



**The 10th Anniversary of Avialesookhrana's Air Fleet
Avialesookhrana Headquarters, Pushkino, 15 September 2004**

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It seems that only very short time has passed since it was decided to transfer the bankrupt Seimchanski United Air Detachment "under the wing" of *Avialesookhrana*. This was a response to the proposal of the North-Eastern Airbase, supported by the authorities of the Central Airbase and by the Federal Forest Agency *Rosleshoz*. In 1994 the aviation subdivision within the North-Eastern Airbase was established. In 1995 the Ministry of Property of Russia turned the remaining property of the Vladimir State Aviation Enterprise over to the Central Airbase. Subsequently, on the basis of the turned-over property of the bankrupt aviation companies the detachments of forest aviation were reorganized into the Airbases North-West (Petrozavodsk), Krasnoyarsk (Yeniseisk) and Amursk (Svobodni) Airbases with in their subdivisions in Altai and Buryat Republics.

Today we celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Avialesookhrana*'s way leading to the revival of forest aviation. Its establishment is dating back to 1931. If we take a look back to the history, the first air expedition for forest protection was organized on an area of 1.5 million ha in Nizhni Novgorod province and the first group of forest engineers was trained in the capacity of pilot observers (S.P. Rumyantsev, V.V. Stadnitsky, G.G. Samoilovich). The flight time with respect to forest fire protection activities during that year was 40 hours with 16 detected fires. From 1932 to 1935 research on the use of aviation for the solution of different questions in forestry had been conducted by the Leningrad Branch of the All-Union Research Institute of Agriculture and Forest Aviation.

Furthermore, in 1934 the same institute elaborated on the project on the use of parachutes in fighting forest fires. First tests were made on delivery of equipment and people to fire sites. In the Gorikovksi expedition in 1935 the parachute group, consisting of three persons under the guidance of G.A. Mokeev performed 50 parachute jumps for forest fire suppression from a U-2 plane using the parachute PT-1.

The year 2005 will be the 70th anniversary since the first use of parachute systems for forest firefighting!

In 1936 Leningrad Branch of the All-Union Research Institute of Agriculture and Forest Aviation was reorganized into the State All-Union Trust of Forest Aviation (VGTLA) in Leningrad city. P.A. Tsetlin was appointed Head of that organization. Since that time all activities on aerial forest fire protection have been planned for forest lands situated all over the USSR. The Department of air service was founded as well as the four air detachments of forest aviation – the Airbases in Leningrad (Head: M.D. Artamonov), Northern (V.S. Rekunov), Krasnoyarsk (A.T. Hramtsov), and Tyumen (S.Z. Beloborodin). These subdivisions were responsible for aerial forest fire protection, and also for serving wood floating, aerial photography of forest resources, providing transportation and communications and carrying out some other forest aviation functions. Within the air detachments forest aviation expeditions were organized. The protected areas and the amount of flight hours were growing swiftly. Within only eight years from 1931 to 1939 the protected areas increased by more than 45 times and reached 95 million ha, and the amount of flight time grew up to 7200 hours or 76 hours per one million ha – to this index we returned in 2003.

Besides the Trust of forest aviation in 1940 another aviation group (Head: L.D. Dolmatov) was established for forest protection in the zone of artificial reforestation. This group was formed by three detachments – Semenovskiy (A.G. Timofeev), Zagorskiy (B.I. Bogolepov and Deputy I.A. Proshkin) and Solikamskiy (V.F. Jakovlev).

By the beginning of the Second World War the area protected by aviation accounted for about 109 million ha. The number of involved U-2 aircraft was close to 110 out of which 60 belonged to the

Forest Protection Service itself. In 1949 the aviation of the Ministry of Forestry of the USSR together with the plane-motor park and the engineering and technical personnel was turned over to the Central Board of the Civil Aviation Fleet of the USSR for the purpose of forestry service improvements and more effective use of aircraft in forest protection. In connection with that the special bases for air protection of forests and attending to forestry had been established for providing struggle with forest fires and aviation service of forestry by the aircraft being under the authority of the Central Board (CUGVF). In 1955 the All-union Enterprise for Aerial Forest Protection and Forest Service *Leskhozavia* was established. Starting in 1958 the Central Base of the Aerial Forest Fire Protection Service *Avialesookhrana* was entrusted with guidance over all the air bases. The first Head of the Central base was I.A. Proshkin, followed by V.V. Podolsky and N.A. Andreev.



PO-2 airplanes used in the 1930s until the end of the 1940s



PO-2 airplanes during air patrol



Chief pilot observer Evlalia P. Gruzdova (North airbase) is instructing a fresh pilot instructor (mid-1950s).



Smokejumpers boarding to PO-2 (1950s)

Before the 1990s the Airbases were leasing airplanes from the civil aviation enterprises, which had the required number of airplanes available. The number of aircraft, their flight hours for different types of missions, and the price of a flight hour for each type of aircraft was planned centrally by the state. During the period of "perestroika" – a period of stormy changes in the social, economic, and political development of our country – and during the transition from the centrally planned national economy to the market economy, the civil aviation agencies responsible for planning the use of aviation in the national industry and economy (PANH) lost their volume of work and financial support by the state as it had been oriented towards planned public economy itself. This led to ravage and left most of them bankrupt. The bases of aerial forest protection in the Far East and Siberia were the first to feel the shortage because the lack of aircraft for aerial forest operations. Under the conditions of an economy in transition, involving illegal operations and suffering an absence of control by the government, the air enterprises stopped the flight operations of the AN-2 air planes and increased the prices for leasing the helicopters MI-8.



For smokejumping the D-1 parachute was used from 1950 to 1970



MI-1 was used as patrolling helicopter in the 1950s and 1960s.



MI-4 unloading helirappellers to fire (early 1960s)



Ka-26 helicopter used for helirappelling in the 1970s



Antonov-2 used for aerial fire management since 1950s until today

Not much attention was paid to the interests of aerial protection of forests in many regions. This was the reason why the Heads of *Avialesookhrana* and *Rosleshoz* were obliged to keep on maintaining the more or less ruined aviation enterprises in Siberia, the Far East and on the European part of Russia.

At present the Federal State Enterprise (FGU) *Avialesookhrana* has 24 branches (subsidiaries). The Vladimir state aviation enterprise, whose property complex will be turned over to the FGU, will serve as the European subsidiary Airbase. Altogether there are now five airbases that are operating own aircraft (North-West, in Vladimir; North-East, in Krasnoyarsk; Amurskaya, in Blagoveshensk; and the small aviation detachments in Altai and Zabaikalie, Ulan-Ude). Before the end of the current year 2004 all of them will be consolidated under united single certificate of the FGU '*Avialesookhrana*'. The park of aircrafts consists of 102 units, including 69 AN-2, 18 MI-8T, one MI-8MTV, three MI-2, two AN-24, four AN-26, and one IL-103.