

2/2012



**Fortune Favours
the Prepared**

WARDAK:

a Tough Military Test



At the end of November 2012, National Memorial on Vítkov Hill, Prague, was the venue to a ceremony marking the end of operational tour of the Czech Armed Forces 4th rotation the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team following their return from Operation ISAF. Fifty-four soldiers of the 72nd Mechanised Battalion served a seven-month tour in Wardak, Afghanistan. Their primary mission was to train the Afghani National Army personnel and provide cover for them in combined operations.



"The unit has accomplished their assignment to excellent standards in what was one of the most difficult missions the Czech Armed Forces service-members have operated in so far. Wardak – that is not just a name of a province, but also a synonym for a tough military test," Minister Vondra said in his remarks addressing the deployment. He also underscored that the deployment always treated their Afghan counterparts as equal partners, and soon won their esteem and respect. In addition, the Czech deployment was highly instrumental in increasing the Afghan National Army's operational readiness and self-reliance.

"The military needs soldiers just like you are: tough, ready for action, perfectly prepared. I would like to commend you for everything you did for the state of Afghanistan and for the good reputation of our Armed Forces and the Czech Republic at large. Soldiers from Přáslavice, and not only them, again showed they are the masters of their profession," the Defence Minister emphasised and thanked Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Botík, who has been "the right man in the right place" according to the Minister, for a masterful sureness he displayed leading his men.

Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel said the unit showed a high professional readiness and the ability to deliver on assignments across the mission spectrum with the Allies, but also a very sensitive approach to the local soldiers. The 7th Mechanised Brigade, the superior echelon to the 72nd Mechanised Battalion Přáslavice, is definitely not some sort of a B-Brigade – contrarily. "The number of combat contact badges awarded attests to the fact that your tour, if not the most active and riskiest, definitely ranked among such. I should say with full responsibility that your unit combines the best of what we have in our military, and I would very much wish that majority of personnel serving in the Czech Armed Forces would be like you," General Petr Pavel said at the end of his remarks on a more personal note.

During their tour in the East of Afghanistan, soldiers comprising the so-called omelette recorded nearly seven hundred security incidents. "All those incidents have one common denominator in Afghanistan: improvised

explosive devices. Given the very fact that we were deployed along the main road connecting Kandahar and Kabul, this type of incidents was the most frequent one. Second in terms of occurrence rate was direct fire at our patrols and our posts," Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Botík said.

Along with their Afghan and US colleagues, the 4th OMLT deployment took part in two hundred combat operations and got face to face with insurgents nearly a hundred times. One of the primary assignments were also search operations, in which Czechs discovered a high quantity of weapons, munitions and explosives. In one of the operations, they discovered a lab producing homemade explosives in a local village. The warfighters seized roughly 300 kilograms of explosives, which then showed in improved security situation. "It is fair to say that for about three or four days, until they recovered, the area was relatively calm and no one dared to plant a roadside IED," LTC Botík commented.

One of the strongest moments LTC Botík experienced was a suicidal attack that destroyed part of the camp in Saydabad. "I still had had one of my soldiers down there. It took about half an hour before I was able to talk to him and those thirty minutes were probably the longest in my life," LTC Botík admitted. But he also experienced extremely pleasant surprises: "On the ninth of October in the evening, my lads banged heavily on my B-Hut; I opened the door in horror for I did not know what was going on. I saw them standing there with a cake ready to congratulate on me on my birthday," he said smiling.

All service personnel of the 4th Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team were decorated with a Foreign Deployment Medal – Combat Operation Abroad 1st, 2nd and 3rd class; three soldiers including the commanding officer were decorated with the Cross of Merit of the Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic 3rd class. Combat contact badges, Honorary Medals of the Czech Armed Forces 3rd Class and coins of the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces were bestowed as well.

by Olga Haladová

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Dear Colleagues, Soldiers and Airmen,

I regard it a natural obligation for me to thank you very much for your cooperation in our joint endeavour, whose goal has been – and I am confident that it will continue to be – to strengthen stability of the Armed Forces and develop its capabilities. The Armed Forces and other Czech security services are the key guarantee for defending the Czech Republic's interests and for delivering on our obligations in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

I trust you have understood the reasons that led me – after not receiving sufficient confidence of voters – to decide to resign from the office of defence minister. I would like to assure you I am doing so with full recognition of the responsibility including for the outcome of our joint work. The Prime Minister assured me the Cabinet and he personally will take every measure for everything we have achieved through our joint work to be further developed. We have defined our goals in the White Paper on Defence, which the Cabinet endorsed. Despite necessary savings in defence appropriations, it is vital to strengthen the certainty in our society that the Armed Forces are ready in all aspects to defend security interests of the Czech state and Czech citizens.

Responsible politicians accept their assignments responsibly, and, in case they find out the support of their electorate has diminished, they leave their positions responsibly as well. That is a natural process that characterises democracy. The Cabinet I was a member of lasts and will last with its programs and full responsibility for their performance. So, there is no reason to yield to uncertainty. Not only the Government, not me as a minister, but you in particular have made it possible through a joint effort to pave the way for launching all the remedial and reinvigorating processes whose completion will attain the goals we have defined.

There are multiple achievements we may boast. We promulgated the White Paper on Defence, and authorised a binding security policy document, the Defence Strategy. We have created a new acquisition system expelling redundant go-betweens and reflecting the whole life cycle of acquired equipment. We have strengthened our ties to our NATO Allies through significant achievements in performance of missions on deployed operations. We have also prepared legislation that will make service career management more transparent and ensure stability of the remuneration scheme, and, importantly, we have attained stability of the defence budget by a Governmental decision for the years to come. Changes in the force structure, same as rationalising the overhead structures of the MoD, will inevitable involve reduction of those components that have turned out to be ineffective.

Development of a new and more effective concept of the active reserve component will support improvement of some of the capabilities our Armed Forces have. At the same time, it will help overcome temporary effects of the budgetary restrictions that have been necessary so far and will approximate the all-volunteer armed forces to the civilian society. A list of everything we have commenced and often already achieved through our joint effort in pursuit of strengthening our national defence posture would take much more paper.

Bidding farewell with you, let me conclude by thanking you for the trust you honoured me with in my assignment as the minister, and by expressing my belief that your effort to attain the objectives will not slack. To our men and women in uniform on foreign deployments, who bear the brunt of our commitments to NATO, I would like to wish the very best of luck and a safe return home.

Let me wish you and your families Merry Christmas.

Yours,

Alexandr Vondra
Alexandr Vondra

Published by MoD CR
Communication and Promotion Department
Tychonova 1, 160 01 Praha 6, Czech Republic
www.army.cz

Identification number: 60162694

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Distributed by MoD CPD, Production Section
Rooseveltova 23, 161 05 Praha 6, Czech Republic
Olga Endlová, tel. +420 973 215 563

Printed by: EUROPRINT, a. s.

ISSN 1804-9672

Registration number: MK ČR E 18227

Published: December 2012



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AIRBORNE in fifteen minutes!

A Czech Armed Forces deployment has been providing security to the airspace of the Baltic States. Assigned to the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS), quick reaction alert fighters in turns take off the runway of the Shiauliai airbase, Lithuania: first a couple of Polish MiG-29s, followed by two Czech JAS-39 Gripen fighters. A couple of minutes later, already forming a neat box, they fly over the heads of VIP guests in a ceremony handing over the operational assignment in the Baltic Air Policing mission.

As new seven nations joined NATO in 2004, an interim solution was endorsed to provide air policing in countries not possessing relevant capabilities to provide for it. NATO nations presently provide air policing as a long-term multinational endeavour benefiting Slovenia and Albania, plus Iceland and the Baltic States on rotational basis. Policing the airspace over the territory and territorial waters of the three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – began in March 2004 and has so far seen the involvement of fourteen nations that filled thirty-one rotations in total. Belgian Air Force with F-16AM Fighting Falcons had the first go. The Czech

Republic has already filled one rotation in the mission with its JAS-39C Gripen fighters in 2009. Thus, various aircraft operated by NATO nations' air forces provided security to the area of interest. In addition to the mentioned F-16s from Belgium, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, United States, Turkey and Portugal, also the German Luftwaffe F-4F Phantom and Eurofighter Typhoon, French Mirage 2000C, Romanian MiG-21, Polish MiG-29 and U.S. Air Force F-15C Eagle.

The Baltic Air Policing mission has already slated rotations till the end of 2014. The fighters of the 211th Tactical Squadron from Čáslav



Air Force Base (September through December 2012) will hand over to a contingent from Denmark, followed by France, Belgium and the United States of America. Filling the rotations down the road will be subject of the global force generation conference scheduled to take place in November 2012.

Importantly, the mandate for Baltic Air Policing has been endorsed till 2018 with possibility for another extension. But along with mandating

the extension, NATO Allies agreed that a concept must be outlined by 2014 for involvement of the Baltic States in the air policing effort. As a matter of fact, Lithuanian air force does not have any fighters and its inventory only comprises a minimum number of transport airplanes and helicopters, specifically three L-39 Albatros trainers (one L-39 was lost in an accident last year, which involved a French Air Force Mirage 2000C), seven transport aircraft (e.g. C-27J Spartan) and eight Mi-8 helicopters. The Lithuanian Air Force structure comprises three airbases, and Shiauliai particularly meets NATO standards.

Longterm predeployment effort

The air transfer into the area of deployment located over thousand kilometres away commenced on 21 August 2012. The advance team transferred from the Čáslav to Shiauliai airbase on a Czech Air Force CASA C-295M transport aircraft. Additional transfers took place on August 23 and 30, 2012. A Lithuanian C-27J Spartan transport airplane was also involved in besides the aircraft operated at the 24th Air Force Base Transportation Kbely. The necessary materiel and equipment, including twelve ISO containers, back-up power generator and airplane tug, were transferred in a ground convoy provided by the 14th Logistic Support Brigade headquartered in Pardubice from August 20-25, 2012.

On the last but one day of August, four JAS-39C multirole supersonic fighters made a transfer flight. It did not take them more than sixty minutes to get there from their home station. Ahead of the departure of the Czech Armed Forces 2nd deployment for the Baltic Air

The reality is that the four-month plus effort in the Baltic States means a double employment for the Čáslav airbase pilots in NATINADS. Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav Míka, the commander of the 211th Tactical Squadron, is however confident that professional readiness of the members of his unit is at standards high enough to meet that double challenge. "We have been forced to restrict the planned flight training. The key will be serviceability of the aircraft," he says abruptly, but completely aptly.

An example of NATO solidarity

Friday, August 31, 2012. The Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) hangar at the Shiauliai airbase has a venue to a muster bringing together two military units: Polish airmen from the 22nd Tactical Airbase Malbork and Czech airmen from the 21st Tactical Airbase Čáslav. Facing them were senior officials of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania headed by the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis and the Minister of National Defence of Lithuania, Rasa Juknevičienė and other diplomatic corps members, senior military officials and political representatives. The delegation of the Czech Ministry of Defence was headed by Defence Minister Alexandr and comprised Senators of the Czech Parliament, members of the MoD Defence Policy and Strategy Division, National Armaments Directorate and the Joint Operations Centre. "The Czech Republic's involvement in the Baltic Air Policing effort is very positive from my perspective. It is both an expression of NATO's solidarity and indivisibility of NATO's security, but the Czech fighter pilots are also able to improve their professional readiness in



Policing mission, Deputy Director of the MoD Joint Operations Centre Brigadier-General Jaroslav Kankia came to make farewell with the deployment. "Three years from the first deployment of the Czech contingent in the Baltic States is what we regard an optimal rotation cycle," he stated and specified the predeployment prepping was a long-term effort and was informed to maximum extent by the lessons the first Czech Armed Forces deployment learnt in 2009.

real-world situations," Minister Vondra said and highlighted the high credit the Czech military professionals enjoy in the Baltic States. "Three years ago, they accomplished their mission here to excellent standards and I am completely confident that will be the case this time as well," the Czech Defence Minister underscored.

The ceremony included a handover of a wooden key unlocking the airspace of the three Baltic States. Polish leader Lieutenant-Colonel Leszek

Blach handed over the key to the commander of the Czech task force, Colonel Petr Lančí. From Saturday 1 September 2012 nine zero zero hours local time till 3 January 2013, they are responsible for providing quick reaction alert coverage in their area of responsibility. In reality, this means a fifteen-minute limit for a pair of QRA Gripen fighters to take-off for intercept.

The 2nd Czech Armed Forces deployment comprises of sixty-four service personnel from four military units: the 21st Tactical Airbase Čáslav, Military Police Command Olomouc, Vyškov Area Medical Centre Vyškov and the MoD Force Development – Operations Division Prague. The deployment core comprises flight and ground personnel of the 211th Tactical Squadron based in Čáslav. Most of the personnel will rotate at the turn of October and November 2012. The deployment commanding officer is the commander of the 21st Air Force Base in Čáslav, Colonel Petr Lančí.

Czech Gripens over the Baltic

Reminiscence of the first deployment of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic in the Baltic States is as follows: the 1st Czech Armed Forces deployment for the Baltic Air Policing provided coverage to the airspace and territorial waters of the three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – in the framework of the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS) from 1 May till 31 August 2009. A seventy-five strong deployment of Czech Armed Forces service personnel from five military units, with the core formed by flight and ground personnel of the Čáslav-based 211th Tactical Squadron, performed their assignment from the station at the Shiauliai airbase, Lithuania.



The contingent also operated in Karmelava at Kaunas, Lithuania, where two Czech specialists served a tour at the local Control and Reporting Centre (CRC). To perform the operational assignment, the Czech Armed Forces contingent had four JAS-39 Gripen multirole supersonic aircraft. Over a four-month mission the Czech Air Force Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) pilots logged the total of 404 flight hours in 336 sorties, of which were eight alpha scramble flights to commercial as well as military airplanes in their area of responsibility, which had not been complying with civilian air traffic management rules. The commanding officer of the first Czech Armed Forces contingent in the Baltic Air Policing was the commander of the 211th Tactical Squadron, Major Jaroslav Míka.

by Pavel Lang

General Pavel's Freefall



Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year
P. Pavel

Although lasting just a couple of minutes, the freefall by the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel became a spectacle for onlookers to remember quite some time down the road. There was no need to talk him into it; he pulled on a special overall, put on the glasses and helmet and entered the flight chamber with 4.3 diameter in the Skydive arena at Prague Letňany. In the vertical glassed tunnel, air flows at the speed from 160 to 280 km/h, providing identical conditions as when you jump out of an airplane. Flying in the wind tunnel, his conduct improved continuously and in the third attempt he already earned words of praise from the experienced instructor for a professional control of his body in the airflow. "I have not made a free-fall dive for fifteen years, last time when I was in command of the Special Forces Brigade in Prostějov. It was awesome in the simulator. While we seek to have a safe and effective training at affordable cost, this is definitely the right path to pursue," General Pavel said shortly after landing.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba



**Alpha Scramble
off RWY 32**

The Czech Task Force providing air policing coverage to the airspace of the three Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – have clearly demonstrated that the mandate given by Czech authorities has been justified and adequately sourced in terms of operational capability, as attested by alpha scrambles intercepting targets in their area of responsibility.

Nearly a year's preparation of the sixty-four strong Czech Armed Forces Task Force for the Baltic Air Policing, whose core comprises of the 211th Tactical Squadron flight and ground specialist personnel, has now come to fruition. From September on, fighter pilots from Čáslav airbase stationed at the main operating base of Lithuanian Air Force at the Šiauliai airport have been repeatedly called upon to perform missions under the deployment's primary operational assignment in the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS).

In nine alpha scrambles of QRA Gripen fighters so far, they have proven their high professionalism and accomplished intercepts successfully. On order by the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Uedem, Germany, a pair of JAS-39C multirole supersonic fighters took off within the mandatory limit of fifteen minutes and performed the required visual identification of the target. This time, it was a Russian Air Force Antonov An-26 transport aircraft heading for Kaliningrad with passengers onboard, which did not observe mandatory flight procedures, including planned route.

There are no major specificities in the Czech QRA pilots' flight effort. They perform identical activities as at their home station in the Czech Republic. NATO QRA interception procedures and mandatory time limits apply equally both at Čáslav and Šiauliai airbase. The area of deployment is not the decisive factor for the task force.

Provided with relevant specialist ground and logistic support and logistic, it really does not matter what runway on the globe they operate from. Some nitpickers however do not find it completely identical. It is correct to say the differences would only involve minor professional details. For instance, the area of responsibility in the Baltic region is about three times larger than the domestic one; it does not border on NATO nations, but on the Russian Federation and Byelorussia and the Kingdom of Sweden and Finland over the Baltic Sea, i.e. nations that are Partners in the Partnership for Peace programme.

QRA pilots always must be constantly aware of the proximity of air borders on Byelorussia and the Russian Federation. No way could they operate closer than eight nautical miles or roughly fifteen kilometres from their international borders. Additional "tiny" differences relate to the operational assignment of the Czech contingent – action is only authorised against military targets and they are not mandated to use weapon systems against commercial airplanes. In case it is necessary to provide assistance to commercial airliners in distress or for loss of communication, they are authorised to do so, but they may not interfere its flight safety. It is also

specific for this mission that alternate airports for Gripens to land are civilian runways at Vilnius, Kaunas, Riga and Tallinn.

As a matter of fact, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have also been included into the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP) and are entitled to use the program funding to develop infrastructure at their airbases. Šiauliai airbase in Lithuania, the station for the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) fighters, was the first one to receive the NATO funding. According to deputy commanding officer of the Czech Armed Forces Task Force Baltic Air Policing, Lieutenant-Colonel David Schreier, the development of Āmari airfield in Estonia has been nearly completed too. "Only the lack of qualified personnel prevents the airfield to provide full host nation services. Once development of essential infrastructure is finalised at Lielvarde, it will become the alternate airport for QRA fighters in the Baltic region," says the second-in-command of the Czech Task Force. It should also be noted that JAS-39C Gripen pilots were issued special equipment for flight over sea – a special rubber



emergency suit protecting them against water and cold should they need to eject or emergency land on the sea. The wet suit is mandatory for flights over water, as the sea temperature is below twelve degrees Celsius.

Duty, Rest, Standby, Duty

As opposed to previous years, the host nation support involves some novelties for the CzAF Task Force BAP 2012. "The QRA building has been refurbished for quite some time, and so we have been stationed in several blocks of

container shelters. It is not optimal but it has no effect whatsoever on the performance of our operational assignment," says the Commander of the Čáslav airbase and the commanding officer of the Czech Armed Forces Task Force, Colonel Petr Lančí, and shows new aircraft shelters.

"Contrarily to provisional shelters on the apron, the QRA aircraft are now housed in four new hangars, which undoubtedly provide much better comfort for maintenance and facilities for ground specialists," COL Lančí concludes.

Potential onlookers could ask a rational question: whether the hangars do not hamper a quick dispatch, especially in alpha scrambles. "Aircraft are not tugged out of the hangar. The front and rear door get lifted and engines are started inside the hangar. Following mandatory procedures, pilots roll for the runway. It is no complication," COL Lančí comments. Day-to-day life of his subordinates is centered on a continuous performance of their operational assignment. Every day, shifts take turn at half past eight and then they serve a twenty-hour readiness standby duty. The shift comprises two pilots, two Gripens and one reserve fighter and other members of the shift. Those who are not on RS 15 standby are on an RS 60 alert. Those who are on RS 60 standby are taking a rest before the next duty shift. At the same time, NATINADS is not the only mission they have – they are also to actively contribute to training combat radar controllers at the Controlling and Reporting Centre (CRC) in Karmelava, Lithuania, and participate in NATO air exercises taking place in the region such as

the Baltic Region Training Event (BRTE) exercise held in October.

This begs the question what the personnel do in their free time. "Well there is not much of a free time," LTC Schreier says and offers some well-proven methods to counter claustrophobic feelings. "The best way to relax is sporting. All of us knew beforehand what we would be up to, and could prepare for that according to their nature. Baltic Air Policing is a standard foreign deployment. We use the same standard operating procedures as the Czech Armed Forces



deployments Afghanistan for instance. We have clear rules to follow and we strictly observe them."

The Czechs enjoy a good reputation with the general public. "Political leaders and the citizens of the three Baltic States evaluate our efforts positively. Lithuanians have made it clear to us that it has been an honour for them to host the NATO task forces for BAP. Latvia and Estonia

have similar ambitions. They would definitely welcome a rotational system for QRA capability deployment stationing," COL Lančí adds.

A stroke prior to take-off

Air policing in the area of responsibility is not just a matter for the seven QRA pilots. Ground specialists and maintainers also contribute their specific input to the performance

of the operational assignment. "We selected six Gripens for the Baltic Air Policing mission, of which four are permanently stationed at the Šiauliai airbase. Preparing them, particularly for winter operation, actually took twelve months. Why so long? Namely for the need to remove dozens of assembly units from each aircraft to receive a special anti-corrosive coat. That is necessary because of different deicing agents applied onto paved surfaces in Lithuania than those normally approved for Gripens. After assembling those units back, a demanding testing phase began, at the end of which you have to be one hundred per cent sure that everything works the way it should. I would compare our unique effort to foaming the hollows on a car. It was a very demanding operation that however suits the purpose.

The aircraft hold and the number of malfunctions is not higher than usual. We have been satisfied so far with serviceability of Gripens in the Baltic environment," deputy commander of the 211th Tactical Squadron for ground support Major Radomir Holuša says and goes on to describe the way the Czech technical personnel is prepared to troubleshoot the aircraft. "Lithuanians provide general aviation technical support. All the rest in relation to operating JAS-39C aircraft is our responsibility. That is why we brought over here several sets of tools and special appliances. In reality, it comprises over two thousand items. We have with us a range of components and units we know from practice may be liable to malfunction.

We are able to perform the most demanding maintenance operations here. In case there



is a dramatic malfunction, the aircraft makes a transfer flight back to Čáslav. The required number of NATINADS QRA fighters would be immediately replenished with another machine from the assigned minifleet of Gripen fighters." Interview with MAJ Holuša is interrupted by a roar produced by engines of JAS-39 fighters. A pair of QRA Gripens start rolling towards the runway to perform a training flight referred to as tango scramble. Before leaving the apron, the aircraft receives a stroke by the ground specialists. "It is the right of ground specialists to



make a farewell with their machines; it is a ritual for a good luck, confirming they have put their heart into it and wishing a safe return. The final slap on the machine is an unwritten rule for all ground personnel to do," MAJ Holuša explains.

