

Arms Control

U.S. LEADS UKRAINE MISSILE DESTRUCTION PROJECT **BY MICHAEL M. UYEHARA**



The destruction site near Shostka rests about 50 miles from the Ukraine-Russia border.

As an Army officer, I never imagined that I might someday travel in a helicopter that once formed part of a potential adversary's military might. Yet here I was, seated next to U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bill Taylor—a West Point graduate who flew helicopters for the Army—in an MI-8 HIP helicopter that had been built in 1989.

We were flying in September to a location in northeast Ukraine, just 50 miles from the Russian border, as part of a group of diplomats witnessing the destruction of the last of 1,000 man-portable air defense systems that were once part of the Soviet arsenal, but now excess to Ukraine's defense needs. The MANPADS, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, were similar to the U.S. Redeye and Stinger missiles I had once been trained to deploy.

A North Atlantic Treaty Organization Partnership for Peace Trust Fund project was the impetus for destroying the missiles, as well as 133,000 tons of munitions and 1.5 million small arms/light weapons that pose a hazard to the population living nearby.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement has been deeply involved in the project's design, funding and implementation. The NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency is managing the project.

As representative of the lead nation for the Trust Fund project, Ambassador Taylor invited representatives of donor nations to the site near the city of Shostka for the ceremony. Defense Attaché Air Force Colonel Jim Molloy and Public Affairs Section staff

member Vadym Kovaliuk were also on the trip. Colonel Molloy and I had already gone to Shostka in June to witness the start of the MANPADS destruction process.

THE COLD WAR LEGACY

Until I began working at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, I had not realized the magnitude of Ukraine's demilitarization challenge. Ukraine figured prominently in Soviet war plans. As the Warsaw Pact countries liberated themselves from communism's yoke, first-echelon Soviet units often dumped large quantities of weapons and ammunition in Ukraine with minimal accountability as they withdrew to Russia.

Ukraine is endeavoring to transform its military forces and military-industrial complex to meet its current needs. It holds



Above: These two shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles were part of the 1,000 destroyed under the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund project. Below: A woman dressed in traditional Ukrainian garb presents ceremonial scissors to NATO official Susan Pond as Ukrainian Ministry of Defense officials look on.

as many as 7 million small arms/light weapons and stores around 2.5 million tons of obsolete and excess munitions, some dating from the two world wars.

The munitions, stored in more than 180 depots and arsenals throughout Ukraine, have caused serious accidents. There have been five explosions or fires since October 2003. The most serious fire caused seven fatalities.

NAMSA developed a proposal for the Trust Fund project in response to a Ukrainian government request. The agency estimated it would cost donors more than \$25 million and take 12 years.

The United States agreed to be the lead nation for the first three years, or phase one, of the project because of our strong concerns over the MANPADS and small arms/light weapons threat. NATO describes the project as the largest of its kind ever.

To date, more than \$7 million has been contributed to phase one, which is projected to cost nearly \$10 million. In addition to the substantial U.S. contribution of more than \$3.6 million and Ukraine's in-kind contribution, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the European Union's European Commission have contributed.

THE LAST MANPADS EXPLODE

In Shostka, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Volodymyr Tereshchenko briefed us on the procedures to destroy the MANPADS. After being uncrated, two missiles at a time were taped together and

carried by a special handling device, essentially two lengths of rope looped around the front and back of the missiles. Once the missiles were placed in an outdoor destruction pit, soldiers added six pounds of plastic explosives and prepared to explode the whole assembly.

In the bunker at the destruction site, Ambassador Taylor was invited to turn the key to the electric detonator. The ground shook from the explosion of the two MANPADS. Regional Governor Nina Harkava then exploded the 999th and 1,000th missiles. Back outside the bunker, we inspected the pit and found very little debris left from the missiles.

Addressing journalists afterward, Ambassador Taylor hailed the successful cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, and noted that the project had enhanced the security of Ukrainians and others by eliminating the possibility that the MANPADS could fall into the hands of terrorists.

After a light lunch and the usual vodka toasts, we returned to Kyiv, knowing that the world was safer and that this vital Ukraine-NATO project was off to a good start. ■

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