared for combat application over one to two days...

**Source:** Alexander Tikhonov, “Десант наращивает мобильность и мощь (Airborne Building up Mobility and Power),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 February 2019. <http://redstar.ru/desant-narashhivaet-mobilnost-i-moshh/>

**...The airborne troops' mobility and capacity to regroup in short order is among their main distinguishing factors. Andrey Nikolayevich, what measures are scheduled for the coming years to continue increasing the VDV's mobility?**

The Airborne Troops' have always been a high-mobility combat arm capable of very swiftly relocating subunits over great distances, regrouping, and deploying in any strategic sector.

In 2018 the Airborne Troops conducted an experiment to employ a “new type” air assault formation directly with army aviation. The formation's participation in the Vostok-2018 strategic maneuvers constituted the culminating stage of the experiment. Fundamentally new combat and maneuver capabilities on the part of air assault subunits operating from helicopters were demonstrated during the performance of combat training missions...

**In an interview you gave to *Krasnaya Zvezda* last year you stated that the total authorized strength of VDV personnel had increased by 48 percent since 2012. Are there plans to continue increasing the authorized strength of the “winged guard”? Is there a possibility that brigades will be reconstituted as divisions?**

The increase in the strength level last year has been just one stage in the evolution and building of the Airborne Troops. With the active support of the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces it is planned to implement some further measures that will be aimed at the troops' considerable reinforcement in the quantitative and qualitative respects. The VDV command's action plan stipulates the creation within the troops of a brigade with a “new type” organizational and manning structure, which will acquire qualitatively different capabilities in the performance of combat and specialized missions via its own mobile component and increased combat potential. Measures to reconstitute brigades into divisions are regarded as just one stage in the prospective evolution and building of the Airborne Troops.