Two Alphas

The fifth and twenty-second day of September 2012 were definitely days for First-Lieutenant Vladimír Málek, a pilot of the 211th Tactical Squadron, to remember. The Combined Air Operations Centre scrambled him to intercept

a target in the area of responsibility. "I have served NATINADS QRA duties since December last year. I have not had any alpha back home and here I already had two," says the pilot with a log of two hundred and fifty flight hours on the Gripen and admits he regards this double alpha from the Baltic a very important milestone in his career. "In both cases, I was number two or wingman if you will. We shook hands with the leader afterwards that was it. Admittedly, it is a pleasant feeling to have accomplished all the requirements by our superior echelon. We have demonstrated the QRA system's operational readiness," 1LT Málek replies and recalls his second alpha scramble. "I was on duty with Major Martin Pelda. They whistled the scramble for us in the evening. It went real fast. What was in instantly on my mind was adrenalin and the sense of fifteen-minute time limit."

A vehicle approaches the two QRA JAS-39C Gripen fighters. Pilots are quick to jump out and run for the airplanes. They get quickly seated in cockpits and start performing mandatory procedures in steps. Checking the aircraft systems takes several minutes. Then the two fighters start rolling to parallel runways. Leader on three two right (32R) and dash two three two



left (32L). Eleven minutes from the alarm, they lift off the runway and head northeast. The CRC keeps briefing them on the target and orders to fly at maximum subsonic speed. "We were at the airplane in ten minutes. It was a Russian An-26 Curl.

We caught the An-26 above the sea on the Estonian-Latvian border. The leader approached the target without attracting attention and started performing its identification. I was in position enabling me to step in anytime to cover the leader. He made the necessary photos and I took some footage on my camera. We followed the instructions from the CRC. We had neither visual nor radio communication with the foreign aircraft.

Identifying the target not observing the prescribed flight parameters took about ten

minutes. When we transmitted the required data to the CRC and they were sure the An-26 posed no threat in the airspace, they ordered us back to the station," 1LT Málek says and adds that piloting during the intercept is not easy. "An-26 Curl airplanes, which have been the target of four alpha scrambles so far, fly at about three hundred kilometres per hour. That is not that easy for me. I have a max dry thrust on the Gripen and the machine is quite stretched.

Moreover, I controlled the machine with one hand and videoed the target with the other. That is the way we do it with the Curls, but it would be different with other machines." What does the Czech pilot imply? Perhaps what was the word on the street in Shiliai, when the Poles served the NATINADS tour before the Czechs.

Only those involved know whether there were any Su27 fighter flying along with Russian An-26 aircraft or some surveillance Tupolev aircraft or not.

"We transmit the acquired data up the chain for relevant authorities to evaluate them. In the process of identification, we primarily watch for details on the target, such as tail number, registration, antennas or surveillance systems," Major Pelda and says the JAS-39 Gripen multirole fighter has sophisticated systems able to detect foreign fighters in the area of responsibility.

Although some may be in doubt, the response by superior bodies in the NATINADS, this time to intercept a military An-26, was completely relevant. No one can tell how the operations in the air may escalate. Although it would just be monitoring, each alpha scramble intercept is a combat sortie.

Differing mandate

Intercepting military aircraft in the Baltic region, that is a different story than assisting commercial airliners in distress back home. "Who would not wish to encounter a Sukhoi up there. There is this kind of likelihood. The higher the adrenalin, when you go for an alpha. Such experience would definitely be worth it. All pilots have their dreams, and I think this is exactly that kind of dream," says First-Lieutenant Robert Stejskal who has served as a NATINADS QRA pilot for three and a half years and logged close to five hundred flight hours with JAS-39.

Thanks to the forthcoming attitude of the commanding officer of the Czech Armed Forces Task Force Baltic Air Policing, we have a unique opportunity to be with QRA pilots for

a short period of time. We were even incredibly lucky to witness their activity following an alpha scramble alarm.

The siren blared and both pilots pulled on the wet suit. Since now, anything they are doing is much more difficult. They are quick to get their boots on as first beads of sweat start on their foreheads. Then the G-suits follow. Time? Four minutes are over. They grab their helmets and run toward a vehicle to take them over a couple hundred metres to their machines. Additional two minutes have passed. Activities pilots do in the cockpit cannot be followed from a close distance for reasons easy to understand. 1LT Stejskal, who was dash two in that alpha scramble with First-Lieutenant Pavel Štrůbl, describes the sequence afterwards as follows: "I initialise the systems and start the engine. There can be no mistake in the sequence of procedures, because otherwise I would need to go from the beginning. Simultaneously, I am buckling myself up in the seat. I report to the ops center and receive initial data. Then the mandatory process according to code table takes place. The leader and the wingman do a radio check for mutual connectivity and tune to the channel of the tower. We say we are rolling out of QRA and going for the runway. We take off in a five-second interval and Lithuanian controllers guide us afterwards. We have a separation up to two nautical miles and CRC Karmelava clears the airspace ahead of us. Pilots of the 211th Tactical Squadron based at Čáslav proved their very high standards of professionalism in this case as well.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba and the 211th Tactical Squadron

The Czech Armed Forces 4th deployment of the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team successfully completed their operational tour in what is one of the most dangerous provinces in Afghanistan – Wardak.

Fortune Favours the Prepared

In the Czech Republic, the first day of September has been historically reserved for the beginning of the school year. This year, school kids could nevertheless stay in their beds in the morning – it was Saturday. Captain Martin V. could not. He had spent the previous six months in the Wardak Province, Afghanistan, stationed at combat outpost Sayed Abad. On that fateful day, he got up very early in the morning and set off to a nearby heliport.

He was the only Czech far and wide. On the previous day, eleven of his Czech colleagues were airlifted to COP Soltan Kheyl, where the Czech Prime Minister Petr Nečas would meet Czech service personnel during his very first visit to Afghanistan. Captain V. also awaited the arrival of a helicopter to take him to COP Soltan Kheyl. But a fierce explosion suddenly occurred. Before he was able to get over that, another explosion came up, much stronger this time. A fierce shockwave knocked him down together with other soldiers waiting for the chopper, who were mainly U.S. personnel.

“We quickly got up and ran for the shelter to take firing positions. As a matter of fact, we did not know whether that had not been a complex attack with the explosions possibly followed by insurgency assault targeting our base,” CAPT V. explains. “We also immediately joined the effort to aid casualties. We tried to do maximum to stabilise their basic life functions. “Later on, we carried them and loaded into incoming helicopters that transported them into a military hospital in Bagram. We also carried Afghan soldiers who could not be helped anymore. When everything

calmed down a little and it became obvious that no further attack would take place anymore, the commanding officer requested a battle damage assessment and documenting photos. In that combat outpost, we had both combat equipment and materiel and housing premises as well.”

PM bringing good luck

On that 1st day of September 2012, the Czech Armed Forces 4th deployment the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) passed one of the toughest tests during its seven-month tour. First a suicide bomber blasted himself in front of COP Sayed Abad. Then a truck loaded with explosives detonated. The effects were tragic. A marketplace close to the combat outpost was virtually annihilated. Fifteen Afghans died, dozens of others suffered injuries, including a number of Americans. Czech housing that had accommodated a dozen warfighters just a day ago was practically razed to the ground.

The explosion was so massive that it could be heard as far as at the COP Soltan Kheyl twenty kilometres away. “It was such a blast

that we fought the US company that had been patrolling off-base hit an improvised explosive device. We got on our feet with my chief of staff and started organising medical aid. After about three minutes we got the information that the explosion was caused by a person-borne improvised explosive device at COP Sayed Abad. It took additional thirty minutes before we were able to establish communication with that COP and find out Captain V. had not been hurt and was OK,” commanding officer of the 4th OMLT Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Botik explains. “Some materiel we had positioned at COP Sayed Abad was heavily damaged. We initially thought we had also lost four armoured vehicles. But our drivers also had also been trained as maintainers; they immediately started to repair the vehicles. They managed to get the damaged vehicles into serviceable condition within a week’s time. We were able to again operate the vehicles in support of our missions. In the end, we succeeded to minimise the damage. It again proved that no one compares to Czech soldiers in such situations – there is nothing like the golden Czech hands.”



Guarding the highway of death

The primary mission of the Czech Armed Forces 4th OMLT was to train, mentor and assist on planning, command and control processes of a battalion-strong Afghan National Army infantry unit, a kandak. The OMLT was to provide for increasing operational capabilities of all units forming the kandak, help them provide a security environment, freedom of movement in their area of responsibility and set conditions conducive for performance of operations across the whole spectrum. The joint objective of the Czech and Afghan soldiers was to eliminate the insurgency network in Sayed Abad district. That involved an area covering roughly fourteen hundred square kilometres a valley at two thousand four hundred meters above sea level with two hundreds of communities.

The notorious Highway 1 connecting Kabul and Kandahar, nicknamed the highway of death, goes through the Sayed Abad district. As a local colour, military vehicles in wrecks line the road in regular intervals. “Our assignment included overseeing some fifty kilometres of the most dangerous section of HW-1. The complexity of our assignment is attested by the fact an IED went off practically every day during our tour in Afghanistan. Sometimes even two or three a day,” Major Martin Hajduch, the deployment’s chief of staff, comments. “But we had a very good cooperation with Afghan soldiers. Over those seven months, they were



showing significant improvement in their military skills in all aspects. Although the kandak remained the same throughout their tour of duty, its units changed and its area of operations partly too. Some stations were closed down and some newly activated. That involved quite extensive movement of materiel and personnel, which was demanding in this type of environment.”

Everybody returned safely

All the teams forming the OMLT operated at about two thousand four hundred metres above sea level. That naturally showed during movements and claimed some physical preparedness. Typical Afghan weather did not make life easier for the deployment either. Temperatures went high in the summer but it was getting quite cold at the end of the tour. There



were great differences between night and day temperatures.

The primary mission of the 4th OMLT deployment and their ANA kandak included search operations, which found sizeable quantities of small arms and light weapons, munitions, hand grenades, fifty calibre machineguns, comms devices and hundreds of kilograms of homemade explosives. Important achievements included detection of a lab producing the explosives and apprehension of persons working there. In combination with the arrest of one of the important local leaders, it helped weaken insurgent activities in the area.

In total, Czech servicemembers completed two hundred combat operations and got in contact on nearly half of the operations during their tour in Wardak. They were engaged by small arms fire practically on daily basis. Sometimes they got under fire by opposing forces and were in such a trouble that they had to request air or artillery fire support. Summing all incidents during the seven-month effort, we would be getting close to seven hundred.

Wardak ranks among five most dangerous provinces in Afghanistan. After seven months spent operating in such a high-threat environment, Lieutenant-Colonel Botík was nevertheless able to bring all of his fifty-four soldiers safely back home to the Czech Republic. "In two hundred combat operations we had with our

assigned kandak, neither the Czech service personnel nor their Afghan comrades-in-arms suffer any losses or injuries. We were one hundred per cent successful in this respect," the commanding officer of the 4th deployment comments. "I am confident a high quality preparation and training played the key role in this respect. And a good luck goes with it as well. It proved that fortune favours the prepared."

Reality not differing from training

LTC Botík knows what he talks about. The core of the 4th OMLT comprised members of the 72nd Mechanised Battalion who already served a tour in Afghanistan three years ago. They knew exactly what they were going to be up to. The unit's commanding officer had even fresher experience. Some time ago, he served a tour at Headquarters ISAF. He was assigned to a division responsible for supervising training and certification of Afghan National Army kandaks. He had a chance to work with French, Polish and later also a Czech mentoring and training teams and see operational performance by individual national units. He was stationed in Kapisa, a province not far away from Kabul. The difficult security situation however made it an area hard to access. Later on he moved south to Ghazni to join a Polish contingent and completed his tour in Wardak with the Czech OMLT.

"Therefore we knew pretty exactly what to ready ourselves for, which is I believe one of the causes of our success. The reality on the ground in Wardak did not differ much from our training," LTC Botík underscores. "But our good cooperation with the kandak was important too. During those seven months downrange, we became so close with Afghans that we essentially formed a single unit. Not only training teams, but also the staff lived with them day-to-day at their bases. We spent with them all of our time. And that was the key for establishing outstanding relations. They saw we were not avoiding anything, that we were doing everything like

them and they treated us accordingly. The cooperation was truly excellent. Although our kandak also had an incident when one of the Afghans turned his weapon on servicemembers of a U.S. battalion, under whose command we operated. But nothing like that happened in our unit; we did not feel any hatred from the side of the Afghans. Everything was OK."

Captain Martin V. concurs with that assessment. According to him the September 1st VBIED incident pull them all even more together. They were suddenly much close to each other.

"It was the most challenging combat mission we have had so far. I dare to say it was even more complex than the last operational tour of our Special Forces," the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel evaluated the performance by the 4th OMLT. "The greatest challenge was that the unit was stationed in several combat outposts in conjunction with Afghan and US forces in small teams. The environment the Czech servicemembers operated in was characterised by incidents taking place on daily basis. When we went down there with the Prime Minister, eleven Czech personnel had just escaped certain death by a narrow margin, which again shows how difficult this tour was. The site they had been stationed at was virtually blasted by a four-ton explosive charge. That is why it gives me a great pleasure that all of them returned safely back home in good health. Of course, there must a bit of good luck to it. At the same time nevertheless, a high quality preparation is apparently what makes the difference. The fact that you still have a more sensitive approach to the locals than other countries' armed forces plays a role too. That makes our life a bit easier. We have not had a case so far that some of our trainees would turn their weapons on our soldiers," General Pavel said in the end-of-tour ceremony.

by Vladimír Marek
Photos by the 4th OMLT



Lieutenant General Ondrej Páleník, Director of the Military Intelligence Service, said goodbye to the Ministry of Defence

A good team makes the difference

The Director of the Military Intelligence Service, Lieutenant General Ondrej Páleník, has recently ended his military career, having put in several decades of service. We made use of this occasion to ask him for an interview.

You started attending a military secondary school at the age of 14. What attracted you most in the army? What did make you to take such a step?

At the age of fourteen I did not know why I made the decision. I had never been able to imagine I would do anything but soldiering. I pursued the goal, I enrolled at the military school, and then my career was growing with me.

Did the military secondary school meet your expectations?

I was very content there. We had an excellent team. It was actually there that a belief that a team could overcome all problems and

difficulties started forming up in me, which has survived throughout my military career.

You have spent dozens of years in the army. Have you ever regretted joining the army when facing difficult personal or military situations?

I have never regretted it. Obviously, you experience both pleasant and not so pleasant moments in the army, just like in everyday life. The latter have to be overcome. It has never come to my mind that my decision was wrong. Definitely not.

In the end of 1990, our NBC unit for the Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations was

being formed and you, then a young lieutenant, volunteered. Do you recall your feelings when you were about to depart? Were there any fears or worries about what to expect?

There were a lot of expectations, that's a fact. Great expectations, as we did not know at all what was waiting for us in international missions. There were also concerns whether we would manage our tasks, of course, but I wouldn't call it fear.

So concerns only?

Yes, concerns whether our capabilities were up to the task facing us, i.e. taking part in the Gulf War, but naturally also great expectations – an endeavour and ambitions to compare ourselves against other armies of the world and show them that Czech soldiers also knew their business.

It was our first major mission. Was your belief in teamwork confirmed?

Hundred percent. We were lucky to be able to pick our soldiers, still conscripts at that time.



They were my men, members of the reconnaissance unit from Prostějov. The belief in teamwork indeed helped us overcome all problems that we encountered there.

Your soldiers nicknamed you Hombre. How did it happen?

It is an ancient story. The opinions how the nickname was born differ. I trusted my soldiers and they trusted me. They felt I treated them as comrades. And when I got really pissed at them, I used to tell them: "Hombre, wait till I come after you and you will see what's going to happen!" I think this was how the nickname was born. However, I said it had been born a long time ago and there are many interpretations as to how I earned it. Nevertheless, I believe my explanation is correct.

When you were the commander of the Special Forces, you were cooperating very closely with Daniel Landa. A fairly close relationship gradually developed between him and the "Specials" from Prostějov; he even composed your anthem. Do you regard him as a friend?

Daniel Landa is definitely a great personality of the Czech cultural scene and his relations with the 601st Special Forces Group are well known. By the way, he is also a Lance Corporal in the reserve company of the 601st Special Forces Group. Our relationship was being built for years. His lyrics and songs can encourage soldiers in difficult moments, which they experience primarily in missions. This is, I think, most important for us.

You have several tough missions under your belt. What was most difficult about them? Can you recall any critical moment?

For me, as the commander responsible for all the guys who were with me in combat missions in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2006, the whole

stay there was psychically very demanding. The hardest moment came when my soldiers were in combat contact with the enemy. One could only listen to the radio to get an idea of what was going on. I could not help them, I could only believe they were capable enough to deal with and defeat the opponent. Of course, if one is listening to on-line radio communication, one's heart gets heavy. I always felt tremendous responsibility for my soldiers.

Is it more difficult to listen to the radio, to hear what's going on, or would you rather be with them?

I think being with them would have been easier for me, but each of us had his place and job to do. As they say, a place on the totem pole. And my job was to lead the unit, to make sure the operation was well-planned, logical and meaningful, to make sure the objective of the mission was fulfilled and, of course, hope that all of us would safely return home. Since 2004, we spent three years and nine months in Afghanistan, in the most difficult conditions. Perhaps no one doubts that the Czech Special Forces were operating in the hottest spots, in the centre of combat operations, and we are extremely proud of that. We are particularly proud of the fact that we always managed to bring all the boys back home, alive and in good health. In my opinion, this is nothing short of a miracle. When someone asks me how that was possible, my reply is that it was a combination of our capabilities, preparations, training, team cohesion, but understandably also a pinch of luck. You simply cannot do without luck.

Five years ago, your life underwent a radical change. You went from Prostějov to the Ministry of Defence and became the head of the Military Intelligence Service. You were thrown in the water and forced to start swimming rather quickly. Was it a big change for you?

Actually, it was not such a big change for me. I see myself as a military manager. Moreover, I had known the environment of the Military Intelligence Service, as the 601st Special Forces Group is a part of it. I had not expected I could have advanced to such a high position so fast, but I had not been too afraid about the task. I approached it as a proper manager. I accepted it as a challenge and became the Director of the Military Intelligence Service.

Your predecessor had been called off rather quickly and unable to pass specific advice and experience to you. What were your first days like?

Of course, it was difficult in that the job was not handed over to me in a proper fashion. My predecessor was no longer there. But I was once again helped by what I had been benefitting from throughout my previous military career – good people around me, my closest co-workers. My office assistants, aides, told how to do this or that. I have been lucky in this respect throughout my military career, and it was the same there. At the end of the day, the change was not as dramatic as it might have looked.

The historical name of honour borne by the 601st Special Forces Group is "General Moravec". The outstanding military personality had accomplished an essential reform of our intelligence service in the early 1930s and succeeded in preparing it for difficult tasks that awaited it during the war. How do you perceive General Moravec? Is he one of your heroes?

Of course. When the name of honour was being selected, we were carefully considering the Czech military and intelligence personalities the 601st Special Forces Group could be named after. I think we have chosen well. General Moravec unquestionably is a great person in the history of the Czech intelligence service and the 601st Special Forces Group is a part of the intelligence community.

There were many discussions in the past suggesting that the Military Intelligence Service should be a part of the structure of the Army of the Czech Republic, just like the Military Police, rather than subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. What is your opinion?

I believe the opinion, which I basically share, is quite reasonable. However, my acquaintance and friend, who used to command the British Special Forces, says "why change anything that works?". I think this is the essential question. Should we change something we do not have any problems with only because we believe it does belong under the ministry? I am convinced there is no other reason for the change. As a part of the Military Intelligence Service, the Special Forces have been developing at an unbelievably dynamic pace. I daresay they rank among top Special Forces units of the world. It seems to me it would be rather unwise to promote the change for the sole reason of the Military Intelligence Service optically not fitting in the place where it is now.

Some people believe the Czech Republic has too many intelligence services for its size. Do you think the intelligence services still face a major restructuring?

The Czech Republic has three intelligence services. I think the number is not excessive. In today's dynamically developing world you can no longer find the traditional threats we used to be accustomed to. There is terrorism, a major phenomenon of our times. There are various forms of extremism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which is really becoming a crucial problem of the modern world. I believe that each of the three services has its place in the Czech Republic. There are so many tasks that we could not handle them even if we delivered a 120% performance. In my opinion, no big changes are needed. We can definitely discuss a second tier or mechanism of input control. No one from the Military Intelligence Service would oppose that. But I don't think any major restructuring would make sense now.

Some time ago, you were criticized for publishing information concerning your contribution to the capture of Osama bin Laden in your annual report. Looking back, do you think releasing the information was a mistake?

Yes, it was in the 2010 annual report. I don't think it was a mistake. I believe the Czech public should know that there exists a service which it is paying for. The citizens have the right to know that the service is really working, that it is working at its full capacity, and showing it is successful every now and then does not do any harm. If I were not a member of the service, which I soon will not be, I would like to know, as a citizen of the Czech Republic, what intelligence officers are doing for my money, for other taxpayers' money. I don't think it was a mistake. Of course, there was a big media case, a big bubble inflated around it. At the end of the day, however, nothing of it was proved to be right. There was no threat to our citizens. Actually, the threat following the first decision of the Parliament of the Czech Republic to send the Special Forces to Afghanistan in 2004 had been much greater. Nothing like that appeared in 2010.

You are known as a physically fit soldier, an athlete. However, you began putting on weight relatively soon after you had come to the ministry. Is it because of the nature of your job? Can you at all resist something like that when holding a position similar to yours?

I could perhaps that it is quite difficult, with the change of the job, many duties and things like that. However, I must honestly admit it is because of a combination of being self-indulgent, social events and service duties. In my case, there were also some health problems which I had to deal with. So, without making lame excuses, I think it can be resisted.

In what shape are you handing the Military Intelligence Service over to your successor? What do you think was your biggest accomplishment during the five years at the head of the Service?

I am very pleased that the hand-over of the position of the Director of the Military Intelligence Service was a ceremonial event attended by the Prime Minister and that it was, all things considered, a cultured process. That's how it should be. We had enough time for the hand-over. I am convinced we have accomplished



a lot during the five years, thanks particularly to my co-workers. The Military Intelligence Service is in good shape and is an integral and solid part of the security system of the Czech Republic, as well as those of the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU. I believe we have a firm place in the intelligence community, both in the Czech Republic and globally. Many of our achievements indicate we are handing the service over in a good condition, which means I am content. Understandably, there are still a few things that need to be improved. I think General Kovanda is the right man for the job, who will follow our footprints and move the service one or multiple steps forward.

When General Pícek's stint at the General Staff was almost over, there appeared information to the effect that you would succeed him as the new Chief of the General Staff. Did it also get to you?

I would lie if I told you it did not. I would be an incompetent Director of the Military Intelligence Service. However, I was saying from the very start that my career was following a slightly different direction. In fact, I have never been a part of the Army of the Czech Republic. I have never been subordinated to the General Staff, I have never worked there. I think it is quite logical that someone who has a different relation to the General Staff has been chosen.

