

Hundreds of UK troops parachute into Ukraine for joint exercises

Flying straight from the UK, 250 soldiers from 16 Air Assault Brigade dropped into the Ternivsky training area, where they teamed up with thousands of Ukrainian troops ahead of Exercise Joint Endeavour.

Building on the strong relationship developed between the two nations' armed forces in recent years, the exercise provides both nations with vital experience of deploying rapidly from air to land to counter threats.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heappey said:

Deploying directly to Ukraine from the UK, the Paras were straight into the action on Exercise Joint Endeavour.

Our participation is an important affirmation of our commitment to our defence relationship with Ukraine, our partners in the Black Sea, and our ability to project highly capable troops forward anywhere, and any time, they're needed.

As the UK's global response force, the paras of 16 Air Assault Brigade are able to deploy worldwide at short notice.

Alongside 200 troops from the Ukraine Airborne Forces, the Colchester-based 16 Air Assault Brigade parachuted into the Eastern European country from 600ft from C-130 Hercules transport aircraft which had flown directly from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire.

In doing so, the paratroopers demonstrated the ability of the UK to move at pace to support our partners around the world.

The 250-strong UK force also made up of personnel from the Royal Engineers, Royal Horse Artillery, Royal Signals, The Parachute Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps and The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, is now fully assembled on the ground in Ukraine for Exercise Joint Endeavour, which kicks off on 22 September.

Captain Harjot Singh Gill, 16 Air Assault Brigade:

We all bring something to this exercise. The Ukrainians bring their resolve and courage and we bring our constantly changing tactics and processes. Our shared values and the airborne nature of our units brings us closer together. This a welcomed opportunity and the hot weather just makes us realise that we are able to cope

easily in all environments.

Exercise Joint Endeavour, which will total up to 8,000 personnel and also feature a small number of troops from the USA and Canada, is the first multinational exercise in Ukraine since the country achieved NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner status in June. As an enhanced opportunity partner, Ukraine will gain further experience working closely with NATO militaries, sharing best practice and matching capabilities.

The UK and Ukraine have built a strong defence relationship in recent years, with British troops having trained over 18,000 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the five years since the start of the UK's training mission in the country, Operation Orbital. Established in 2015 following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia a year earlier, Operation Orbital is a demonstration of the UK's unwavering commitment to Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace last month stepped up the UK's support to Ukraine even further, announcing that the UK would lead a multi-national Maritime Training Initiative for the Ukrainian Navy. Courses will be delivered by the Royal Navy and naval personnel from Sweden, Canada and Denmark in a range of areas.