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A Mikoyan's MiG-25BM Foxbat F continues to be used for the development of suppression of enemy air-defence tactics

B A flight line at Lipetsk shows that the MiG-25U two-seat trainer is still in use for training Foxbat pilots

C Sukhoi Su-27 Flankers are also on the Lipetsk inventory, both with and without the Sorbtsiya wingtip-jammer pods

D One of the Su-27s in the base's display colours

E One of the base's Su-27 cockpit simulators

F While this MiG-27 Flogger may still be flying, some 250 other Floggers are stored at the base ready to be scrapped

G One of the base's MiG-25U's being prepared for a training sortie

H This two-seat Su-27UB Flanker is adorned with a red cross and is used for medical research into the affects of g forces on aircrew

mander at Lipetsk. The 968th Research Instructor Air Regiment, based at the air base under the command of Col Dobretsov, is not a regular regiment of the air force, having four squadrons rather than the three of a standard unit.

The First squadron is equipped with Sukhoi Su-27S single-seat fighters and Su-27UB twin-seat fighter trainers. The Su-27S is the designation of Flankers used by the air force, while the Su-27P is the model in the inventory of the air-defence force. There are no visible differences between the Su-27P and the Su-27S, except for the wingtip Sorbtsiya active jammers on the latter version. The Su-27S can also be used in the ground-attack role, delivering unguided air-to-ground rockets and bombs, while the Su-27P interceptors do not have such capability.

The CTFCCC conducts various research programmes, including medical ones. An

Su-27UB, with a red cross on its port side (picture H), is used in experiments to investigate influence of high g-loads on a pilot, and to evaluate new high-g and high-altitude suits.

A special mounting on the head-up display for a video camera to take footage of a pilot in flight can be seen through the canopy in the rear cockpit.

Lipetsk also has an aerobatic team of four Su-27s painted in the white-blue-red colours of the Russian flag (picture D). The team is formed from experienced pilot instructors, led by Lt Col Anatoly Kharchevsky, and performs several times a year at air shows over the air base.

The Second squadron is equipped with the Mikoyan MiG-29 Fulcrum-A (9-12 in Russian designation), MiG-29/9-13 (Fulcrum-C) and MiG-29UB twin-seaters (Fulcrum-B).

The Third squadron flies Sukhoi Su-24 Fencers: the Su-24M bomber, Su-24MR reconnaissance and Su-24MP electronic-

countermeasures (ECM) aircraft. Only about a dozen ECM Su-24MPs have been built.

The ECM Fencer can be distinguished by a different set of maintenance hatches providing access to jamming equipment under the nose cone, a jamming pod under the centreline fuselage hardpoint, and a different cockpit arrangement, with the electronic-systems operator (ESO) in the right seat. The ESO tactical display replaces the weapons-systems operator displays of the strike Fencer.

The Lipetsk centre has at least a couple of Mikoyan MiG-25BM Foxbat-F defence-suppression aircraft, which can carry four Kh-58 (AS-11 Kilter) anti-radar missiles. The camouflaged MiG-25BM 41 was the first production aircraft of the type, most of which were delivered to Lipetsk in the early 1980s.

The MiG-25BM is distinguished from the MiG-25RB reconnaissance-bomber version by four large missile-launcher rails under the wings.

In the 1970s, CTFCCC pilots worked out flight procedures for high-altitude supersonic bombing runs by MiG-25RBs, which were later reported to have been used by Iraq in the war against Iran. Several MiG-25U twin-seat trainers are also still used at Lipetsk to train pilots for air force operational units flying Foxbats.

The Fourth squadron is equipped mostly with Sukhoi Su-25 Frogfoot ground-attack aircraft, but also has Mikoyan MiG-27Ms and Sukhoi Su-17Ms. A weapons-delivery range is located not far from Lipetsk airfield. More than 80 pilots from the CTFCCC gained combat experience in Afghanistan, verifying their recommendations under combat conditions.

These included Col (now Maj Gen) Alexander Rutskoii, who was deputy commander of the Lipetsk centre before he was shot down in his Su-25 over Afghanistan, became a prisoner of war, then a member of parliament, the Russian vice-president and, finally, the rebel released from jail by an amnesty.

The Lipetsk airfield is used as a conservation base for older aircraft such as Mikoyan MiG-23/27 Floggers. Now they are being flown to utilisation bases, one of them on Taganrog, where they are cut into scrap because of the limitations of the treaty on conventional forces in Europe. Over 250 Floggers still sit in a lengthy line at Lipetsk waiting for their last flight.

The Lipetsk CTFCCC is regularly visited by foreign air forces. The base has seen US Air Force McDonnell Douglas F-15s from the 1st Fighter Wing and Dassault Mirage 2000s of the French air force's Normandie-Neman squadron. The Lipetsk Su-27s were flown on a visit of friendship to the USAF base at Langley in Virginia.

Many buildings of the Lipetsk centre date back to 1925-33 when, on the agreement with the Soviet Government, the air base was secretly used by Germany to build up its air force. A considerable problem for the CTFCCC, as for all air force units, is the deficit of jet fuel. In 1995, the first time there was any flying from Lipetsk was on 17 January, after almost a month's standstill. □