During the several decades of your military service, you have advanced from the lowest rank to the second-highest one. What would you recommend to soldiers who are going to join the army now? What path should they follow, how could they contribute to making their own career a success?

I do not want to sound like a Dutch uncle. The fact is I was tremendously lucky. I started as a pupil at a military secondary school and have ended in the rank of a three-star general.

Apart from luck, you need a bulldog's patience and tenacity, reliance on your own abilities and, of course, a good team. To be able to advance so high, one needs the right people around him, support of his co-workers, and patience to advance step by step in one's career.

Your next job is the director of the Administration of State Material Reserves, which position probably requires some economic knowledge. Are you not you a bit afraid?

There is something that needs to be added. Under the legislation in force, the Administration of State Material Reserves takes care of strategic material reserves to be used in emergencies, natural disasters, but also in the event of a war. Which means the organization is very relevant in the security system of the Czech Republic. Naturally, economic issues prevail, but I am not afraid of that. I once again repeat that I see myself as a manager. Of course, I will not understand all economic matters from the very beginning. On the other hand, I am convinced I can handle management decisions even in this relatively complex field.

Is there any message you would like to convey to your former subordinates in the end?

I already said what I wanted to say to soldiers of the 601st Special Forces Group and officers of the Military Intelligence Service during the leaving ceremony. I wish all soldiers of the Army of the Czech Republic to handle all those restructurings and relocations with patience. They should not see their service only as a job, but also as a mission. And, understandably, when they are sent to a mission abroad, I will keep my fingers crossed so that all of them will return alive and unharmed.

by Vladimír Marek and Jan Procházka
Photos by Marie Křížová

Medical support and CBRN defence personnel of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic exercised mass casualty reception following an attack with radioactive agent

DIRTY BOMB: consequence management

The government of the state of Laprep requested the United Nations (UN) to provide relief aid. A coalition force with stock of materiel has been ordered to the area of crisis. However, the convoy has been attacked by the opposing forces not reluctant to use the so-called dirty bomb. The incident results in numerous casualties. Those must be immediately taken to a safe place, but mainly decontaminated and provided medical treatment. The closest NATO camp is about twenty kilometres away. The staff receive the order to activate the CBRN defence company and the field hospital. Scenario of Exercise Medical Man 2012 gets to the finale ...

therefore concentrated our effort on deploying Czech Armed Forces field surgical teams, who serve tours in the French military hospital in Kabul on rotational basis," specifies Major-General Aleš Opata, Deputy Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces – Director MoD Joint Operations Centre. Never say never applies in this case as well. A crisis with fatal consequence may come anytime indeed. That is the order for deployment during natural disasters, into humanitarian missions or stabilisation operations may come anytime.

"We would be able to respond operatively to potential requirements," General Opata explains. Very much like him, representatives of several foreign armed forces speak highly of the credible scenario that exercise Medical Man 2012



The final part of the Exercise Medical Man 2012 took place at the turn of May and June on the premises of the Hospital Base in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic. Together with the members of the 31st Chemical, Biologic, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Brigade, the local medical doctors and personnel improved their skills in receiving and treating casualties contaminated by weapons of mass destruction.

Exercise Medical Man, however, was not designed to test the current level of skills of the Czech Armed Forces medical and CBRN personnel. "This exercise is also a part of certification for the NATO Response Force (NRF). In case required, assigned Czech Armed Forces personnel may deploy anytime for crisis management operations worldwide," says the Support Force Commander, Brigadier-General Ján Gurník.

The commander of the Hospital Base in Hradec Králové, Colonel MUDr. Jan Österreicher, whose subordinate units include both the 6th and 7th Field Hospital, regards such type of field

training an optimal test of professional readiness of the specialists in training: "Each exercise of that type helps us maintain the capabilities the Hospital Base has and consequently develop them to the best current standards.

Although we practise mass casualty reception several times a year, there is no way for it to become a stereotype for us. Every deployment is unique: different location, different operational assignment, different task force structure. We build the field hospital accordingly, tailoring it to the mission. We inform the hard training with lessons learnt, particularly those from Afghanistan. We train to be adequately ready for possible foreign operational deployment," COL Österreicher concludes and remembers the Czech field hospital's last operational deployment in 2008.

"Presently we have no plans to deploy a full field hospital for a foreign operation. Our priority is Afghanistan, where brick hospitals have already been built in all key sectors. We have

plays. "Those are exactly the types of threats that NATO forces face on day-to-day basis. This is a highly realistic and current exercise scenario. Working together is important for medical and NBC personnel because they get to know each other better. One service is able to see how the other service works in a real situation. Not only we are gaining a better understanding of our personalities, but indeed we are cultivating our interoperability for possible deployments," officers in US, German and Hungarian uniforms concur.

True test with realistic scenario

Intensifying ambulance wailing indicates that the soldiers from assaulted unit are being brought into the Hospital Base areal. The exercise director calls signal Mascal, which is short for Mass Casualties. A group of approximately twenty persons arrive a couple of minutes

later. It is obvious already at the first sight that a number of individuals suffered very serious injuries ion the incident. That they have been contaminated only aggravates the situation.

Contaminated soldiers are first sorted at the field hospital's triage ward according to the nature of their injuries. "Those heavily injured naturally have the highest priority, so-called P1. In reality, those are patients in critical danger to life, whose condition demands urgent surgery," Lieutenant-Colonel MUDr. Michal Plodr, Chief 7th Field Hospital, states and goes on to say: "Next levels are P2, with deferrable requirement for surgery, and P3 that encompasses lighter injuries." Specifically, the field hospital personnel may receive two P1, five P2 and twelve to twenty P3 patients in one mascal alarm at a time. But let us get back in time a couple of minutes. P1 patients are progressively loaded on trolleys, undergo dosimeter check and get transferred to the decontamination line. Inside, they are extracted

from contaminated clothes, receive necessary treatment and deactivation of the radioactive agent. "We are able to decontaminate twelve to twenty heavily wounded patients with P1 and P2 priorities," adds Lieutenant Radim Zahradníček, leader of SICRA platoon of the 3rd Chemical Defence company, and specifies the capacity of for the least serious cases: We are able to handle up to thirteen P3 patients at a time. We manage to take care of a hundred and twenty to hundred and fifty contaminated soldiers in sixty minutes." Following this special procedure, they are taken care of by doctors and medical personnel and allocates them to individual specialists wards in the corridor of the modular field hospital. In a real-world deployment, the field medical facility would comprise a combined system of tent and container shelters interconnected to form functional units that may also operate autonomously. Just as a matter of interest: on withdrawal of the field hospital from Kabul four years ago, all

materiel and equipment was transported in as many as one hundred and ten ISO containers!

"Patient!" someone cries out loud. A servicemember with heavy injuries is brought shortly to the P1 site. Given the serious injuries, the verdict could be expected. "Urgently endangered patients get to the operating room within fifteen or twenty minutes maximum," LTC Plodr says.

Behind the field hospital corridor, the noise is heard produced by the helicopter that has just started to spin. One of the wounded soldiers needs to be immediately transported to a specialised facility of the Military Hospital. The W-3A Sokol pilot of the Czech Armed Forces Air Rescue Service Centre (HEMS), Captain Petr Šafařík, manages to take off within less than three minutes. The red-and-white "Sokol" gets airborne and heads for Prague ...

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba

Interview with Major Milan Vojáček, the first Czech airman to become a NATO E-3A AWACS aircraft commander



This news was undoubtedly intriguing for all aviation fans: the Czech Republic has the first captain flying the NATO E-3A AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) airplane: he is Major Milan Vojáček, presently a member of the Flying Squadron 1 the Operations Wing at Geilenkirchen airbase, Germany. He achieved the prestigious position of aircraft commander approximately halfway through his five-year contract that will expire in August 2014.

THE FIRST Czech AWACS AC

After an eight-hour mission, the Boeing 707/320 airplane with the typical dish antenna on top returns back to Geilenkirchen airbase. The machine with Luxembourg registration and tail number 90458 touches down on the concrete runway and taxis to its designated place exactly as instructed by the tower. Shortly after its Pratt & Whitney turbofans went silent, aircraft commander, Major Milan Vojáček, comes out of the NATO airborne early warning and control system. The welcome and explaining the reason for our visit only take seconds. Anything else would be at the expense of the time available. His invitation for us into the cockpit of AWACS airplane is irresistible. Attendees of an exclusive interview for a Czech defence media take their seats. Aircraft commander naturally gets seated in the left seat ...

Nose up? No way!

Joining any prestigious club may stagger one profoundly. "You have to ask my colleagues, whether I became haughty after the aircraft commander course or not. I do not think that is the case. By the way, you cannot have your nose up here. Why? Because it rains at Geilenkirchen quite often," the Czech military pilot smiles. After a pause, he goes on to say: "I take it as a milestone in my aviation career. For the first time, I am in

command of an aircrew with multiple members, plus it is right on the AWACS. That I am the first Czech in this post naturally delights me. In short, a chance came up and I grabbed it and have not let go. It is a professional pilot development, which you have to help a lot nevertheless, working hard regardless of time."

Eight! That is the ideal number of aircraft commanders in one flying squadron at Geilenkirchen. "So far, this has not been the case during my tour. Personnel turnaround rate is considerable. Most of the time, you would find three or four aircraft commanders and two instructors available at the squadron. The more extensive flight effort they are required to deliver," MAJ Vojáček explains and offers his personal stats: "I have been with the flying squadron for two years and logged roughly eleven hundred flight hours with AWACS during that time. Last year it was over six hundred." It might have implied for many readers that MAJ Vojáček already can do everything with the AWACS aircraft. What is the reality? "Not everything yet. Some manoeuvres are restricted to instructors only. But I have no doubts I would be able to perform them already now. But there is a rule here, that unless you are appropriately instructed on it at the Training Wing, you simply do not fly that – for example in-flight refuelling into the limits of

the refuelling boom. It is a standard for AWACS aircraft commanders is to keep the refuelling boom within the notional cube two by two metres without disconnecting the airplane from the tanker. Instructors must be able to fly the manoeuvre even more precisely, following the edges of the notional cube. In short, you have to be able to fly the limits."

The conversation turns to piloting the "seven-o-sevener with the dish". That is a subject MAJ Vojáček apparently indulges. He makes it clear how highly he values his qualifications. He never fails to underscore that achieving career goals with this operational NATO unit is always conditioned on enormous efforts by individuals. But that may differ too. Sending for an aircraft commander training course may serve as a good example. "There are several criterions. For example, one must have completed at least three hundred flight hours as the first pilot to advance to aircraft commander. My question is: is it a sufficient quantity of flight hours to make this professional leap? It is no secret that we spend much time orbiting in the sky and performing our specific role. Our log grows fast, but it is not adequately sourced by flight experience the way it is with tactical units, for instance. It is no exception for us to perform a twelve-hour flight with one take-off and one landing altogether.



That is why the number of 300 is not completely telling. In other words, if you successfully accomplish 300 hours as a pilot, you are not automatically qualified to advance. Professional readiness of individuals for an AC course is decided by squadron commander," MAJ Vojáček explains and says another hard requirement to become the aircraft commander is for pilots to have logged at least 2,000 flight hours in their career (regardless of aircraft type). MAJ Vojáček came to Geilenkirchen with total 1,100 hours and had to work very hard to complete the necessary nine hundred hours – contrarily to his colleagues from other NATO nations! "There are pilots coming to the airbase who have logged three to six thousand flight hours. For example, Canadians normally log five thousand hours flying C-130s. They already meet the minimum flight hour requirement, and so they can advance faster into the position of aircraft commander, or indeed instructor or inspector," the Czech Air Force pilot argues.

Czech language as well as repeated flashes in the cockpit naturally attract attention of other members of the multinational AWACS crew. Asked about their appraisal of cooperation with Czechs at the airbase, they concur: "Excellent!"

Enjoying high credit

In August last year, the Czech Armed Forces contingent at the Main Operating Base Geilenkirchen grew by one hundred per cent: from four to eight military professionals. Out of seventeen signatories, the Czech Republic has ranked among the few nations to have filled their assigned posts in full. In addition, the Czech posts are exclusively flying related, both as flight crew and mission crew members onboard the plane.

Personnel posting at Geilenkirchen airbase will however see some changes in foreseeable future. First, there will be a reduction in NATO structures, and additional changes will take place in relation with Canada's withdrawal from the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control (NAEW&C). "A number of important posts at

the NATO E-3A Component were allocated to Canada. Other nations indicate a high interest in obtaining those positions. They practically entail a truly unique experience," MAJ Vojáček says and adds that Portugal, for example, has a similar number of personnel with the Component like the Czech Republic, but there are about forty Belgians and forty Dutch personnel here. Both of the Benelux countries have bid ground specialists involved in various in supporting operations on the ground. Be it security of restricted access facilities, or logistic support posts, the Geilenkirchen airbase would not be able to deliver all its missions without them. "This NATO unit is currently not manned one hundred per cent. The Component needs to have its posts filled, regardless whether flight related or not. Some would like to see Czech ambitions much higher, but allocated funding is what plays the key role in the decision-making," MAJ Vojáček says sternly but accurately.

Deployment in Afghanistan

NATO E-3A Component flying squadrons take turns in serving one-month operational tours in Afghanistan. MAJ Vojáček has served already three operational tours downrange. Two times as NE-3A AWACS first pilot, and recently he had a premier run as the aircraft commander. "I can tell based on my own experience that missions in Afghanistan immensely expand professionalism and qualifications of flight personnel. You can easily tell those who have been deployed from those who have not. There is a great difference between our operational flights in crisis areas and training activities we carry out over Europe and overseas. When training, you have at the back of your mind that it is still practice, which you may adjust this or that way based on current situation. In a combat operation, you know that everything is real. Your bad decision may even have fatal consequences. Of course you get recommendations from your colleagues, but the commander has the final say. Therefore, you have to have a clear detailed picture of what

course of action you would take in unexpected situations.

You are the final authority to decide how the flight will be performed. That is your responsibility no one is going take off from you," MAJ Vojáček argues and also points out the need for mental resilience: "You are in control of a machine worth millions of U.S. dollars and you have a multinational crew of experts with specialist training behind you. You have to concentrate on your priority task and that is both to get safely into the sky and back on the ground." Flight activities are extensive in Afghanistan at the same time.

It is not exceptional for pilots to log over one hundred flight hours a month. We now newly operate from an Afghani airbase. "In the area of interest, we are an executive element controlling flight activities by military aircraft in support of the operation. It is always a combat mission, during which we use procedures practically unthinkable in Europe. We fly visual using the on-board systems. We fly on eyes there, because the local air traffic management services, including radar coverage, are not that high on quality as in the European continent," NATO E-3A AWACS aircraft commander MAJ Milan Vojáček says and quite understandably does not want to go into detail.

In response to the mention that the next career notch to climb to is the instructor post, MAJ Vojáček laughs heartily. "You know it would be nice. But it is not easy. Especially timewise, because it is mandatory to have completed at least three hundred flight hours as aircraft commander to qualify as an instructor and then you have to serve twelve months as an instructor with the Component. In general terms, what I described is a matter spanning two years. My contract will however terminate in two years' time. Going in for it would necessitate being given the offer in the upcoming months. We'll see..." MAJ Vojáček.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba

Looking back at two decades of Czech soldiers' participation in international missions

In the role of an emergency fire brigade

Early next year, the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic will celebrate its twentieth anniversary. During these twenty long years, our soldiers have been, inter alia, performing their duties and risked their lives in international missions in hot spots of the world, in tough climatic conditions, from the African Congo to mountain ranges of Afghanistan. This is exactly why we have decided to focus on these operations. However, there have been so many international missions during the last two decades they would deserve a full-sized book rather than a mere magazine article. We therefore present at least their list and a selection of the most dramatic moments that occurred in their course.

UNPROFOR/UNCRO

On Thursday, August 3, 1995, Tango 23 Observation Post manned by Sergeant Petr Valeš, Warrant Officer Luděk Zeman and other Czech soldiers, received an order to step up the observation time. A day later, the highest readiness condition, Red Alert, was announced. However, at that time the Croatian troops had already been launching Operation Storm (or Typhoon, according to some sources). At noon, an about thirty-strong group of Croatian troops accompanied by a handful of tanks had fought their way to Tango 23.

"We knew from the radio that other sections of the front had already been overrun and the situation there was relatively calm. However, the battle was still in full swing around our perimeter," recalled Senior Lieutenant Milan Nechvátal, then Deputy Platoon Leader, several years later.

By 2100, the situation had calmed down a bit. All of them believed the worst was over, but they kept monitoring the situation. They took turns every hour at the observation post. Early in the morning on Saturday, August 5, it was Petr Valeš's turn; he called out to Luděk Zeman to climb down from the observation post and be relieved. Right then several Croats rushed into the position held by our soldiers. They probably wanted to hide there.

"I and my other two colleagues were sitting right at the entrance of the bunker. We heard some voices and decided to find out what was going on. However, as soon as we left the bunker, a mortar shell landed directly atop it. I felt something hitting my thigh. I first thought it was just a ricocheted piece of rock. I was trying to get back to the bunker as fast as possible. The explosion cut off power, there was darkness all around us. I found out I had a splinter embedded

in my thigh only when the boys had brought torches," Warrant Officer Roman Čelanský recalled later.

Other soldiers were wounded as well. Sergeant Jiří Suda was hit in the back. Sergeant Jiří Hubáček suffered leg and arm injuries. When his colleagues took off his helmet, he found out he had been born anew; there was a fist-sized hole in it. Luděk Zeman and Petr Valeš suffered the most serious injuries. The former's legs were amputated by the explosion. The extent of the wound practically ruled out any possibility of survival. Even if qualified medical help had been available, he could hardly have been saved. Petr Valeš lost an arm, and also sustained a serious back injury.



"However, the APC with a doctor onboard, which had been dispatched to help us, was held up by the Serbs. The battle was still raging around. After lengthy discussions, the Serbs allowed only the doctor to pass, but he had to walk. The HQ finally decided to evacuate all soldiers, not just the casualties. There were many mines scattered all around. One of our drivers managed to start an APC which was moving ahead of us; we were following in its tracks. We realized that there could be an explosion at any time. It was an endless hike. However, the rest of us – less two excellent comrades – managed to get to the headquarters," was how Senior Lieutenant Milan Nechvátal described the ordeal.

SFOR

Our soldiers had to handle one of the first and most serious emergencies of the SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the village of Otoka. In the morning hours of April 19, 1996, several Muslim families took advantage of the free passage across the frontier line in this area. Some 300 people had eventually crossed the bridge. At about 1100, the Bosnian Muslims gathered on the main road connecting Otoka and Novi Grad and attacked a Serbian police station. Brandishing Muslim flags, they were marching on toward Novi Grad until they encountered an equally strong crowd of Serbs. The situation got extremely tense. Czech soldiers had to prevent the two crowds from attacking each other. During these critical moments, the Czech unit was led by Captain Petr Miler. The first intervention occurred at about 1400. Soldiers of the Czech battalion had to use live submachine and machine gun fire above the heads of the belligerent groups to separate them. The crowd got calmer for a while. However, the Czech soldiers had to repeat the procedure about an hour later. They expended about 1,200 rounds.

At 2100, Czech and Canadian liaison officers managed to arrange a meeting between representatives of the Muslims and the Serbs, which fortunately helped allay the situation.

KFOR

Of the many years that Czech soldiers spent in Kosovo, the year 2004 unquestionably ranked

among the most difficult ones. In the end of winter, extensive unrest and riots broke out in the region, including the area of operations of the Czech contingent. At that time, Czech soldiers had to deal with one of the hottest conflicts, in Lipjan. In the evening of March 17, the 2nd company dispatched a combined platoon there to assist the Finns. "We were marching against the crowd unassisted, without any APCs, just marching along our UAZ light off-roads," Platoon Leader Lieutenant Roman Ondroušek recalled later. And perhaps this was what worked. As a matter of fact, a rumour to the effect that a special unit would be deployed against them had spread among the Albanian Kosovars. "They were obviously scared of us. We were wresting the clubs they were holding from their hands and throwing them back into the crowd," Junior Warrant Officer Antonín Kropáček, the Section Leader, told us. However, even the experience unit member does not make any secret of the fact that our soldiers were in a really tight spot then. It was dark, hand grenades were exploding all around, and shots could be heard. In addition, the Albanian Kosovars were using downright dirty methods. There were often women and children marching in first ranks of demonstrators. Shooters were hidden among the crowd. People were throwing mostly stones, but there was an occasional hand grenade. Moreover, most members of Kropáček's section were rookies. However, none of them failed. They could rely on each other in the worst moments. The command wanted to make use of the language and cultural proximity of Czech soldiers, which was the reason why they were deployed, whenever possible, to be in direct contact both with rioters and the besieged Serbs, which was probably what counted most at the end of the day.

Enduring Freedom

The day was March 29, 2003, the time just a few minutes to 0200. An Iraqi missile struck in the Sharq Market commercial district of Kuwait City. The situation was very serious indeed.

Czech and Slovak CBRN specialists immediately dispatched two rapid reaction teams to the impact site. The things happening there at 0215





resembled Coney Island fairgrounds rather than anything else. The life of the Kuwaitis is probably boring and drab at other times. Instead of seeking a shelter when a missile has fallen on their city, they welcome every kind of excitement and try to push as close as possible to the ground zero. The Czech CBRN specialists feel rather odd as they measure toxic substances in the air amid the throng. However, Senior Warrant Officer Alan Kantor leading the rapid reaction team behaves like a professional he is. The warhead could contain biological substances with a long incubation time. He sends a lab technician to collect samples and take measurements. The Slovak team is supposed to repeat the measurements, to be on the safe side.

The blast wave produced by the explosion caused a lot of damage to this part of Sharq Market. Fortunately, there was no movie being shown in the local cinema, and there are no lives lost. Only two people sustained minor injuries.

Protective suits and masks clear the way for the Czech CBRN specialists. Junior Warrant Officer Jiří Milt opens an aluminium box. He energizes his meters and deposits samples into small bags. "There is nothing to see, I need some light," he splutters through his mask. When a cone of light finally cuts out the impact site

from the darkness around, he continues. "All clear, there's nothing here." The results of the measurements need to be reported to the analytical team stationed in the base compound. However, a heavy weight is lifted off the shoulders of our CBRN specialists. No weapons of mass destruction were used this time.

MONUSC

In January 2009, the fighting in the Congo resumed in full strength. Under an agreement with the Congolese government, some 5,000 soldiers crossed the border from Rwanda. A new offensive was launched. The Czech observer in the area, Captain Hynek Pavlačka, kept regularly notifying his superiors and the Czech embassy of the developments, so that even Czech citizens planning to visit the region had the latest information.

A difficult situation development at the time a decision was made to withdraw the 85th brigade of the Congolese army from the area. "Actually, they were not regular soldiers, and they did not look or behave like soldiers. Dressed in rags, dirty, stealing and plundering whenever and wherever they could. Rabble, to put it simply. They were moving on foot to their new base. They were liquidating elementary schools along

the way. They took the pupils with them and forced them to carry their weapons and supplies. When the pupils were too tired, the armed men raided another school and took another batch," described Captain Pavlačka. "People living in this part of the world still believe that if they eat a pygmy, they will acquire his strength, and if they cohabit with a pygmy woman, they will be sexually potent. So they were raping en route as well. One twenty-three years old woman died of multiple rape consequences in the Walikala Hospital."

Hynek Pavlačka was immediately interested in the case. He managed to collect enough evidence. However, he was repeatedly advised not to rock the boat, as government soldiers had been involved. He thus waited for an opportunity which materialized in the form of a meeting attended by UN observers, representatives of government forces, local police and non-governmental organizations. When he presented his evidence before this audience, the matter could no longer be hushed up. The trial with the soldiers was held right in Walikala. "The observers' credit among ordinary people rose immensely. All of them could see that we could even stand against government soldiers committing wrongdoings," Captain Pavlačka says. "The

85th Brigade was then replaced by the 1st Combined Brigade, which was vastly different from its predecessors. Its soldiers were disciplined and most of them spoke English. We were sharing information and what we agreed upon held good. I managed to convince the commander that exonerating the name of the national army was in their best interest. He was then drilling and watching his subordinates much more than before."

ISAF

Senior Lieutenant Jiří Luža left for Afghanistan on August 11, 2008. He served as the Deputy Commander of the Mobile Surveillance team in the Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team in Logar. On the first day of October, he was ordered to conduct reconnaissance and identify sites from which the enemy had been launching Chinese-made rockets against the base. The place to be reconnoitred was Baraki Barak, at the very edge of the area patrolled by our soldiers. The nickname of the mountainous area farther to the west was the Death Zone. The Taliban influence was much too strong there.

Four Humvees were moving along Route Georgia, but received an order to turn to an alternate route. After some time, they encountered

a wadi (a valley or arroyo, a result of erosion of a temporary stream in deserts or semi-desert regions), which was difficult to recognize from a distance. The Humvees could not negotiate the difficult terrain that well, and one of them got stuck. "We were trying to pull it out, when an incoming RPG flew in from our six o'clock, exploding some 2 meters from the vehicle. Unfortunately, right where our boys were. The enemy immediately opened fire from a machine gun and other small arms," was a subsequent description of Luža's subordinate, Warrant Officer Martin Karvan, whose role in the operation was that of a turret gunner. "My colleague in the turret of the other Humvee was the first to open fire. He had a grenade launcher and a PKB machine gun. He reacted perfectly. He showed us where the enemy fire was pouring from, so we could join him. We managed to dispose of one of the centres of the attack relatively soon."

The shrapnel produced by the RPG explosion injured five soldiers and some members of the team were busy attending to them. Others kept trying to recover the bogged-down vehicle. There were two journalists sitting in one of the Humvees. At this stage of the fight, the defence rested mainly on the shoulders of the turret gunners in the remaining two vehicles.

"As we were in the hot area and engaged in combat, we could not summon a medevac helicopter. I was trying to raise the base, we kept asking for air support, a medevac helicopter to be dispatched to the base, and a rapid reaction team to help us," Senior Lieutenant Luža recalled. "However, the radio communication was one-way only. No one confirmed they had received our information. We had to rely only on ourselves. We covered each other by fire and retreated step by step."

But then another of the vehicles got stuck in the wadi. They had to return for it. However, the enemy was so insistent that recovering the vehicle proved impossible. The soldiers erased the information in the radio and jammers, took their weapons and ammunition and blew the Humvee up. The crew of the vehicle, under cover of another Humvee which came to help them, then retreated. As soon as out of the range of enemy fire, the soldiers who could not find a place in the vehicle sat on its roof. In the meantime, the Czech and US quick reaction teams from Camp Shank were rushing to the incident site.

by Vladimír Marek

Czech Armed Forces' foreign deployments in 1993–2012

- UNPROFOR/UNCRO – Yugoslavia (1992–1996)
- IFOR – Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996)
- UNTAES – Croatia (1996–1998)
- SFOR I and SFOR II – Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996–2001)
- AFOR – Albania, Turkey (1999)
- KFOR – Kosovo (1999–2011, then only a team at HQ KFOR)
- Operation Essential Harvest – Macedonia/FYROM (2001)
- Operation Enduring Freedom – Kuwait (2002–2003)
- ISAF – Afghanistan (2002–today)
- Iraqi Freedom – Iraq (2003)
- IZ SFOR/MNF-I – Iraq (2003–2009)
- Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan, Special Forces (2004, 2006, 2008–2009)
- Operation Althea (EUFOR) – Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004–2008, then representation at HQ in Sarajevo, active)
- EUFOR Chad/RCA (2007–2009)
- Operation Headquaters EU BG – Germany (2009)
- Baltic Air Policing – Lithuania (2009, 2012)

- Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) – Egypt (2009, active)
- EU NAVFOR Atalanta – United Kingdom (2010, active)

Czech Armed Forces contributions to UN observer missions in 1993–2012

- UNGCI (United Nations Guards Contingent in Iraq) – Iraq (1991–2003)
- UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission) – Iraq (1991–1993)
- UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) – Yugoslavia (1992–1996)
- UNOMOZ (United Nations Operation in Mozambique) – Mozambique (1993–1995)
- UNOMIL (United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia) – Liberia (1993–1997)
- UNOMIG (United Nations Observers Mission in Georgia) – Georgia (1994–2009)
- UNCRO (United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia) – Croatia (1995–1996)

- UNPREDEP (United Nations Preventive Deployment Force) – Macedonia/FYROM (1995–1999)
- UNTAES (United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia) – Croatia (1996–1998)
- UNMOP (United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka) – Croatia (1994–2002)
- UNMOT (United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan) – Tajikistan (1994–2000)
- UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) – Kosovo (1999 – active)
- UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone) – Sierra Leone (1999–2005)
- MONUSC (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) – Democratic Republic of Congo (2000 – active)
- UNMEE (United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea) – Ethiopia and Eritrea (2001–2008)
- UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) – Liberia (2003–2008)
- UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan) – Afghanistan (2008 – active)

- UNSMIS (United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria) – Syria (2012)

Activities of the Czech Armed Forces in OSCE observer missions in 1993–2012

- OSCE – Georgia (1994–2005)
- OSCE – Moldova (1997)
- OSCE – Nagorno Karabakh (1995–2001)
- OSCE – Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996–2001)
- OSCE – Croatia (1997–2001)
- OSCE – Chechnya (1998–2001)
- OSCE – Albania (1999–2001)
- KVM (Kosovo Verification Mission) – Kosovo (1999)
- OSCE – Kosovo (1999–2000)

Missions of other international governmental organisations in 1993–2012

- DK NS (NNSC – Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission) – Korean Peninsula (1954–1993)
- MAPEXT-WEU – Albania (1998–2001)

Armed Forces of the Czech Republic has joined the NATO's Alliance Ground Surveillance program



A Sharp-Eyed Hawk

The compound housing the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, Belgium, is intertwined with a labyrinth of long corridors. A couple of inconspicuous offices are hard to find in the middle of one of them. They accommodate the implementation team of the Alliance Ground Surveillance program. Eight military personnel from five nations seek here to raise what has been a twenty-year-old idea that NATO should have own surveillance capability for the first time. An even more pleasing part of the story is that Lieutenant-Colonel Radek Šťastný, the Czech representative in NATO structures, has contributed his humble part to everything that has been accomplished since March 2010.

The idea to form a unit of NATO-owned surveillance assets first came up in the first half of 1990s and has undergone various developments since then. The initial plan was to have manned reconnaissance aircraft. In April 2004, NATO awarded the contract for AGS project design study to the Transatlantic Co-operative Industrial Proposed Solution (TIPS) consortium. A 2005 plan foresaw a fleet combining five manned Airbus 321 airplanes and seven Global Hawk RQ-4A unmanned aerial vehicles. The year 2007 saw the decision taken on creating a fleet of eight Global Hawk

unmanned aerial vehicles. As a result of budgetary restrictions, the number eventually came down to the current number of five. The concept had refocused on unmanned assets only, just fifteen nations remained involved in the project out of the original number of twenty-three. In September 2009, those nations signed the AGS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and established the so-called NATO AGS Management Organisation (NAGSMO). "When I came to this workplace over two years ago, the situation with the AGS project did not look really good.

Out of fifteen NATO nations that shared the system procurement cost, first Denmark pulled out in June 2010 and then Canada in August 2011. There was every indication that the project was verging on its clinical death. With France in the head, many nations were unwilling to support the project. The situation only improved when the NATO Secretary General sent official letter in autumn last year to all leaders of NATO nations, requesting their support for the project", explains Lieutenant-Colonel Šťastný, who had been responsible for aerial reconnaissance in the Czech MoD



Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare Department at that time.

"At that time, the future of AGS was subject to discussions on the highest level, but the most important were talks between the U.S. and France. The project was eventually green-lit. NATO Summit in Chicago in May earlier this year unanimously endorsed signing the contract for acquisition and subsequently its common funding. After long years of waiting and major changes, the AGS train has left the station and picks up speed every month. Hopefully no one will halt it anymore."

In the end, thirteen NATO nations including the Czech Republic joined the AGS project to share to total cost of EUR 1.2 billion. The Czech contribution will be approximately 1.7%. The project's life will span twenty years from 2018 till 2038. Funding the AGS operation, which is going to claim additional two billions Euro (EUR 79.3 million annually) in that timeframe, will be shared among all NATO nations except France and the United Kingdom, who have undertaken to compensate NATO's costs by providing national reconnaissance assets having a similar type of sensors.

Stationed at Sicily

The implementation team stationed at SHAPE Mons is to finalise the overall project concept by the end of 2012. U.S. naval air station Sigonella

in the east of Sicily was selected as the new location for this NATO component. That is because the U.S. Air Force has successfully operated Global Hawk UAVs for a number of years at Sigonella and there are basically all requisite facilities and operations there. In total, 511 service personnel are planned to be stationed there with majority of them assigned to intelligence and reconnaissance related posts, augmented with UAV operators, signal people and other support personnel. "The proposal that I submitted to my superior, the director of the MoD Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare Department, in June earlier this year recommended that we applied for one intel officer and two NCO operator / imagery analyst posts.

They would serve three-year tours at the base, but they would need to go for at least a six-month training course prior to that, depending on the post they would serve in." Lieutenant-Colonel Šťastný says and rules out that the Czech Republic would be in position to apply for pilot posts. Those will primarily be reserved for the US and NATO nations having in the inventory similar type of UAVs, who have already gathered some experience. "We have to build on the body of experience we have gained. The Prostějov-based 102nd Reconnaissance Battalion currently has in its inventory the Raven mini UAVs with optronic sensors providing Imagery Intelligence (IMINT). To cover the requirement for a brigade-equivalent task force, we would need one more bigger tactical unmanned aerial vehicle with the same type of sensors. We have to be hopeful of acquiring it sometime down the line," LTC Šťastný smiles. "In my view, filling operator posts would be a great asset for the Czech Armed Forces in such situation. There is a simple reason for that – Global Hawk also has a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) capability which falls into IMINT too. Global Hawk operators must have a good knowledge of imagery analysis, which Raven operators have. At the end of the day, UAVs make the world go round these days. Czech servicemembers would gain considerable specialist and language skills and they would also benefit from working in international environment, all of which may well benefit the Czech Armed Forces upon their return."

Movement detection capability

A forty-four strong AGS command headquarters will be responsible for the Sigonella

operating base. The AGS command stationing location remains unresolved for the time being. The least likely option is that it would be located at Sicily as well. There are rather talks of subordinating it to the SHAPE at Mons, or possibly to the Air Component Command (ACC) based at Ramstein, Germany. Collocating the headquarters with the NATO Airborne Early Warning (NAEW) overseeing the AWACS system operation is also an option under consideration. The Czech Armed Forces should be allocated the post of Chief Ground Intel. "A sort of a pitfall in my view is that our AGS implementation team that is embryonic for the future AGS headquarters builds on the so-called Voluntary National Contribution (VNC) posts. In other words: nations currently filling the posts will not necessarily fill them in the future either; any NATO nation may apply for those posts down the road. The process of changing the posts for individual nations takes roughly 18 to 24 months. While we already are represented on the AGS project, practically from its inception, I believe it would be good to continue the effort. We may only remain hopeful that there will be the will in the future to have our people both in the AGS command headquarters and the operating base down at Sicily z," Lieutenant-Colonel Šťastný underscores.

First NATO troops should come to Signella as early as 2014, because there will be the requirement to perform military tests of the Global Hawk Block 40 unmanned aerial vehicles and develop all necessary facilities. Original plans were that the initial operational capability of the surveillance system will be achieved already in 2014 and the full operational capability in 2017. But it has already become evident that everything will be postponed by twelve months.

As mentioned, the unit will be equipped with High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) Global Hawk RQ-4B Block 40 aircraft with MP-RTIP type of radar capable of detecting moving ground targets and providing SAR. Contrarily to its predecessors, Block 40 aircraft have a bigger wingspan, more powerful engine and an APU. It also has dedicated flight control software for high altitude operations. The slotted antenna array radar with active electronic beam steering will provide all-weather high-precision terrain profile mapping capability, making it possible to locate and identify nearly all stationary and moving land and sea targets.

Thanks to the Ground Moving Target Indicator (GMTI) technology that uses the



Doppler principle, the system is able to automatically discriminate moving targets from the background.

The capability will also be able to track them and predict their movement based on target characteristics and ambient terrain. The technology is planned to be able to compare very minor changes in the terrain with its digital map library to detect alterations on the surface, critical defence infrastructure or false targets. Therefore, it is also capable to detect spots with improvised explosive devices. The radar will be able to detect several tens of thousands of moving targets.

TGGS & MGGS ground stations

Besides Global Hawk UAVs, the project comprises take-off and landing operations, sensor control, a communication information system and mobile ground stations. Using those two stations, the unit will be deployable worldwide. Specifically, that will involve two TGGS (Transportable General Ground Station) stations providing operational level support. Those facilities will be housed in airconditioned tent shelters and will be operated by a crew of eleven service personnel. In addition to that, there will be six MGGS stations (Mobile General Ground Station) providing tactical support. MGGS station

will be mounted on truck platforms and operated by a crew of two.

Data will be transmitted via standard terrestrial or satellite connection near real-time using standard communications or satellite connection. In simple terms, the ground station operators will be able to receive data from the Global Hawk, evaluate them, communicate to the forces authorised to get that support, and send it back to the main operating base via satellite. From there, data or the end product will be sent on via the NATO Network Enabled Capability (NNEC) to users at strategic command echelons and national elements.

"In case the ground stations are neither used nor deployed in specific situation, the Global Hawk will transmit its data via satellite to the Sigonella main operating base, evaluate and fuse them in the operations centre and distribute them to end users. The chain of command for this to be realised is yet to be determined under the prepared concept of operations. That way we are able to provide information to people with decision-making authority from tactical to strategic level. All gathered data will be collected in the main operating base at Sigonella. All NATO interoperable surveillance systems are planned to feed the facility down there as well." LTC Šťastný explains.

NATO nations' armed forces will be able to connect all data gathered by AGS into their national command and control systems. It has not been decided yet, which Czech Armed Forces component will be the recipient of the information.

Airborne up to thirty hours

Global Hawk has airborne endurance up to thirty hour. It flies at altitudes up to twenty thousand metres and it has practically has a global reach. The system may autonomously operate simultaneously in two locations on the globe.

"Global Hawk would take off from Sicily and make a transfer flight into NATO's area of interest, such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran. It has the capability to fly down over South Africa, which is about seven thousand kilometres, perform an eight-hour surveillance mission and fly back. But it does not necessarily need to take off from the main operating base. In order to save time required for the transfer flight, it may fly for its orbits from a take-off and landing airfield located in proximity of TGGS and MGGS in case of their deployment," Lieutenant-Colonel Šťastný confirms. "According to the original plan, the AGS system with five UAVs was to deliver up to five thousand flight hours a year. We were intended to be capable of being on two orbits twenty-four hours a day seven days a week for thirty days with the aircraft taking turns directly in the orbit. But given the financial cuts and the ensuing cut of flight hours down to four thousand a year, the reality is nevertheless much more sober. With five machines, we are able to provide two twenty-four hour sorties a week for ten months a year and in case of operational requirement such as Operation Unified Protector in Libya, we may have two aircraft in the air nonstop for one month twice a year. So, the AGS train is already rolling. The other good news is that Denmark announced in May earlier this year its intention to return among the thirteen nations organised in NAGSMO, or indeed NAGSMA. Some NATO nations have begun to take an intensive interest in possibly filling posts in the AGS implementation team. The Czech Armed Forces will hopefully be an integral part of the Allied Ground Surveillance program in foreseeable future."

by Vladimír Marek and Jan Procházka
Photos by Vladimír Marek and A Review

Aerial targets

Engaging targets in the air is one of the most complex missions the military has. It demands a high-quality and intensive training, to which there is however a corresponding price tag. One of the ways to make it cheaper is to employ target drones.

The air defence of the Czech Republic is currently provided by fighter aircraft, older missile systems and the 2K12 KUB, 9K32M Strela-2M, 9K35M Strela-10M as well as the new short-range RBS-70 (usually designated RBS 70 abroad). According to the White Paper on Defence and in line with NATO recommendations, the Czech Armed Forces should keep and develop short range air defence capabilities. The live fire exercise for the RBS-70, which newly tested target drones, was designed along these lines.

Live fire too expensive

An effective training must be performed to keep the ground based air defence capability concentrated in the 25th Air Defence Missile Brigade in Strakonice on operational readiness standards. RBS-70 operators and other crew members do not learn to fire their systems in lecture rooms. Simulators would not address the whole challenge either. Full training claims real environment in the field and naturally live firing at real targets. But that is costly. The Czech GBAD guys have been forced to go for training into foreign countries to date. Our shrinking military training areas have not allowed for live exercises to take place without endangering areas outside the ranges. Indeed, such is not completely new. Prior to 1989, crews operating the Dvina (SA-2), Volkhov (SA-2), Neva (SA-3), Krug (SA-4), Kub (SA-6) and Osa (SA-8) air defence missile systems travelled for live fire exercises into the vast training areas in the former Soviet Union. Only the firing of the Strela-2M (SA-7) and the Strela-10M (SA-13) could be performed in the domestic ranges. But both types are scheduled for phasing out and their service life draws to end due to obsolescence and lack of missiles.

Prior to November 1989, then Czechoslovak ground-based air defence crews, especially and operators of calibre 30mm and 57mm anti-aircraft guns also trained in Slovakia (Kežmarok

and Malacky MTAs). The division of Czechoslovakia in 1993 ridded us of many possibilities, including in terms of defence and training.

The Czech Armed Forces has sent GBAD and airmen into Sweden and GBAD guys also into Poland for live exercises. Firings aim to engage target drones, or towed targets, which are a fabric sleeve suspended behind the aircraft on a line several kilometres long, which have been in use since World War I. As a part of their predeployment training ahead of going to Afghanistan, Czech helicopter pilots also went France, Spain and Israel. Costs of sending soldiers for training, their per diem, transportation, housing, range rent, target systems, insurance etc, count in ten million Czech korunas per one training exercise. But it gets much higher with the Air Force. But the GBAD guys now have a chance to achieve substantial savings.

Target drones for Czech Armed Forces

The Czech MoD has recently sought to make GBAD training cheaper by having the RBS-70 SHORAD system operators train at home. The MoD National Armaments Office concluded that the form of training and live fire exercises for RBS-70 system operators had not been realistic enough. Live firing has only been done at fixed targets – moored balloons. In practise, operators acquire weather balloon wrapped in aluminium foil, which is moored at constant height above the ground. In a way, it imitates a helicopter, and whilst on the ground, it also represents a tank, because RBS-70 may also serve as antitank weapon. But the target is static, which makes the engagement a lot easier.



An RBS-70 launch: the missile jettisons the booster

But moving targets are a challenge: when used in the constrained Czech training areas the missiles may hit the ground outside designated training areas and endanger life or property of local citizens.

The target unmanned systems technology was selected is an option to meet that challenge. Contrarily to balloons, the drone moves in the air and may be kept within the boundaries of the training area. The Czech Armed Forces did not seek a foreign supplier this time. The assignment was to develop a training target drone technology demonstrator. The drone was required to fly at various speeds and be equipped so that it would imitate a real-world airplane in the air, including radar signature. The drone operator would have the option of controlling throughout the flight, or preprogram the flight trajectory and only take control for take-off and landing. Two versions were required: one as a target drone to be engaged and the other one as training airplane for practising RBS-70 operator and crew activities repeatedly. The requirement for an extensive performance envelope resulted into designing two drones with different propulsion, including jet engines. The reason for that was the requirement to imitate three types of targets. For combat airplanes, the required speed is up to 500 km/h, around 200 km/h for helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles may cover the whole spectrum. Delivery and use of the drones is planned as a service to be provided by a commercial contractor. The first stage of the project was to define safety zones for firing RBS-70 in ranges in the Czech Republic and to produce a technology demonstrator. The assignment includes development of methodology for engaging the target drones. A state-subsidised military maintenance plant, currently named VOP CZ, became the principal project contractor. As a matter of fact, it encompasses all defence institutions developing and manufacturing of ground hardware. In terms of technology, development is overseen by the VOP CZ Slavičín Division, the former Military Technical Institute of Arms of Ammunition (VTÚVM), which has a track record of developing and manufacturing arms and weapon systems components.



HAES 400 aerial target on the launching ramp

Two solutions

Two companies eventually decided to realise development and manufacture technology demonstrators. They adopted somewhat different approach to attain the solution. The HAES Group, a joint venture comprising Hacker a.s. and E.S.C. (Evolving Systems Consulting) companies, launched its HAES 400 unmanned aerial vehicle already two years ago. Besides other lines of business, HAES engages in development and manufacturing of RC model airplanes as well as parts for weapons and space programs. They have financed the development of a target drone using their own funds. There are three versions of the general HAES 400 solution, which differ in propulsion. The oldest model uses a combustion two-cylinder engine, whereas the newer variant is equipped with electrical engine or a small jet engine. The delta-winged plane without stabiliser has a robust design. The fuselage houses autopilot with GPS, sources, servo control system transforming electrical commands into mechanical action, and material giving a radar signature adequate to a real combat aircraft. Engine with propeller having tilting units is at the back of the fuselage. The start is provided by a collapsible ramp designed similarly as those used by foreign competitors.

This solution makes it possible to operate the drone virtually in any type of terrain. With length and wingspan nearly 2.5 metres, the drone takes off using a rubber band tensioned manually by a winch or an electric motor connected to a car battery. The drone is operated and controlled via antennas by a laptop connected to control panel with joysticks throughout the flight; the trajectory is shown on the display and stored in the computer memory.

The present HAES 400 technology demonstrator with electric propulsion lands on its plastic stub under the fuselage, which requires sufficiently flat surface without rocks or shrubbery that could potentially damage the airframe.

The ARXEA company demonstrated three various target drones built on airframes of commercial models modified to customer requirements. The solution accelerated the development and perhaps made it cheaper, as it mostly

Director of MoD Force Planning Division Brigadier-General František Mičánek:

"We seek to keep abreast with technology. developments At the moment, we use fixed targets (moored balloons) and today's demonstrations represent the first step towards moving the operators closer to the reality on the ground in the battlefield. Aerial targets are the means we would like to pursue down the road in order to increase quality of our training. The 25th Air Defence Missile Brigade has gone for live fire exercise mainly to Poland so far. The possibility to use the domestic weapons range in the Boletice MTA would be ideal, because the safety limits enable us to operate RBS-70 systems as well target drones without posing any threat to the civilian population. The requirement is for five to ten aerial targets a year and approximately five balloons. We assume the price of this target drone could oscillate around CZK 200,000. That is peanuts compared to costs of travelling abroad, which amount to CZK 15 to 20 million. Unmanned aerial systems can also be used for lead-in training of RBS-70 operators, specifically for tracking. In the future, we will provide basic training on trainers and then have field training exercises, including live fire at balloons and then target drones. RC models flown in the field have a good potential for rationalising our training for live firings. We want to acquire the target drones as a service. It is favourable for Czech Armed Forces that we have two businesses here, as it creates a competitive environment and we are able to achieve better pricing. We will adjust tender specifications based on the lessons we learnt in today's live firing exercise. We plan to acquire the service within two years' time."



concentrated on avionics, specifically flight control and monitoring. The shape of the drones is roughly based existing types which may be an advantage for RBS-70 crews, who may follow it using optical devices. The first drone, the FDIVC-2/B (target drone 2 version B technology demonstrator), resembles of a common sport trainer airplane; the FDIVC-2/E looks like a motor glider and the third one, the FDIVC-1/D, resembles of small jet engines for target drones used by several air forces and is probably a state-of-the-art product worldwide in technology terms. All three planes are able to take off from the ground, best from paved roads or other flat surfaces several dozen metres long. Propeller types may also be hand-launched. The FDIVC-2/B and FDIVC-1/D use landing gear whereas the FDIVC-2/E motor glider jettisons the gear after take-off and lands on a skid under its fuselage. Regardless of the slim wing and big wingspan concept, the motor glider flies at maximum speed nearly 200 km/h thanks to the appropriate wing profile and fuselage aerodynamics. All three aircraft are equipped with small cameras in the nose, which enable the operator to have a pilot's view online during the flight and record the footage.

Drones of both companies use commercial model components, such as electric motors, servos, gyros, transmitters, which helps save time in development and serial production. The variants used for repeated training are envisaged to be equipped with a parachute as the best landing system, as it does not demand cleared and paved landing areas. So, most of the evaluation effort will focus on functionality and reliability of avionics on all types demonstrated.

Engaging various targets

Servicemembers of the 252nd Air Defence Battalion of the 25th Air Defence Brigade stationed in Strakonice were probably enjoying the live exercise and presentation of target drones most. They took turns to acquiring and engage target drones and the moored meteo balloons. Live exercises are a feast for them, which only takes place maximum two times a year due to budgetary restrictions. Besides four RBS-70



Interior of the FDIVC-2/E motorised glider

RBS-70

RBS-70 (Robotsystem 70) air defence missiles system has been manufactured by Saab Bofors Dynamics corporation since 1977. The RBS-70 is a man-portable short-range ground-to-air missile system with effective range from 250 to 8,000 metres. Three missile variants were progressively developed with different electronics and flight speed. Mark 01 with Mk. 1 and Mk. 2 variants has maximum speed M 1.6, whereas Mark 2 Bolide already flies at M2.0 – close to 2,500 km/h. Contrarily to the popular Strela 2, Igla or Stinger missiles that use infrared homing, the RBS-70 missile warhead is laser guided. The team has connectivity to other ground based air defence assets. The guidance system minimises the possibility of jamming the warhead and increases the hit probability. At the drone's flight level above 100 ft, the system achieves 95% hit probability. The Czech Armed Forces has already uses the Mk. 2 and Bolide missiles only; the Mk. 1 missiles are designated for practise live firing. Targets are eliminated by explosion of the warhead that is initiated by proximity fuze. In the Czech Armed Forces, an RBS-70 team with one launcher and several containers with missiles is carried on a Tatra T 810 PVO truck. The RBS-70 is in the inventory of 21 countries.



teams and the SURN Cz radar capability with crew, the live exercise also saw the participation of the RACCOS automated command and fire control system truck, the PEU POSI facility and teams equipped with aerial observer kits

(AVZP). The systems are integrated to the RBS-70 operators via the team leader to the effect of providing assistance on the so-called rough guidance. An RBS-70 team comprises seven personnel, a Tatra 810 PVO truck driver, two commanders, two operators and two loaders. That provides for 24/7 duty shift manning.

The activity commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav Daverný, the commander of the 252nd air defence missile battalion, emphasised an interesting fact. The assignment for contractors was as tough as possible in order to prove compliance with technological and tactical possibilities of the demonstrated target drones. The manufacturers' cooperation with the military has always proven well in the GBAD domain, as it increase the likelihood of redressing teething problems early and enables fine-tuning the product better. Tracking the miniature airplanes was not really easy for RBS-70 teams, because the drones sometimes flew against the backdrop formed by trees on hillsides, not the sky. But all the targets were detected nevertheless. One was shot down successfully.

by Martin Koller

The author is grateful to Mr. Petr Hák of the MoD National Armaments Office for informing this article

The NATO Multinational Military Police Battalion attained certification in exercise Sharp Lynx in Wedrzyn, Poland, and is ready for operational deployments

Lynx claws instead of bear

An intensifying noise is coming from a location far away, in which trained ears would recognise a helicopter rotor turning. A worm comprised of Croatian special counterterrorist unit personnel has been already leaning against the outer wall. Automatic weapons aim forward, upward, sideward and rearwards. It just takes a couple seconds for one of the squad members to fix a plastic explosive and the access door gets smashed into pieces.

The commando makes an aggressive forced entry while another team abseil onto the building from a helicopter. Only cries, explosions and gunfire are heard. Terrorists holding hostages are eliminated and the kidnapped persons freed. The security situation in this location is however unstable. It is necessary to clear the area as soon as possible. One of the squad members with a hostage get hooked on a rope hanging from the helicopter. Slung under the chopper, they fly away to a safe place. A convoy of offroad vehicles storm in before the building. Soldiers and escorted kidnappers cram inside and only the kicked dust remains on the road in a couple of seconds.

Ten years' preparation coming to a fruition

This was roughly the course of one of the episodes comprising the NATO Multinational Military Police Battalion exercise Sharp Lynx 2012 that took place in the Wedrzyn military training area in Poland. The history of the project of multinational military police battalion goes back to 1999. NATO then came up with the strategy of defence capabilities designed to allow deploying forces into crisis areas, arming, equipping and sustaining them to be able to effectively face the opponent. Three years later in the NATO summit in Prague, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Croatia agreed to contribute a multinational military police battalion. Bulgaria initially took part in the project and Ukraine also considered doing so, but they eventually gave up.

December 2005 timeframe saw works commence on the implementation agreement and steering, coordination and budfin groups were established in March 2006. National military

police representatives signed the implementation agreement in June 2007. In the following year, Wedrzyn, Poland, was the venue to the first exercise for the MNMPBN, exercise Black Bear 2008. The series then comprised exercises in the Březina/Vyškov Military Training Area in 2009, in 2010 in Gasinec, Croatia, and at Lešť, Slovakia, in 2011.

The multinational battalion or its components may perform military police missions in support of NATO task force or deploy for policing operation in crises areas. Those efforts involve peace support operations, consequence management after natural disasters, evacuation of non-combatants and assistance and support to civilian authorities. The agreement also contains provisions defining the conditions under which the unit may be used in operations involving prisoners of war.

Evaluator from Gendarmerie

The Black Bear training exercise series was to practise and improve the NATO multinational battalion in planning and performance of military police missions in stabilisation operations using different equipment and weapon systems. MP support missions rehearsed in the exercise fully reflected the requirements for the battalion's planned operational capabilities. Exercise Sharp Lynx 2012 differed from the Black Bear exercise series particularly because it represented the culmination of a several years' training effort and involved final certification according to CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation) methodology. The evaluation process itself is conducted by Military Police specialists from countries involved in the project. In addition, a monitor was called in from the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe:





Lieutenant-Colonel Sebastian Dordhain, a planning, doctrines and evaluation specialist with the background of many years' service with the French Gendarmerie.

Once the process is accomplished, the battalion will be able to perform the whole spectrum of military police missions defined under the related STANAG. The rationale behind the procedure is to make sure the unit has capabilities on same standards as other Allied forces deployed for operational tours.

Poland represented most

Same as Slovakia and Croatia, the Czech Republic has contributed a platoon to the multinational battalion. The lead nation for the project, Poland has the largest representation with its assigned company and a combat support service unit. In addition to that, individual nations are represented in staffs as well. Besides the two Polish companies and three national platoons, the MNMPBN structure comprises an investigation section, battalion staff and a command component. Reporting directly to the MNMPBN commander, the investigation section was headed by Captain Marcin Swiecicki during the exercise.

That component engages in investigation and documenting of incidents that may happen. All national units are normally based at their home stations and the battalion only assembles for joint training, which must be preceded by signing an agreement on transferring those units into the command of the MNMPBN commander. The multinational battalion has the authorised strength of 278 service personnel. Croatia and Slovakia both contribute thirty-one personnel; the Czech Republic contributes forty-one MPs and a hundred and seventy-five service personnel were provided by Poland. For exercise Sharp Lynx, Poland also provided support personnel, as well as opposing forces and seasoned role-players who performed excellently in the roles of domestic inhabitants making use of their extensive first-hand experience they gained downrange.

The NATO MNMPBN commanding officer was the experienced Polish Lieutenant-Colonel Grzegorz Pardo, a graduate from the Tadeusz Kosciuszko Higher Officers' School in Wrocław

and National Defence Academy, who serves as the Commander of Military Battalion in Minsk Mazowiecki. His deputy commander of the multinational battalion was Czech Major Miroslav Balogh, whose background includes training Afghan National Police at Camp Shank in Logar, Afghanistan. Captain Zdeněk Koreczki of the Military Police Command Olomouc was assigned to the post of battalion's chief of staff.

"From my perspective, one of the most challenging tasks in this exercise is to harmonise the staff, as it comprises representatives from four national armed forces in individual sections that are to interact successfully. Naturally, language barrier also poses a challenge to an extent," Major Balogh elaborates.

Crowd control

Another task for the MNMPBN in exercise Sharp Lynx was to provide security coverage to a meeting of the top allied commander with local leaders in the Nowy Mur community. The Czech MP platoon comprising personnel from the MP Security Command Prague and MP Command Olomouc acted as the quick reaction force in this instance. They deployed around the railway station with assignment to control the outer perimeter and be ready for action within five minutes should any drama take place. "Now we are awaiting further orders. In the Czech Republic, we may be called up to similar duties in the aftermath of an airplane crash or a large-scale road accident. The Integrated Emergency Management System is authorised to request us to secure the area of interest and provide for unhampered investigation of the whole event," commander of the Czech platoon First-Lieutenant Igor Szabó explains.

But he is called to report to the deputy battalion commander, Major Miroslav Balogh. The route initially planned for the convoy carrying the senior NATO commander has to be changed for security reasons. ILT Szabó assigns two vehicles from his pool to lead and escort the convoy.

In a bid to avoid improvised explosive devices and potential contact with insurgency, the convoy chooses the route that is significantly more difficult to pass. Once they enter the community, it instantly attracts the attention of the locals. The



air gets thick with endless series of claims as well as with bottles with water and sticks.

The senior NATO commander is played by one of the evaluators – Czech Armed Forces Lieutenant-Colonel Roman Gottfried. They are able to get into the town hall without any major problems, and the talks are also pretty seamless. Their departure from community is however a bit more complicated. The crowd turns cars over and seeks to block the convoy using anything they get their hands on. An Alligator armoured vehicle (assigned to the battalion by Slovakia), which carries the senior commander to and from the meeting, nevertheless manages to break through.

It was obvious already early in the morning that the security situation in the area had been worsening. The protesting locals gathered at the entry gate to Camp Eagle, where the battalion HQ had been based. One of the locals was allegedly knocked down by an MNMPBN vehicle and suffered fatal injuries and the protesters demanded that those responsible be handed over to them. But they also wanted food and other materiel some of the soldiers promised to give them some time ago. This time around, the negotiators, who included Captain Koreczki and Lieutenant-Colonel Gottfried, managed to mollify the discontented and the crowd dispersed. In the next episode, the Czech MPs with their Polish colleagues had a chance to practise crowd control in their anti-riot gears.

Special incapacitating nets shot from assault rifles and various tasers were also used to eliminate individuals during the exercise. The Czech Military Police has not used those devices extensively so far. "It is expedient to escalate the used force progressively. It is definitely to first use non-lethal weapons than those that may hurt or kill people – and that is where all those nets, tasers and paralyzers come in handy," Major Balogh expands.

Surveillance systems

Major Balogh is currently at the MOPRO mobile command post, which is a rather unique facility the Czech Military Police assigned to the multinational battalion. The command post housed on an Iveco truck may operate autonomously using its own power generator. It is

equipped with two table-top computers and two laptops, plus it also has own radio. "Back in the Czech Republic, we use this vehicle in emergencies such as flood, airplane crash, search for missing persons and the like. The capability enables the response commander and his operators to communicate with their subordinate units," MSG Roman Ponoš explains. "We are using the capability in exercise Sharp Lynx to monitor the building in the Nowy Mur community, where the meeting was held of senior NATO commander with local government officials. To that effect, we mounted a part of the SOM 5 security monitoring system on top of the vehicle roof. That way we are able to get data on what is happening around the building we provide security to."

Just a couple of kilometres on, at Camp Eagle, there is another Czech capability active – the SOM 3 security and monitoring system, which is much more sophisticated than SOM 5, is highly mobile and provide a higher comfort. It is transported on two Tatra trucks. The Czech Military Police has had the system in its inventory since 2007. It is primarily designated to provide security to external perimeter of buildings or facilities and/or access control. The two trucks carry both the systems and all the support operations including power generator and housing for troops.

The system may operate completely autonomously, independent of any support. "We have provided security to and monitored the battalion command post in exercise Sharp Lynx. We are monitoring the internal perimeter surrounding the command post and the surrounding areas of the camp including access roads and surrounding terrain," Warrant Officer Michal Vágner explains. The system comprises of four sensor units, each of them having optical sensors, day TV camera, low-light camera and IR camera. "Thanks to that combination, we are able to see virtually nonstop, regardless of lighting conditions. All three optical sensors complement each other. We also have electronic ground surveillance radar, the Bligher 202 at our disposal. This is an alert system with range up to four kilometres. In ideal ambient conditions, the sensor units have a range of eight hundred meters at night and we are able to identify a human



target in the terrain over fifteen hundred metres," Warrant Officer Vágner comments. "The way it is designed is that the building we are to provide security to, for instance a base on foreign deployed operation, should be located in a plain area. The external perimeter should be as deep as possible for us to be able to react to any motion."

Attacked from behind

The battalion staff received the information that one of the soldiers had been missing. The individual was later confirmed kidnapped by insurgents, and the location was established he had been held. A rescue operation got soon underway involving all national units comprising the battalion.

Land Rover vehicles of the Czech platoon were the first to make a fast approach to the building. "We instantly got under a fierce fire. In addition, the area in front of the building did not provide for a good cover. So, we had to run across the road and seek a more appropriate terrain profile as fast as we could. That phase was pretty demanding," Lieutenant Michal Čtverák describes. "We train for the like affairs quite frequently, so it did not throw us off balance. A Polish unit arrived in the meantime with the task to provide cover for us." The very assault on the building was assigned to the Croatian MP platoon, which is most experienced in the like ops. Its members were to abseil to the building from helicopter. A strong wind prevented the first drop and the helicopter needed to go around for another attempt. A ground attack was launched in parallel.

Insurgents were eliminated after a short skirmish, but an unexpected complication occurred at that stage. Having used an underground tunnel system, another group of insurgents unexpectedly appeared behind the Czech and Polish warfighters. "They began shooting at us from the back, which caught us by surprise a bit. The referee designated me injured. It would all be even more realistic, if we would have the MILES simulation system, or the FX marking ammunition. I reported that I had been injured.

The fire produced such noise that others could not hear me initially. But it is also a valuable experience for us," Warrant Officer Robert Patolán describes. "Colleagues had an opportunity to try working casualties under fire. They first provided treatment to me and requested MEDEVAC. Then they took me on a truck to the staging site, where a helicopter had landed. The chopper then transferred to the area medical facility."

The Poles also had two casualties. The Slovaks secured the outer perimeter and provided



cover to the withdrawing forces. Most of counterterrorist operations were performed by the Croatian platoon in cooperation with other military police officers. The Croatian unit has been primarily trained for such missions and is a component of Military Police Regiment of the Croatian Armed Forces. The unit's history dates back to 1993. It underwent a series of reorganisations, the last of which took place in 2008, renaming it from Military Police Counterterrorist Unit to Special Military Police Company. Their quality shows in outstanding arms, equipment and training, but also a highly demanding selection of applicants. Out of several hundred applicants, only eight succeeded in the last round.

In command from January

At the beginning of the next year, Lieutenant-Colonel Roman Gottfried of the Czech Military Police will be assigned the new commander of the multinational battalion. The staff structure should otherwise remain unchanged. Personnel will only be replaced in the rotation posts, including in the investigation section. "NATO Monitor Lieutenant-Colonel Sebastien Dordhain of France, who had the responsibility for overseeing that the unit be certified in accordance with NATO doctrines, confirmed the battalion was combat ready without any caveats," LTC Gottfried says. "As of now, this multinational force is available to the Alliance for possible deployment. Any NATO unit may now request the multinational military police battalion's assistance, either as a whole or selecting some of its components on modular basis. Deployment of individual national units is naturally subject to standard approval process according to national procedures. It therefore has to be mandated by national Governments and Parliaments."

The multinational MP battalion now strives to achieve affiliation and be assigned under command of the Multinational Corps Northeast based at Szczecin, Poland. "Then we will be in the pool of forces ready for deployment as a part of NATO MNC Command, which is scheduled possibly at the turn of 2014 and 2015. The battalion is scheduled to take part in several exercises next year. One of those is the annual exercise Crystal Eagle held in Denmark earlier this year. It is a standard exercise to train operations in support of restoring infrastructure, humanitarian relief operations and MP support to forces in their area of deployment. The scenario of exercise Crystal Eagle informed exercise Sharp Lynx 2012. In addition, we will be involved in a large-scale NATO logistic exercise Capable Logistician 2013 scheduled to take place in the Slovak Armed Forces' Military Training Area at Lešť. We would also like to tweak some details in communications," the new commander adds.

The Chief of Czech Military Police Colonel Milan Schulc also said he highly appreciated the standards of training the MNMP Battalion had displayed. "I think the unit is trained to high standards of readiness, which is indeed proven by the evaluation of the CREVAL certification team. The Multinational Military Police Battalion is a well-functioning example of how four countries may cooperate effectively. And that is what I see belongs to the future."

by Vladimír Marek

For the aviation engineer personnel of the 241st Transport Squadron, it is just a matter of several hours to rebuild the Airbus A-319CJ aircraft cabin into any medical seating variant

Get the MEDEVAC ready!

A couple of minutes before Tuesday noon, the phone rang in the office of the deputy commander of the 241st Transport Squadron. The command post at the Kbely airbase orders: "Prepare the MEDEVAC configured into two patient transport units and two stretchers. The expected time of departure is seventeen hours thirty five." In no time, Airbus A-319CJ cabin starts to be reconfigured into the required medevac version. Five hours later, the medevac plane is taking off Kbely airbase runway with the mission to bring back home heavily and lightly injured persons from Zadar, Croatia, in the aftermath of a road accident.

Strategic medical evacuation is a task involving multiple governmental agencies, not only the MoD components. Their interoperability with exactly defined tasks and time limits both in and off working hours has a single goal: to transfer the injured into domestic medical facilities as soon as possible.

MEDEVAC is not designated just for the Czech Armed Forces service personnel. In case of need, following communication with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, indeed it may transport any Czech citizen in immediate danger to life in into the Czech Republic.

The members of the aviation engineering service of the 241st Air Transport Squadron based at Prague Kbely contribute their part to the overall air repatriation effort: by installing and configuring the demanded medical systems into Airbus A-319CJ aircraft. "We operate two A-319CJ aircraft, but reconfiguring the cabin

into various medical variants is only possible on the airplane with registration number 3085 – the one that bears the historical name of General J. Ocelka DFC," says the deputy commander aviation engineer service the 241st transport squadron, Major Josef Karbulka, and adds that the other Airbus plane does not have the provisions for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC).

"The Patient Transport Unit (PTU) carrying a supine patient connected to medical devices includes an oxygen system comprising four cylinders. In case the pressure in cylinders increases above the limit, the disc bursts and the cylinder contents expels outside the aircraft into ambient air via a dedicated outlet. The special outlet is only found on one of the Czech Air Force Airbus: the 3085 plane. The other specificity of this particular aircraft is a dedicated autonomous power installation sourcing the PTUs and medical systems. In other words, only this

machine can be used as MEDEVAC capability," MAJ Karbulka explains and goes on to say that identical PTUs may be installed in the CASA C-295M transport aircraft in the inventory of the 24th Air Force Base Prague Kbely.

The number of patient transport units to be installed onboard the Airbus is naturally limited. "The aircraft manufacturer specifically certifies only four cabin configuration variants. Those include medical configuration with one PTU (left), with two PTUs (left and right), two PTUs and two stretchers, or four stretchers," says Captain Zdeněk Špaček, commander of technical flight the 241st Transport Squadron, and specifies MEDEVAC may be configured depending on the number of passenger seats (40–79 seats) into six variants. The squadron has in the inventory two PTUs, one left and one right. The aviation engineering specialists are responsible for keeping them operational. That is why mandatory works and tests are performed on the PTUs same as on any other aircraft system. The Passenger Transport Unit with medical devices is installed at the rear of the passenger cabin. In flight, the patients receive the same care and treatment as they would in a hospital. The PTU comprises three autonomous parts. "The oxygen system is integrated at the bottom. Above it, there are controls and electronics to provide power sourcing to medical devices, and compartments for medical devices. The stretchers to carry the patient are mounted on top," CAPT Špaček describes.

Just as a matter of interest, the whole unit weighs 190 kilograms, and is 0.68 m high, 2.01 m long and 0.68 wide. It goes without saying that, the aircraft carry onboard the necessary stock of medical and non-medical equipment and materiel relevant for the type of treatment as well

as the number of repatriated casualties. In short, everything is driven by the need to provide the best possible care to patients while onboard the Airbus.

Nine times medical installation into the Airbus

The PTU connected to medical devices and oxygen may only be installed into the Airbus by trained technical personnel observing the manual for airplane cabin reconfiguration. "We have no dedicated team assigned for MEDEVAC reconfiguration. Ninety-five per cent of the ground technical personnel of the 241 Transport Squadron are able to realise the A-319CJ medical cabin installations, that is indeed everybody who have been retrained for this type of aircraft. We first learned about the sequence of works as a part of type training provided by the aircraft manufacturer, including practical demonstrations. In practice, specific steps under reconfiguration are described in detail in a specialist manual. We have progressively gathered necessary professional skills and we are always able to perform MEDEVAC reconfiguration within prescribed time limits," MAJ Karbulka concludes.

What are the limits? "That naturally depends on the specific variant of medical configuration and partially also on whether the reconfiguration order comes in or off working hours," he explains and offers some recent examples. "The requirement is most often for installing PTUs and two stretchers. With a five or six member team, we manage to complete the reconfiguration within about five hours from when the order is given by our command post. Engaging more personnel would not be expedient onboard the Airbus. But the patient transport unit is nevertheless not installed in all cases. For installation of four stretchers, the time limit is somewhat shorter." It is definitely not just about removing the necessary quantity of passenger seats.

In addition to changing the interior, the process also claims much more sophisticated procedures that take some time to perform. "The plane's software must also be reconfigured. Each seat has its specific address. After it is removed, an electronic block remains in place, which must be modified

accordingly. Additional steps follow in conjunction with PTU functionalities and with the cabin software. The installation is complete with a check and tests of relevant systems onboard the Airbus," Captain Špaček says. Since 2007, when the Airbus A-319CJ aircraft have been introduced to the inventory of the 24th Transport Airbase Kbely, the specialist engineer personnel of the 241st Transport Squadron performed reconfiguration to MEDEVAC nine times.

Although it is just a sort of technicality for them, they also admit the human dimension their professional effort involves. "It naturally includes some personal emotions. At the

beginning of the MEDEVAC program, the perception was much more intensive, but it has not turned into a routine activity to date.

You have at the back of your mind that you are a part of a system doing its best to help an injured patient. In a way, you contribute to saving the individual. If the effort succeeds, you are among those who may take credit. The bonus you definitely enjoy is when you hear the base commander thank us for MEDEVAC during the morning brief. It is the pleasing kind of feedback," Major Karbulka says.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba



Members of the 151st Engineer Battalion from Bechyně took part in the Danube 2012 international exercise in Szentes, Hungary

When pontoons connect the banks

Several large trucks backed into the water. We heard a lot of noise and saw geysers of water splashing into the air. The pontoons first opened, resembling huge lotus blossoms, and then deployed with a loud slap. They were immediately attended to by soldiers holding cables and assembling them into a craft train along the riverbank. After demanding days of tough drill on the water surface, the Danube 2012 Czech-Hungarian exercise in Szentes, Hungary, was about to culminate.



Members of the 151st Engineer Battalion from Bechyně and soldiers of the 37th Engineer Regiment of the Hungarian Army were practising the assembly and deployment of a pontoon bridge on the Tisza River. "The cooperation between Hungarian and Czech combat engineers dates back to an agreement in the framework of the Visegrad Group years ago. In 2009, we had an opportunity to train on the Elbe River in Litoměřice. This time we have invited our Czech colleagues to our country, to Szentes on the Tisza River. The purpose of the exercise is to practise cooperation with our Czech colleagues and find out whether we could be deployed together, should it be necessary. This is basically a follow-on event of the exercise we were a part of in 2009, in Litoměřice. Our objective is to achieve a certain measure of coordination between the units. It is not only about some of our equipment and that of our Czech counterparts being different; there are also some differences in the procedures, the ways we use our respective equipment. However, we have so far managed to deal with these problems rather quickly. The Czech soldiers are good partners to cooperate with. This is our experience learned in the three years during which we have been maintaining contacts," says Captain Gábor Nagy of the Hungarian Army. "We have not had rain in Hungary for quite some time. Under normal circumstances, the Tisza is about 160 meters wide here, but it is just 120 meters now. On the one hand, it is easier for us, as we have a shorter distance to bridge and the flow speed is lower as well. On the other hand, it is a new river for us now, with different properties and parameters."

Although the engineers' job is still physically very demanding, both the Czech and the Hungarian units had a few women in their ranks. "The training of the Hungarian engineers is very similar to ours. There were just minor differences in the procedures used to build the pontoon bridge. The cooperation required

communication in English, at least at my level. I cannot imagine I could do without it," explains one of them, Lieutenant Jitka Bahulová. "The thing that captured my attention was that the Hungarian engineers started every day with their national anthem. It is quite impressive. Most soldiers even sing. It is clear they have a very strong patriotic feeling. And it looks like the position of the Hungarian Army in their society is also quite different from ours". The Hungarian Army is fully professional, just like ours. It uses two types of contracts; for an indefinite period of time and for shorter, definite periods of time. The training is allegedly also similar to ours. "According to what I have heard, there are differences in Tables of Organization and Equipment. We are fewer, which means we have to be cross-trained. In the Hungarian Army, there is an organic specialist in every slot. Every engineer in our army has to be able to perform several different jobs. It is not much of a problem to be trained to work with pontoons, but it is more difficult with some other specialties," Lieutenant Bahulová adds.

River as a line of defence

Rivers have always been a problem of manoeuvring armies since time immemorial: they are obstacles which are difficult to cross and often serve as a line of defence. Engineers have always had to pay a great deal of attention to crossing rivers. If it was not possible to capture an undamaged bridge or locate a suitable ford nearby, there was no other option but to ferry the troops across or to build a makeshift bridge. The invention of a pontoon bridge was literally a revolution for engineer corps. Our army fielded a pontoon unit known as PMS in 1967. It was basically a slightly modified PMP pontoon unit introduced five years earlier by the Soviet Army. It was manufactured under a license by Slovákcké strojírný in Uherský Brod. The idea of a pontoon bridge was born in the German



Army during WWII. When the war was over, the plans were captured by the Soviets. The pontoon bridge was indeed a revolution, as corroborated by the fact that similar equipment was later fielded by the US Army or the German Bundeswehr.

"The Hungarian engineer battalion has been using the original Soviet-made PMP pontoon units here. They have two versions here, river and coastal. There are just minor differences between the two versions. The former has bolt-on eyelets to allow it to be airlifted by a helicopter. The latter has welded-on pockets instead. Other than that, they are identical. The differences from our PMS set are also negligible," says Junior Warrant Officer Jan Kučera. According to Deputy Chief of Engineer Corps Lieutenant Colonel Božek Valíček, the pontoon equipment matches the time in which it

was designed, but is still capable of fulfilling all missions without any problems. There is no upgrade needed in the near future. "In its time, it was very good and especially very efficient equipment. We naturally know that some armies proceed faster with their upgrade programmes than we do. For example, they replace metal components of the pontoons with plastics, which of course can facilitate some operations. But I do not think this is something we could not do without," explains the Deputy Chief of Engineer Corps.

A closely watched target

Pontoon bridges have always been a juicy target for enemy aircraft, rockets or artillery. The engineers therefore often conduct exercises set into a tactical scenario involving, for example, the destruction of a part of the bridge by the

enemy and the quickest possible replacement of the damaged segments. These exercises often include training of cooperation with air defence units.

Another alternative is represented by dummy or deceptive bridges. They require only a fraction of the number of pontoons sets that would normally be used, the rest being built of any material making the whole structure look like a bridge when viewed from an aircraft. The purpose of the deception is to lure the enemy away from the real bridge. However, the construction of pontoon bridges can be practiced even for peacetime uses, as they are expected to be deployed, for example, in the event of natural disasters etc. Pontoon bridges are also built for second-echelon logistic units, humanitarian purposes etc.

"The standard width and load-bearing capacity of the pontoon bridge are 6.8 m and 60 tons, respectively. It is possible to divide the pontoon units along the centreline and build a narrower bridge, with just one lane and a load-bearing capacity of 20 tons. However, this option is viewed as an emergency one and is not practiced very often," Junior Warrant Officer Kučera explains. "You need four bank sections; the number of river sections depends on the width of the stream or water body you want to bridge. You can build the bridge even without the bank sections; every river section has two flat pieces that be used as a makeshift ramp. However, if you want a more permanent structure, the bank drive-on/drive-off sections should be used, as they are stronger, with a more rigid hull bottom and designed to be placed halfway on the ground. Another alternative is to use a floating bridge train that can carry a payload between 20 and 70 tons. If necessary, a train carrying up to 150 tons can be assembled as well."

We have different boats and vehicles

In the meantime, towboats are being anchored to pontoon trains on the Tisza River. In this case the gap between the Czech and Hungarian equipment is much wider. Our engineers use Czechoslovak MO 634 boats and also the newer version, MO 2000 Veronika, dating back to the late 1990s. On the other hand, the Hungarians use the obsolete Soviet equipment of the 1960s vintage. Contrary to our boats, theirs are not loaded on a transport trailer hitched to a truck; instead, they have wheels along both sides of the deck which can be pulled out and used to transport the craft. The deployed wheels with

shock absorbers resemble long claws, which is probably the reason why the boats were given the nickname "Griffin" by our soldiers, most of whom also executed a deep bow to Hungarian boat operators who have to do their best to keep their craft serviceable. "Compared to what the Hungarian engineers have to work with, our boats are something like a Mercedes. The Soviet boats are powered by a half of the engine originally designed for the Ural truck, with an electromagnetic clutch coupled to a gearbox and a small propeller. The exhaust does not have any muffler. All this naturally reduces the power output," Junior Warrant Officer Kučera explains.

Our pontoon sets were initially transported by Tatra 138 trucks. These were later replaced by

Tatra 813 8x8s. Since the mid-1980s, Tatra 815 trucks have been used. However, the Hungarian Army still employs the obsolete Soviet KrAZ 255B vehicles. "They have a wooden cab, basically without any lining, and their technical condition matches their age. But, first and foremost, there is a generation gap. However, I think even this comparison was a benefit for us, as we can realize we are quite well off, equipment-wise," adds Junior Warrant Officer Kučera.

They would like to bridge the Danube

There are two large assembled pontoon trains lined along the riverbank. These are now

the Czech Republic, including human resources, equipment upgrades or training issues. It is no secret the Army of the Czech Republic is facing a substantial restructuring. The issue presently much discussed among the engineers is a potential transition from the brigade organizational structure to a regimental one. No one is particularly enthusiastic about it. However, they realize it is not just their concern, but rather the issue of the overall concept of our army.

"Priorities will have to be determined before a decision like this is made. If a step like this is indeed going to be taken, we must consider which of the existing capabilities will be retained and offered to our allies," Lieutenant Colonel Valíček emphasizes. "As to potential

bridged the stream. A mountain biker suddenly emerged from the wood across the river. He braked to a halt just a few steps from where the long pontoon centipede ended. He cast a bit embarrassed glance across the water surface, obviously surprised by the bridge which had not been there a day ago. However, he soon recovered. For a while, it looked like he was going to start again and use the steel structure to get across the river dry-wheeled. However, a KrAZ truck with many tons of iron on its load bed suddenly roared into life on the other bank. When its wheels touched the steel ramp, the pontoons sang a screeching song that only iron scraping against iron can produce. It took less than a minute to cross the 130-meter bridge. The loading test was over. "Every international exercise like this teaches us a lot. The engineers of both armies showed commendable professionalism during the Danube 2012 exercise. We could see that if the units use similar equipment, there are no language barriers that could render the engineer support impossible. I would like to thank the Commanding Officer of the Hungarian 37th Engineer Regiment for inviting us to this



released and the boats tow them to where they will be linked together. Before the two segment click into place, they form a broad V whose tip points upriver. The V is gradually straightening.

A bit paradoxically, the Danube 2012 River Crossing Exercise was staged on the Tisza River. However, it is no secret that many of our engineers would like to try bridging a major European river, such as the Danube. "We would of course like to continue the tradition of large-scale exercises which used to take place on the Danube, near Iža. It is, above all, a question of an agreement and potential cooperation with other countries. Funds also play a substantial role. We are now trying to make use of the Visegrad Agreement to open the matter and to achieve specific cooperation commitments for these large-scale events as well," says Deputy Chief of Engineer Corps Lieutenant Colonel Bořek Valíček. "From my perspective, every international cooperation project is beneficial. This year we have had a joint exercise with the Hungarian Army; as to next year, we are planning a similar exercise, albeit at a slightly different level, with the Polish Army. It is very important. For example, bridging capabilities of individual countries are, after all, limited, and a situation requiring larger units to be built may easily occur, and in fact has already occurred." The Czech engineers are allegedly plagued by the same problems as the rest of the Army of



future upgrades, we would like to focus mainly on the pontoon carriers, as this capability is very essential for us. We should then proceed with EOD units, construction capabilities etc."

The final loadbearing test

White flags were fluttering on both banks of the Tisza River. The steel structure finally

exercise. I hope our cooperation will continue and we will be able to welcome our Hungarian colleagues in Litoměřice, on the Elbe River, just like in 2009," said Colonel Ota Rolenc, CO of the 15th Engineer Brigade by way of conclusion.

by Vladimír Marek

A commercial airliner lost communication with the tower and the aircrew started acting hostile – a Renegade mission is about to start

RENEGADE

Assistance in Distress

It is shortly after nine hours in the morning and a Jak-40 airliner is taking off runway designated two four. After couple hundred metres, the plane lifts off the Kbely airfield, banks left climbing to allocated flight level and heads for Náměšť nad Oslavou. A problem occurs soon: the aircrew loses communication with the ground controllers! A Renegade case has just begun ...

Not establishing radio connection with air traffic control is one of the scenarios rehearsed. There are several types of distress situations commercial airliner crews may get into. Assistance to them is one of the types of missions performed as a part of the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS), which essentially involves continuous quick reaction alert coverage provided to national airspaces of individual European NATO Allies nations in a single whole.

Airborne in fifteen minutes

Jak-40 airplane continues to fly along its planned route at altitude 3,900 ft. The airplane captain repeatedly attempts to establish communication with the ground air traffic control, but to no avail. Radio contact remains silent even on the international emergency frequency 121.50 MHz.

Exactly at 9 hours 12 minutes, the blaring sound of siren pierces the air around the building with inscription QRA (Quick Reaction Alert). The Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Uedem, Germany, orders Czech QRA pilots to take off immediately (Alfa Scramble) because

of a failure to establish communication with a commercial airplane.

Initial tasking? Perform visual identification of the target. "Exercise Renegade is designed to practice intercepts of various types of targets and threats. It tests the air defence system's operational readiness, which must work any time and under all circumstances," says Czech Deputy Joint Force Commander, Commander Air Force Brigadier-General Jiří Verner.

An "Alpha" sets everything in motion. The busiest are the two QRA Gripen pilots and four ground personnel. Ground specialists are the first ones to reach the machines with tail numbers 9236 and 9242. They prepare both JAS-39C for start as fast as they possibly can.

Pilots come running to the apron. Both get seated in the cockpits in no time and start communication. They do the mandatory procedures and checks in the cockpit in a standard manner, but their performance is substantially faster. The scramble order comes soon. The leader taxis to the runway threshold followed by his wingman. Both Gripens get airborne within nine minutes from the alert signal (the QRA limit for take-off is fifteen minutes) and approach the Jak-40

under direct control of the Control and Reporting Centre (CRC).

Assistance in distress

QRA fighter pilots receive basic target information from the CRC. They have it visual a couple of moments later. "Identification comes first. I find out necessary information about the airplane, including registration. In case meteorological conditions do not allow that, I try to establish communication on the emergency frequency to advise him about the requirement of the ground control. Then I perform approach manoeuvre for visual contact with the airplane captain," First-Lieutenant Milan Nykodým, a QRA pilot from Čáslav airbase, describes.

A Gripen, or a multirole supersonic fighter aircraft with sophisticated weapon systems to be more precise, pops up the left wing of Jak-40. The fighter's weapon systems comprise the calibre 27mm Mauser BK-27 cannon and seven weapon pylons that may carry short to medium-range air-to-air missiles plus a whole range of air-to-ground missiles, bombs and precision-guided munitions. The AIM-9M Sidewinder short-range infrared-guided air-

to-air missiles were fixed on the hardpoints this time.

The JAS-39 pilot uses a specific nonverbal language to communicate with the pilot of Jak-40. The other QRA fighter monitors the situation from the back, standing ready to step in immediately. The scramble always takes a pair of Gripens. "It is mostly for tactical reasons and the prescribed procedures for the intercept are conceived accordingly. The leader communicates with the target and wingman provides cover," adds 1LT Nykodým, whose last Alpha in November 2011 indeed had an identical plot – loss of communication between an airliner and the ground controllers. "In most cases, we take off to long-range flights. Commercial airliner pilots on long-range flights, for lack of attention or because of fatigue, may fail to change frequency to communicate with the ground controller at given waypoints. I also experienced a flight when we had a cargo airplane captain questioning possible malfunction on the aft cargo bay door. We performed a visual check and assured the aircrew it was not an emergency," the Čáslav airbase pilot describes.



Several minutes' effort to establish radio contact remains fruitless. Jak-40 captain keeps pointing his finger at the headset and shaking his head. The time is up for QRA pilots to end discussion and take more effective measures.

Follow me!

The plot of Exercise Renegade escalates. The Gripen pilot makes it clear to Jak-40 captain what is going to happen next. "He will waving wings," Major Miroslav Kail, a highly experienced Czech Air Force transport pilot and a flight safety inspector at the 24th airbase Prague-Kbely, and explains this is the follow-me signal.

The machines fly one behind another like on a string. This is however not a parade escort with a pair of Gripen fighters, but a forced landing. Not at the original planned destination, but at the Čáslav airbase. "The Gripen would guide it all the way to the airfield. It is in visual contact. We fly over the runway in a formation, by which he indicates to me the runway I will be landing on in a moment. In case of adverse weather, he would lead me following on the glide path on through clouds and he would deploy the landing gear. That is a signal for me that we are going to land. Then I configure the airplane and go for the runway. The Gripens check on me one more time in a low level pass," MAJ Kail says.

Incompliance with the instructions by QRA pilots is strictly not recommended. Their fighters are equipped with systems allowing them to

get the situation in their area of interest under control quite fast. First, they may coerce the undisciplined plane to review its intentions by manoeuvring, such as crossing its flight path or attempting to deviate it from its flight trajectory. If the airplane nevertheless continues to be disobedient, fighters may use force, warning shots from their cannons and so on. Those are however only subsequent phases of interception taken in reaction to the evolving situation, and are subject to authorisation by national authorities.

But it is not about rattling arms. On the other hand, underestimating or trifling with the situation does not come into question at all. Sovereignty of the Czech airspace is the highest priority.

Czech Gripens are presently also deployed in the Baltic States, flying air policing missions to protect the airspace and territorial waters of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from the Shauliai airbase. As opposed to domestic missions, the Baltic Air Policing effort is different in some aspects. The area of responsibility is roughly three times larger and is located in the very proximity of Belarus and Russian Federation.

As for operational assignment, QRA pilots from Čáslav may only intercept military targets. They are not mandated to use weapon systems against civilian aircraft. In case a commercial aircrew in distress requests assistance, they will provide it.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba

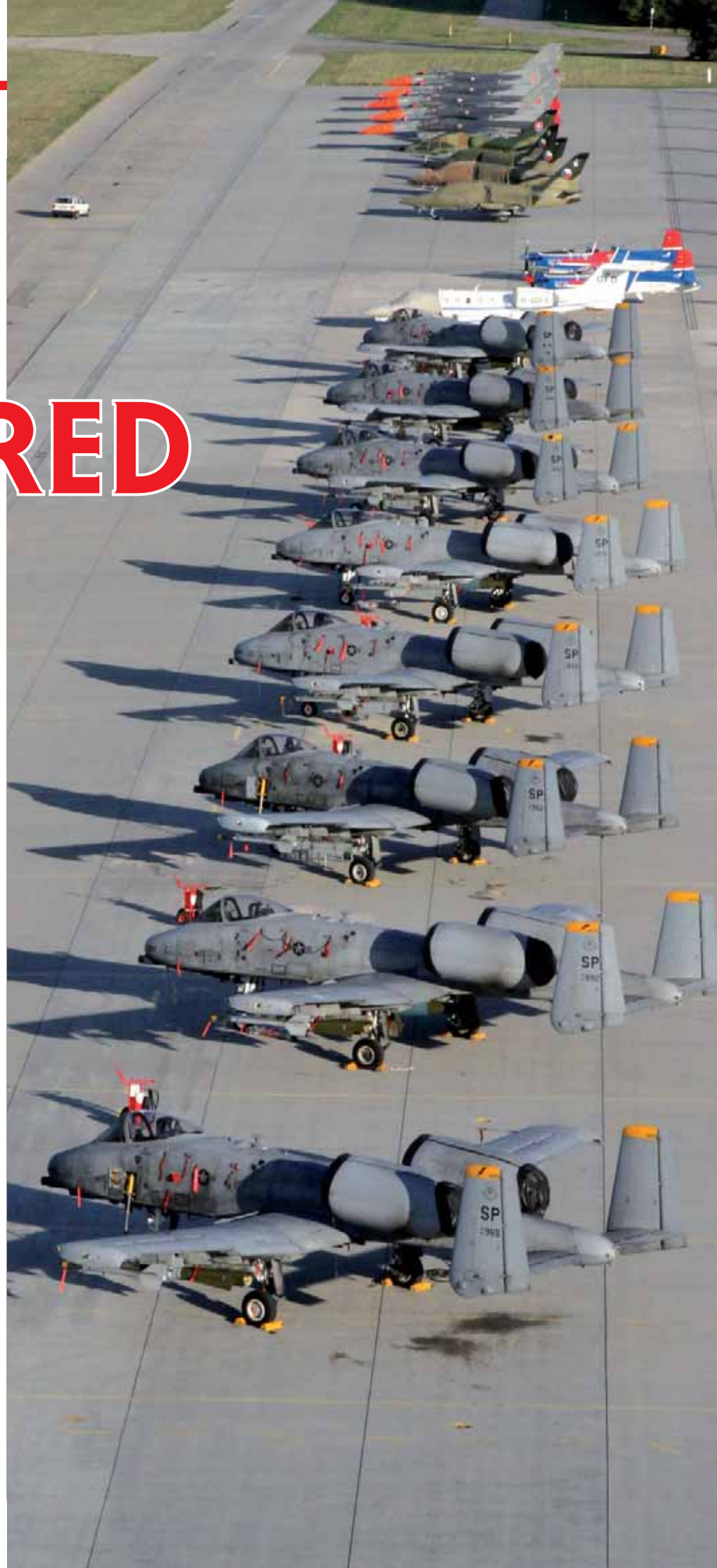
As part of the exercise
Ramstein Rover 2012, NATO
Forward Air Controllers
performed hundreds of
live controls guiding fixed
and rotary wing aircraft on
ground targets

CLEARED HOT!

It has been a couple of
minutes past noon, when
a convoy of coalition vehicles
transporting some materiel set
off for their assigned location.
The NATO convoy suddenly
gets into contact with
insurgents just five kilometres
off base. Fierce small arms fire
causes heavy casualties and
gets the unit into a difficult
situation.

The platoon leader orders to dismount the vehicles, extend order and taking combat positions. The plot suddenly ceases to escalate. The calm in the battlefield however does not last long. The troops who set off to make some reconnaissance on the road are engaged by opposing forces. "Contact at twelve, a DShK on a red technical, distance four-hundred metres," a soldier reports to the commander. The unit is soon under heavy enemy fire from DShK machinegun. Its 50-cal armour-piercing incendiary rounds are putting the coalition forces under considerable pressure. The commander orders their embedded FAC (Forward Air Controller) to request air support for them. An L-39ZA light combat aircraft arrives the site in ten minutes.

"We have got hail coming down from North to South in thirty seconds," a cry is heard over the platoon's position. Fire from the GSh-23 high-speed double-barrel machinegun under the cockpit repeatedly sprinkles the opposing forces' positions. The coalition force quickly regains control of the situation and soon continues its movement. This was how one of the simulated



episodes of the NATO Ramstein Rover 2012 (RARO '12) international air exercise escalated, whose primary objective was to harmonise operations of tactical pilots and forward air controllers/joint terminal attack controllers in support of land operations in a NATO environment. This year's largest NATO air exercise took place in the Czech Republic from September 4-21, 2012, with the participation of sixteen NATO nations. The live exercise was organised and controlled from the 22nd Airbase Náměšť nad Oslavou by the Air Component Command (ACC) headquartered in Ramstein, Germany.

Barely sixty minutes have passed from the incident at Velká Střelná site, and another episode gets played. This time around, the play moves into a little town in the Libavá Military Training Area. A reinforced squad on foot patrol receives the information that one of buildings houses an insurgency group armed with a range of hand-guns and hand grenades, and they have their local leader down there too.

The mission is clear: eliminate the opponent and secure their weapons. While the coalition unit operates in a high-threat area, air support has been requested. An Mi-24/35 gunship assists them on getting out of the ambush laid by the opponent and accomplishing their mission. The helicopter captain hears the order "cleared hot" from the forward air controller in his headset multiple times. Every terminal guidance onto target is original. Although this is a training exercise, the slightest relaxation does not come into question. It can soon be happening live in the Afghan territory.

It is therefore inconceivable for the provision of Close Air Support (CAS) to coalition forces not to involve FAC/JTACs. Exercise RARO '12 trained twenty-three FAC teams from fourteen NATO nations, in reality totalling close sixty of those highly specialised personnel.

A prestigious affair for the Czech Republic

Combining the name of the city hosting the Headquarters Air Component Command and the acronym ROVER (Remotely Operated Video Enhanced Receiver, a device used by FACs for precision guidance), exercise Ramstein Rover does not have a particularly long tradition. "An accident took place in Operation ISAF in 2006 causing coalition forces to suffer fatalities by mistake in controlling the aircraft. The follow-on analyses generated a range of specific recommendations, and the priority was given to standardisation of JTAC/FAC training and organisation of NATO air exercises in theatre-realistic environments as close as possible to the situation in Afghanistan," says German Air Force Colonel Harry H. Schnell, an ACC Ramstein representative and Exercise Director RARO '12.

"NATO asked all the nations to join in and volunteer to become a host nation for exercise Ramstein Rover," COL Schnell adds and goes on to say that Canada volunteered to organise the premiere exercise RARO 2010. It soon turned out that the organizers did not have sufficient quantity of aircraft to provide close air support and additional orchestration; so the United States took up the challenge of joint



preparation. The US training areas eventually saw the participating service personnel drill five scenarios reflecting current situation on the ground downrange.

The exercise did not take place in 2011 due to the NATO Operation Unified Protector in Libya. For 2012, the request by the Czech Republic was accommodated and endorsed by all NATO nations: the 22nd Airbase Náměšť nad Oslavou was the primary venue for the Host Nation Support (HNS) provided to exercise Ramstein Rover 2012 for nearly three weeks in September. Additional premises were assigned at the 21st Airbase Čáslav, in Libavá and Boletice Military Training Areas and the town of Písek. The exercise involved sixteen nations – Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, the US and the United Kingdom, either as trainees or as observers.

It is by all means a prestigious affair, as RARO '12 was NATO's largest air exercise in 2012. Exercise Flying Rhino, well-known to the general public, and Exercise Ramstein Rover do not compare at all. "Flying Rhino was a bilateral exercise. A UK Division service personnel moved over to the Czech Republic to rehearse their procedures and other soldiers participated in training with them. Exercise Ramstein Rover is a NATO effort under direct control of the NATO Air Component Command. There



is also an operational difference: RARO '12 is designed for fully combat qualified forward air controllers scheduled for foreign deployments in the months to come. Although many of them have had considerable operational experience before, they would again undergo the prescribed guidance procedures with specific emphasis on current situation in the areas of interest," Deputy

Airbase commander, Colonel Miroslav Svoboda explains.

For reasons easy to understand, he is not specific about new trends in FAC operations, and offers a general statement that the activity of controllers on the ground is always subject to an in-depth analysis and then fused into FAC operating procedures. "Those must be updated for current changes in the area of interest and their operations realigned to achieve maximum effectiveness. It is not exceptional for this process to be performed five times a year. Although the changes may be slight, they are very important in reality. Procedures for specific cases in specific locations are newly reviewed," COL Svoboda concludes. That is reflected in the scenarios of operations rehearsed in RARO'12 on repeated basis, including engagement of convoys on the

move, elimination of a high-ranking opposition leader in a building or in vehicle, precision guidance on target and its elimination or disengaging from ambush in a built-up area. It should be emphasised at this point that no one of the FACs has a clue of what is coming up next. "They do not have familiarity with details of the scenario. It is highly realistic – live fire is included. The JTACs indeed operate in realworld environment," the Deputy airbase commander says bluntly.

Nevertheless, this NATO exercise does not benefit the land components only. The flight personnel also gains experience. Lieutenant-Colonel Clint Eichelberger, the commander of the 81st Squadron the U.S. Air Force equipped with the A-10C, comments: "Ramstein Rover, it is an excellent opportunity for us to increase our

professional readiness, because this is a specific close air support training. Our squadron has deployed in Afghanistan several times already and I can tell the missions we are flying at RARO '12 are fully in line with our tasking downrange."

Before being seated in the cockpit, he reveals that he had flown the Thunderbolt A-10A for about eight years and has piloted A-10C since 2006. "For communication with FACs, we already have much more sophisticated technology, for instance the secure Link 16," says the squadron commander, who was inter alia involved in combat activities in Iraq.

Combat experience

In proximity of the target area, where imitated houses and a handful of cars have been placed, there is a concealed forward air controller whose activities must built on an in-depth knowledge of procedures in an English speaking environment. Before he speaks exclusively for us, it should be noted that FACs are one the key enablers in the battlefield, who may make the critical difference. The FACs must naturally master air traffic in his area of interest, and there is no way for them to authorise the use of weapon systems on an aircraft without ensuring safety of the pilot or aircrews, coalition forces and non-combatants on the ground. It is not correct to state that FACs guarantee target elimination. The truth is somewhat different. The final element is really the pilot; the forward air controller only guides his eyes on the ground. "I do not dare who can take a greater credit in eliminating the target, whether the pilot or the FAC. You have to keep in mind this is a complex activity. The mission would not be accomplished without the contribution

of either one or the other," opines the experienced Mi-24/35 gunship pilot and deputy commander the 22nd wing, Lieutenant-Colonel Rudolf Straka, points out that the Czech combat aircraft, specifically the Mi-24/35 and L-159 ALCA, have consistently worked to provide JTACs/FACs training with the US Air Force in Europe Air Ground Operational School (USAFE AGOS) stationed close to Ramstein in Einsiedlerhof, Germany.

To deliver the most effective solution, as the slightest mistake can have fatal consequences, strict rules must be observed. Absolute certainty must be guaranteed that all involved have referred to the same target. The very terminal guidance operation before engaging a ground target is preceded by a standard procedure that involves a briefing for the pilot to receive the necessary targeting data from the FAC. They double check that they are referring to the same target. Then the land-based Operation Point (OP) authorises the pilot the use the onboard weapon systems. Pilot turns the aircraft into the final attack cone onto the designated point. The flight is guided by the FAC. Once the pilot confirms the assigned target, the final order is given: "Cleared hot!"

"I came back from a deployment in the Logar province six weeks ago. I had several hot runs or shows of force to suppress enemy activities. When the opponents see the firepower overhead, they are quick to review their intentions and withdraw. I had mainly A-10s on line," Warrant Officer P. N. says and recalls he had a U.S. Air Force A-10 pilot calling him two hours after a mission and thanking him for a job well done.

He offers another comment on mental resilience of FAC/JTAC personnel. "It has involved hundreds and hundreds of hours of hard training that builds on operational experience. Instructors permanently push us to remain in considerable stress and correct the slightest mistakes we make. Everything is done from the top of your head. No routine, no underestimation," the FAC confesses and throws in the most valuable feather in his cap: "It was with an A-10. It just took five minutes from the first contact and we got aircraft come in and we eliminated the target with fire in the seventh minute."

A couple of metres on, Sergeant First Class K.K. is concealed in the terrain. "Czech FACs are one of the best equipped. The technology is sufficient to support our operations over short as well as relatively long distances day and night." But he is interrupted by a sharp cry: "Hail in sixty seconds. Bravo to cover, alpha move back." The unit again gets into contact with the enemy. Today, it is for the fourth time already ...

Commendation by VIP guests

Monday, 17 September 2012, the forces training in the exercise were visited by top officials of the Ministry of Defence, General Staff and the Air Component Command Ramstein, headed by Minister Vondra, Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel and Lieutenant-General Friedrich Wilhelm Ploeger. Demonstrations were also attended by a Senatorial delegation representing the Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, led by the Chairman, Senator Jozef Regec. After introductory briefings by Deputy Joint Force Commander – Commander Air Force Brigadier-



General Jiří Verner and Deputy Commander of the 22nd Airbase Náměšť nad Oslavou Colonel Miroslav Svoboda, the VIP guests transferred to the flight line, where they were able to watch preflight prepping of Turkish Air Force F-16s and U.S. Air Force A-10s, as well as reloading a Slovak Air Force L-39ZA light combat aircraft with ammunition.

The VIPs were then invited to follow real training of JTACs/FACs in tactical scenario in a built-up area. The initial phase involved a troops in contact episode, which escalated in requesting close air support by the FAC and eliminating the opponent forces by an assault of a Mi-24/35 gunship called in. Next, service personnel of the 25th Air Defence Missile Brigade headquartered in Strakonice offered a static demonstration in a combat dispersal site involving S-10 (SA-13) and RBS-70 systems in the process of acquiring and simulated engagement of low-flying aerial targets.

"It is vital for NATO to remain strong and coherent in the years ahead. We have to train more and more to that effect. Exercise Ramstein Rover 2012 is very vital. The Alliance must therefore

work to keep itself in good shape, the more so that progressively downsizes its engagement in deployed operations such as ISAF," Minister Vondra concluded.

Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel underlined the value of exercise RARO '12 for the Czech Armed Forces as follows: "In multinational exercises with such scale, Czech military professionals are able to gain invaluable experience both in command and control structures and in real combat situations. So, we are benefiting in multiple ways."

Same as Defence Minister Alexandr Vondra, the CHOD said the medium term plans envisage keeping the unique FAC capability in the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. "We have absolutely no considerations underway for reducing the forward air controller element. The unit's strength is presently sufficient for us. We will maintain their professional skills that have proven invaluable for us, especially in Afghanistan," LTG Pavel underscored.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba





A hundred years will elapse these days from the birth of František Fajtl, one of our most renowned WW2 veteran pilots

He Survived His Death

The pilot realized that he had sustained a hit and that he would not be able to keep the plane airborne for long. He assessed the situation in a fraction of a second and decided to crash-land his burning plane in a nearby field.

"I left the parachute in the aircraft and rushed to a small solitary house some 300 metres away. While the people working nearby were curious, they were not willing to help the downed pilot. I did not think I would be handed a civilian suit immediately, but I did expect at least a piece of advice. I was dumbfounded by their impassive attitude," is how František Fajtl, the Czechoslovak WW2 fighter pilot and commander of RAF No. 122 Squadron, was describing these dramatic moments later. "I soon learned the reason; they were scared as hell. I spotted an old lady in her sixties and a ten-year boy near the house. The latter made a gesture to me as if someone wanted to hang him."

The calendar read May 5, 1942, and the field he had used as a crash-landing strip was located in Nazi-occupied Europe, close to Hardifort, France. Although the Germans immediately launched a hunt for the downed Allied airman, Fajtl initially managed to hide in a water-filled trench. Later he set on foot to the south, his plan being to try to get to the unoccupied part of France. He had two packages with him, one containing two thousand francs, the other with survival emergency food tablets, chocolate and energy pills. With the assistance of French resistance members, he ultimately managed to reach Paris.

Even today's experts shake their heads in awe over his feat. There is no doubt he must have been in great physical shape at that time. He himself claimed he had been driven by a desire to sit in the cockpit and fly again.

When he learned in Paris that his hiding place would be at Viktor Čermák, a naturalized Czech living in France and coming from the same village as he, Donin, Fajtl must have been truly and genuinely surprised. At that time, the Brits had already given up any efforts to rescue him, believing he had perished during the mission and pronouncing him "Missing, Presumed Killed". Nevertheless, Fajtl set off for the Pyrenees, which he intended to cross to get into Spain. In spite of the injuries he had sustained, he succeeded. Early in June, however, he ran into a patrol of Spanish soldiers off Espola and was arrested. He went through a succession of prisons, including Figueras, Barcelona and Zaragoza, finally ending in the notorious concentration camp at Miranda de Ebro. As a result of an intervention of the British consul, he was released and returned to the United Kingdom via Gibraltar.

However, that was not Fajtl's only tour de force.

A graduate of the Business Administration Academy in Teplice-Sanov, he was inducted



into the pre-war Czechoslovak Army to serve in mountain troops stationed in Slovakia. However, he decided to become a professional soldier and enrolled in the Military Academy. He spent his first year of general military education in Hranice and the second one, focused on flight training, in Prostějov. He served as a pilot in a reconnaissance squadron in Olomouc. He never put up with the occupation of truncated Czechoslovakia. As early as in June 1939, he crossed the Polish border at Velký Polom and reported at the Czechoslovak consulate in Cracow. A month later, he sailed on the Kastelholm to France.



He formally became a member of the French Foreign Legion and underwent fighter training on new types of aircraft. When German troops crossed the French border, he was appointed the leader of a flight consisting of three airplanes and dispatched to the front. He operated from airfields in Lyon-Satolas and Colomnières, off Paris, and finally joined the retreating 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron commanded by Captain Jaroslav Kulháněk.

Having handed over his airplane, he made his way to Casablanca, from there to Gibraltar, and thence to Liverpool, where he finally arrived on July 12, 1940. He was initially assigned to No. 310 (Czechoslovak) Fighter Squadron of RAF. As the squadron had more pilots than it needed at that time, he was transferred first to No. 1 Fighter Squadron and later to No. 17 Fighter Squadron of RAF. It was with the latter that he participated in the Battle of Britain.

Here he also achieved his first air victories. Following the formation of No. 313 Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron, he became one of its first members. In December 1941, he was appointed the leader of its Flight A. František Fajtl differed from the rest of our pilots in quite a few respects. First and foremost, he sported a full beard, a thing unheard of and absolutely forbidden in the army in those days. It made him unrecognizable, although it required an exemption granted by the king himself. Fajtl explained he could not shave for health reasons, as shaving produced rash on his face. He had been proficient in languages even before he came to Britain. In addition to a number of other languages, he was fluent in English. As a matter of fact, that language was seldom taught at schools of the First Republic, where French had been preferred because of political ties. Combined with his flying and commanding experience, the knowledge of English allowed him to become the first Czech officer to command a British squadron, namely No. 122, on April 27, 1942.

When he got back from Nazi-occupied Europe (a description of Fajtl's arduous trek is provided above) and after the necessary recovery period, he could choose from a number of staff jobs at air commands. However, he wanted to fly. In September 1943, he took over No. 313 (Czechoslovak) Fighter Squadron of RAF.

Four months later, he became the commander of a group of twenty fighter pilots who were about to be dispatched to the Soviet Union and establish a Czechoslovak air unit there. The selected pilots underwent a retraining course on Lavochkin aircraft and early in June 1944 formed the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Fighter Air Regiment in the Kubinka airfield,



A Lavochkin fighter of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Fighter Air Regiment in the USSR taking off from the Tri Duby airfield



Spitfire Mk.VB of the 313th Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron RAF at Churchstanton, UK, in spring 1943



The 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment in Slovakia

southwest of Moscow. It was with this unit that František Fajtl flew to support the Slovak National Uprising in the autumn of 1944. Following the retreat of insurgent units to mountainous regions of Slovakia in the end of October 1944, the regiment re-crossed, under dramatic circumstances, the frontline and landed in the territory controlled by the Red Army. It was reorganized and supplemented by a third squadron.

In the end of the war, the regiment took part in battles for the Moravian Gate. After the war, Fajtl attended and graduated from the War College in Prague. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff and appointed the Deputy Commander of the 1st Air Division based in Prague. However, hard times were awaiting him after February 1948. For a short spell, he was Professor of the Air Seat at the War College, but he was sent on leave to await further appointment as

early as in the beginning of May 1949. He did not even have time to enjoy it properly. In November 1949, he was retired from the army; two months later, he was arrested and sent to a forced labour camp in Mírov. After his release in June 1951, he worked first as a labourer for a building company, later as a storekeeper, cashier and accountant. He was partly rehabilitated as early as in 1964, which allowed him to write publications on the deployment of our pilots on the eastern and partly also on the western fronts. He had an indisputable literary gift. He was fully rehabilitated only after November 1989. He was promoted several times, his ultimate rank being that of a Lieutenant General (retired). He died in October 2006, aged 94.

By Vladimír Marek
Photos by Central Military Archives
- Military Historical Archives

AERIAL FIGHT: blues vs. reds

The pilot gets his Gripen into the best position to fire an AIM-9M Sidewinder air-to-air missile. He pushes the button on the stick and quickly rolls to the right. A couple of seconds later, the missile hits the aerial target. One of the red machines is killed this time, as it sought to gain air superiority over a strategic facility of the blues. The combat mission at the TSC Pardubice is coming to a head ...



An ordinary single-storey building in the Pardubice airfield: the fact that pilots wearing Czech and international uniforms keep pouring in can be a mystery for many passers-by. Only insiders know how unique the facility inside is: it is the Tactical Simulation Center (TSC). Such operations are scarce to find in Europe. The Czech operation is a component of the Aviation Training Centre CLV Pardubice, a division of the LOM Praha state enterprise. It became operational in November 2011 pursuant to the Armed Forces' requirement for such a specialised training. In other words: the Czech Armed Forces will not create an in-house TSC capability, but rather acquire a tailor-made service.

"To date, we have already completed thirteen one-week training courses for JAS-39 Gripen and L-159 ALCA pilots at the TSC," the TSC manager Mr. Jaroslav Šefl says and on to specify that one training course comprises ten pilots and a couple of air traffic management specialists. "In a week's time, eight flight trainers deliver are able to provide three hundred and twenty simulated air missions with focus both on tactical beyond visual range combat and Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) procedures in the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS)," he adds and offers some interesting stats on firings of short and medium range missiles. "Over a thousand missiles are fired here at the sim weekly. The price of one real missile counts in hundred thousand Czech korunas. Plus you have to add the flight hour costs for Gripens and the one-fifty-niners. In purely economic terms, we save here hundred millions Czech korunas. With a little overstatement, that is not the decisive factor – which is safety. Here we are able to train without damaging the aircraft and without possible loss of life."

The benefit is obvious indeed. It both provides the comprehensive fighter pilot training process and builds on flight safety, effectiveness and efficiency. But that is far from complete yet: the Tactical Simulation Center has also ambitions in the international arena, which is proven by the simulation tactical exercise with the participation of Czech, Hungarian and German pilots – members of the NATO Tiger Association (NTA) held in June earlier this year. "We have repeatedly rehearsed new tactical dogfighting procedures and proven our combat abilities," pilots of German Tornados and Hungarian JAS-39 Gripen concur. It is not a secret that there are currently talks with the Sweden, which has a similar facility, sounding the possibility to interconnect both simulation centres and perform a joint exercise in 2013.

Indisputable training benefit

The Tactical Simulation Center is a restricted access facility. Classified for Top Secret level, its heart comprises the simulation room that accommodates eight high-fidelity cockpits of JAS-39 Gripen multirole supersonic fighters, and L-159 ALCA subsonic combat aircraft, two Ground Control Intercept workstations and one Forward Air Controller station as well as the briefing/debriefing room. In practice, before the trainees are allowed into the facility, they have to undergo specific security procedures. For those not in training, the security is much higher. The Czech Armed Forces Review



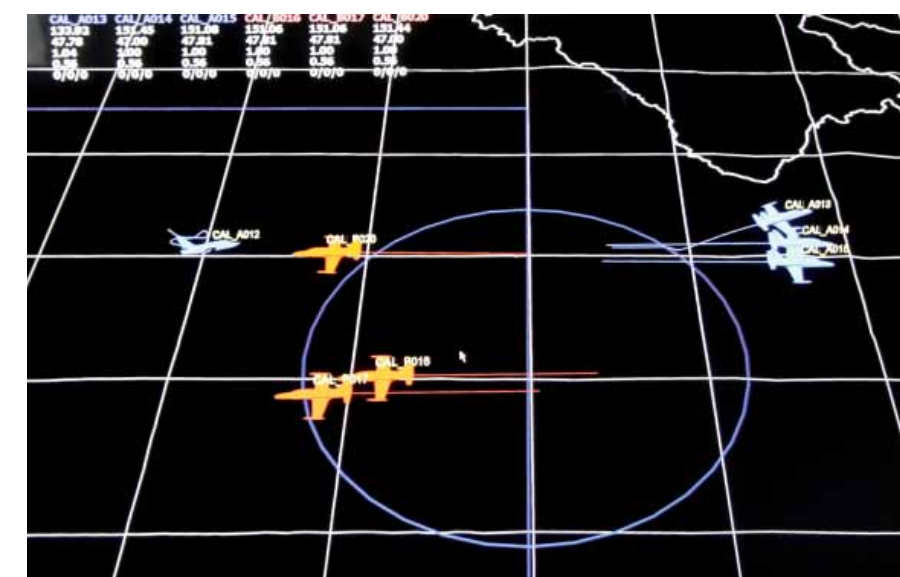
was nevertheless permitted to enter premises, where the blues fight the reds realtime on a big screen.

The sims can be preprogrammed for various types of aircraft, but especially a broad range of combat missions. "In addition to JAS-39 Gripen a L-159 ALCA, we are also able to render F-16s, MiG-29s or Su-27s through simulating their performance envelopes and weapon systems, but the cockpit and flight controls remains the original Gripen or L-159. Retraining international course participants for our standards is not time-consuming at all. It is

matter of hours," Mr. Šefl explains and "says the TSC is also able to generate ground hardware, vehicles, air defence systems and naval vessels. Participants in fictive conflicts respond to scenarios escalating in various ways. "This simulated training is ultimately realistic. It continuously incorporates lessons learnt by NATO squadrons that have deployed for combat operations. It definitely helps us maintain our high professional qualification standards," a JAS-39 Gripen pilot and Deputy Commander 211th Tactical Squadron Captain Pavel Pavlík underscores and adds that six training weeks have



been planned for the 211 Squadron at the TSC in 2012. As a matter of fact, the 212th Tactical Squadron, equipped with L-159 aircraft, has been allocated eight weeks of training in 2012. Wrong would be those concluding that trainees may push beyond the limit in simulated dogfights without risk. The contrary is true. "The air picture is being permanently evaluated here. You make a tactical mistake and the missile gets you in a wink. Your cockpit gets smashed, which is visualised with a high fidelity. The feeling of being shot down is real. Therefore, every step you take must be done expediently



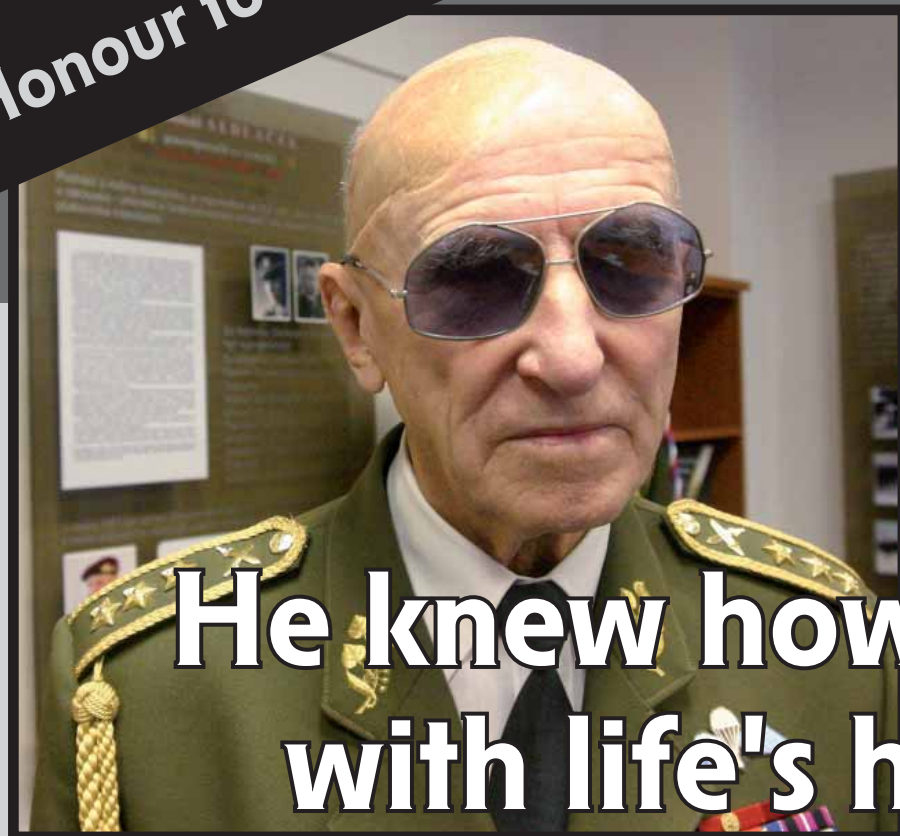
with situations they may find themselves in anytime. They repeatedly practise various types of missions and maintain their professional habits. It is a comprehensive training. "Complexity in reality means that pilots are prepared to face any situation. "The difference in flight effort is essential. In the NATINADS, which is a peace mission, we perform visual target identification missions, indeed we assist commercial airliners in distress. In an operational deployment into a crisis area, it claims a completely different tactical scenario for aerial combat. The good thing is that we are able to intensively train both at TSC Pardubice. Moreover, we can also train special flight procedures here," First-Lieutenant Pavel Štrůbl, a Gripen pilot, relishes.

In the Tactical Simulation Center, aviation students are closely assisted by outstanding mentors – for example Otakar Prikner and Jiří Pospíšil, who just recently ended piloting the JAS-39 Gripen supersonic fighters. "The spectrum of missions to be practised in the TSC is very diverse. We can come back to any situation in the air several times and then chose the most effective way of performing the mission. Although you do not experience sudden changes of weather or G force, the fidelity of flight is nearly real. We know what to focus on in our training. It is about learning ever more valuable lessons," concur both ex-military pilots, now members of staff of the Tactical Simulation Center in Pardubice.

for you to survive," CAPT Pavlík says and explains that, contrarily to the TSC, kills in tactical exercises in domestic or foreign airspaces are only declared after the flight in the debriefing. The deputy squadron commander admits it is really challenging for the 211 TacSq pilots to combine the mandatory sim training hours and their QRA duties in the NATINADS.

He has not encountered a negative reaction to the TSC. "This is not just to make an appearance. It has a great value for us. Operational lessons learned inform the scenarios of air operations here. Here, all pilots get confronted

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba



Army General (ret.) Tomáš Sedláček, an outstanding personality and member of our army units in exile during WWII, died at the age of 94

He knew how to fight with life's hardships

On August 27, 2012, Army General Tomáš Sedláček died in the Motol Hospital, Prague. "I knew he was ill, I visited him in the hospital only this weekend. Although his condition was serious, I still believed he would fight his disease and win, just like he had done so many times in his life," was how Minister of Defence Alexander Vondra commented the sad news. "General Sedláček was a prominent personality of the modern Czech history. All the more that we do not have anyone like him anymore." So, let us remind this outstanding military individuality.

Tomáš Sedláček was born on January 8, 1918, in an officer's family in Vienna. "Actually, our family spent two spells in Vienna, the first one in 1911, when my father attended a quartermaster's course there. The second one came in the end of the war. My father served as a consular officer in Kosovo and he preferred to leave his family in the Austro-Hungarian capital," was how the general recalled the early years of his life. "From Vienna, we moved to Toušeň, which was my mother's birthplace. We lived there for four years. But my father had to commute to Prague, where he served, and his family ultimately followed him."

Tomáš Sedláček Sr. was an officer of service corps, first in the Austro-Hungarian army and later in the Czechoslovak Army. Step by step, he advanced to the colonel's rank. The family education reflected the fact. Two of his four sons were graduates of the Military Academy in Hranice. When the family had moved to Prague, all its members joined the Sokol sport movement in Prague's neighbourhood of Vinohrady. This was why Tomáš Sedláček was being raised in sports

since his early childhood. At the age of 17, he graduated from a technical secondary school and volunteered for mandatory military service at the 1st Artillery Regiment of Jan Žižka of Trocnov, stationed in Praha-Ruzyně, immediately after his school-leaving exams. "With the first year of my service at my belt, I wanted to enrol at the Military Academy in Hranice, but they turned me down, perhaps they thought I was too young. I had to wait another year," he related. In 1938, he was mustered out of the Military Academy in Hranice as an artillery lieutenant. At that time, the artillery was mainly a horse-drawn service, which was why a substantial part of training was dedicated to equestrian skills. For Tomáš Sedláček, horse riding was another sport in his portfolio and he enjoyed it tremendously.

In the spring of 1940, he left, via Slovakia, Hungary and Syria, to France. He reached Marseille on May 13, 1940, i.e. at the time when the German attack against France was in full swing. He was assigned to a reserve unit and thus did not take part in the fighting. He was in for a bit

of disappointment even after the retreat to the United Kingdom. Our brigade there had far too many officers, which was why he was seconded to an artillery battery manned by officers. "I think the problem could have been handled in a different way. If we had been distributed among British artillery units, they could have made much better use of our expertise and capabilities. And we, on the other hand, could have accumulated some new experience," he recalled with indignation even many years later.

He was offered the opportunity later, in the second half of 1943, when he was assigned to the British 112th Royal Light Artillery Regiment in Eastbourne.

Sedláček also attended a number of special training courses in Britain, including a so-called assault training course taking place in a remote coastal house off Fort William.

In addition to tough marches, which invariably invited rainy weather, he learned how to handle and place explosives and how to shoot intuitively. The course also included the arcane art of silent killing. It proceeded to parachute training at the Ringway Airfield. They started with theory. Using a dummy aircraft fuselage, they learned how to embark and jump. They were taught how to open the parachute and how to execute a parachute roll. His first jump was also his first-ever flight in an airplane. "There was a hole in the floor and we were supposed to sit on its edge and slide off, with our parachute attached to a static line by a snap hook. As one was falling down, the strap attached to the static line deployed the parachute and it opened. However, one had been quite tense before that actually happened. Nevertheless, when I saw the white parachute top above my head, I knew everything was OK and I actually enjoyed it. We were jumping from about 800 metres, which was too low for the parachute to



stabilize properly. We were supposed to land on both feet and execute a parachute roll. Otherwise you would have been slammed against the ground. On my third jump, a buckle or something like that bashed my nose and I was bleeding."

In the summer of 1944, Tomáš Sedláček was seconded to the Eastern Front. He travels via Gibraltar, Haifa, Baghdad and Baku to Chernovtsy, where the reserve and reinforcement centre of our troops was located. Because of his superb physical condition and parachute training, he is assigned to the position of the Chief of Staff of the artillery component of the 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade. He is not given any time to loiter – still in his office shoes and without being issued any field gear, he and the brigade are deployed in the fighting in the Carpathian Mountains. Fortunately, a decision is made a few days later to airlift the brigade to Slovakia to help the Slovak National Uprising. "I actually flew twice there. The first attempt was on September 14 or so, but there was fog over the Tri Duby Airfield, it was impossible to land. So we returned, landed on an airstrip near Lvov and waited for the weather to improve," the general recalls. "We maintained a high alert status, ready to take off immediately. But nothing was happening. It was only on October 6 that we actually took off. However, the situation over the Tri Duby Airfield was exactly the same, with fog everywhere. Still, we made an approach and landed."

The 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade was deployed in those sections of the front where the situation was the worst. It fought at Svätý Kríž, Zvolen and ultimately also Banská Bystrica. It covered the retreat of insurgent troops. However, by that time everyone could see that the uprising was running out of steam. "On Friday, October 27, 1944, people in Banská Bystrica started looting the local distillery. There were crowds of drunken people in the streets, including my own batsman Pišpěty, who soon disappeared, never to reappear again. In the utterly chaotic situation, we started retreating in the direction of Donovaly. There were still remnants of Slovak units that had not yet fled. The road to the mountains, and in fact the entire valley, was packed. And we were continuously strafed by German Stukas (Ju-87 Stuka – editor's note), which were still engaged by an anti-aircraft battery under the command of Josef Bernklau."



After the retreat of the insurgents to the mountains, Tomáš Sedláček and remnants of the brigade regrouped at Soliska; from there, they had to undergo a deadly retreat via Chabenec. "We were told we could skirt along the slopes of the Low Tatra Mountains and head for the front. However, the distance was relatively long and, moreover, the weather got significantly worse. Covering the hundred or so kilometres suddenly seemed impossible," Tomáš Sedláček recalls. "At that time, I was in a superb physical condition, so the march did not pose any problems for me. However, there were people among us for whom it was an ordeal. Together with a few officers and orderlies, I joined a group led by Ivan Pazderka. We were proceeding along a contour line at an altitude of about 1,000 m a.s.l. After some time, we found out it was impossible to go on, we had to descend. We came across a woodcutter's cabin where a Jewish family was hiding." The group had survived in this shelter until November 1944, when they were evicted by Slánský and his people. They had to build a dug-out nearby, in which they lived until February 1945. They were able to heat their dugout, but when fresh snow fell, the heat made it melt and the roof was leaking. They managed to lay their hands on a big sack of beans which they were subsisting on, but even they ran out after some time. They had to hunt for food in villages situated in the valleys.

"Sometime early in February 1945, the group of Ivan Pazderka attacked a German column with grenades on the road to Brezno. Prompted by their successful raid, we decided to stage something similar. Only Nanda stayed at home, the others set out. Marching along the slopes of the Low Tatra Mountains, we moved to a position above the village of Horná Lehota. As a matter of fact, we had received information that there was a German artillery battery stationed in the direction of Čertovica. However, we ran into a snowstorm bringing more than half a metre of fresh snow, which made our advance very difficult. We had to spend the night in a shepherd's hut. When we finally got there, there was no trace of the Germans. We had to return with our hands empty."



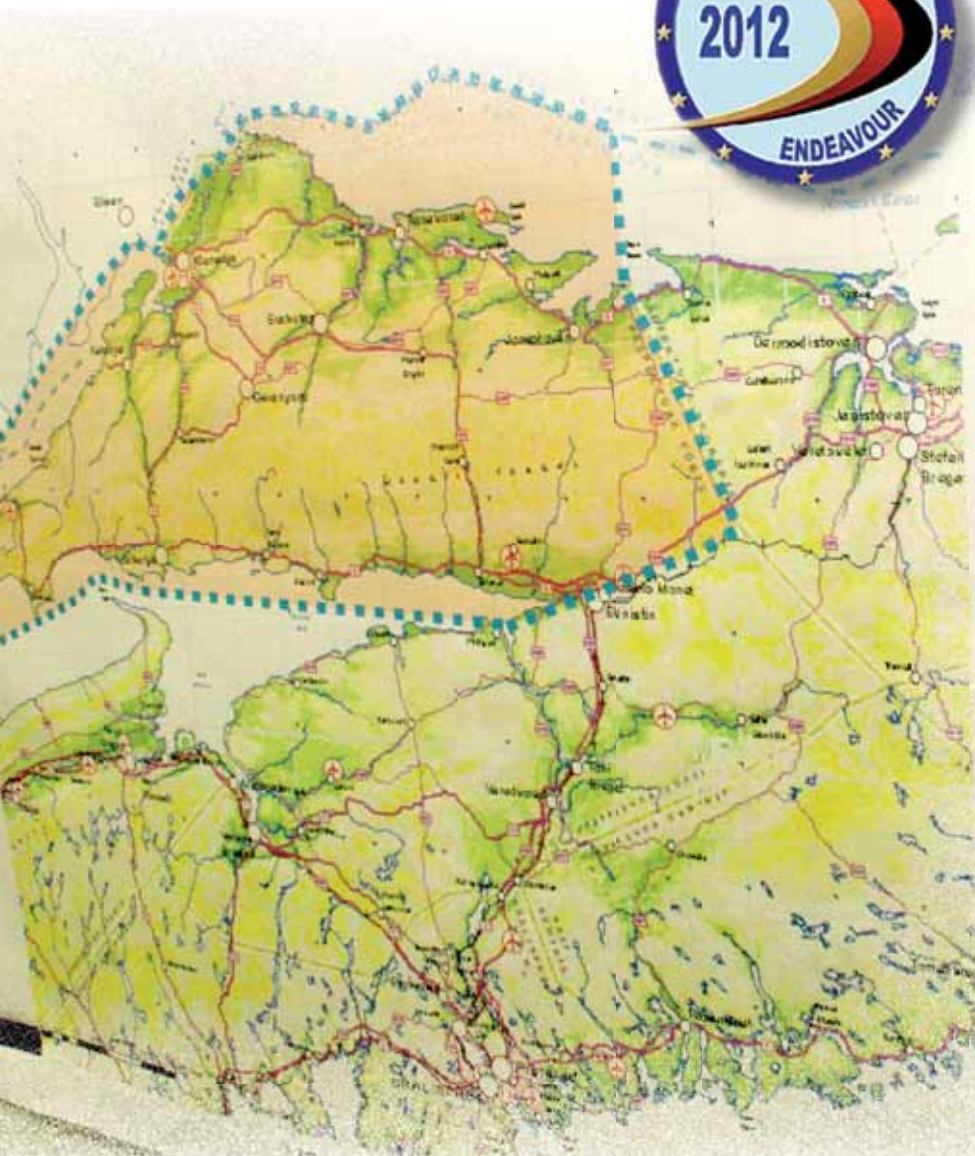
When the front got closer in February, they managed to cross it at Brezno without any problems. The remnants of the brigade were regrouping in Kežmarok. The Czechoslovak command was considering its reinforcement and subsequent deployment in another airborne operation in the Czechoslovak territory. However, Moscow disagreed and the formation was transformed into an infantry brigade. The plan was to deploy it in the very end of the war. On May 7, the brigade received an order to move from Kežmarok to Valašské Meziříčí. The news about the end of the war in Europe arrived while it was still on the move, between Ružomberok and Žilina. Its command received an order to man garrisons in southern and central Slovakia to screen the Slovak-Hungarian frontier. The brigade's HQ was located in Banská Bystrica. Tomáš Sedláček stayed on for two more months and then learned he was to report in the Military Academy in Hranice and to organize combat readiness training there. Having completed the War College in 1948, Tomáš Sedláček became the Head of Ops (S-3) of the 11th Infantry Division stationed in Plzeň. Three years later, he was arrested and indicted of espionage and high treason. He received a life sentence in the subsequent kangaroo trial. "Actually, I have never learned what it was all about. One of my subordinates in Plzeň was Josef Kučera. He maintained contacts with his schoolmate Ženíšek. But I still do not know what they were organizing at that time," General Sedláček told us.

He passed through the notorious "Little House", via the prisons in Pankrác, Valdice, Mírov and Leopoldov, to end up in a uranium mine in Bytíz. He was amnestied in May 1960. His wife had divorced him a year earlier. "I recall we were carried in a bus. As we were driven through the streets of Příbram, everything looked terribly derelict to me. Everything had changed during the nine years in prison; I had to learn how to live again." However, he had to wait another thirty years, until 1990, for his full rehabilitation.

Beginning July 2012, Czech soldiers and airmen have joined the European Union Battle Group effort for their second time

With dozen of stars over head

The large operations room is literally swallowed in the dark only cut in spots by feeble glare of computer displays. The clocks on the wall show various times. But for those in the room, 12:22 Zulu is decisive. At this very moment, this universal coordinated time is followed by all units comprising the European Union Battle Group, be they on the European, African or North American territories.



Hundreds of military professionals and dozens tons of materiel and weapons are heading for the fictive country of Fontinalis some five thousand kilometres from Brussels. According to the scenario of exercise European Endeavour 2012, the country was drowned in persistent disruntlement over distribution of revenues from oil, recently coupled with nationalistic issues. A civil war broke out in the territory. The mandate to deal with the complex situation and stabilise Fontinalis was given to European Union forces, specifically in this case comprising service personnel from Germany, Austria, Croatia, Ireland, Macedonia and the Czech Republic, too.

For the EU Battle Group (EUBG 2012/II) led by Germany, the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic has assigned (for standby from 1 July till 31 December 2012) the second largest contingent with the total strength of 350 personnel. Infantry and combat engineer company, a chemical, biologic radiological and nuclear defence platoon, SHORAD platoon, Military Police group, a Civil-Military Cooperation team, geospatial support module, ROLE 1 medical support and MEDEVAC elements and the national support element. In addition to that, twenty-six Czech personnel serve in staffs at various echelons of command.

In the Battle Group's headcount of three thousand, Germany has the largest representation with 1,750 soldiers, followed by 350 Czech and 350 Austrian military personnel. The Croatian Armed Forces contributed two-hundred and fifty, Ireland one-hundred and fifty and FYROM/Macedonia one-hundred and forty-five servicemembers.

Germany assigned, inter alia, two infantry companies, Macedonia and Croatia one infantry company each. Austria participates with a combat support battalion, Ireland with an ISTAR company. The EUBG also comprises a German helicopter company. The situation with the helicopter unit was problematic from the beginning of the force generation process. Given the generally high demand for operational deployment of helicopters, none of the EUBG 2012/II contributing member states indicated interest in assigning them. Germany eventually took up the assignment.

Under twelve flags

The EU BG certification exercise European Endeavour 2012, which took place in the Wildflecken training area in Germany, had even stronger multinational dimension. It saw the participation of military personnel from twelve EU Member States plus Canada, Croatia, Macedonia and the US. The exercise finalised what was nearly a two-year preparation of the Czech EU Battle Group members. "We focused on purely national training for both individuals and units till the end of the last year. Starting January this year, we endeavoured on performing

The idea of so-called Battle Groups was born when the European Union decided that EU forces would engage in crisis regions worldwide. Development of a quick reaction force system began consequently. A typical Battle Group comprises a battalion equivalent force augmented with essential support capabilities: reconnaissance, artillery, logistic support and the like components. Its force structure enables the Battle Group to perform missions in various types of operations ranging from humanitarian relief operations to separation of belligerent parties using force.

In November 2004, EU Defence Ministers in Brussels decided in favour of forming the EU Battle Groups. Some Member States, including France and the United Kingdom, were able to assign forces with the strength of fifteen hundred service personnel practically at once. So, the European Union had a Battle Group on standby for operational deployment already in January 2005 and two since the beginning of 2007. Then Defence Ministers of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, Karel Kühn and Juraj Liška, came up on behalf of their countries with the idea of setting up a Czech-Slovak EU Battle Group in November 2005.

Units forming the Battle Group are located at their home stations on standby alert. At least a part of the BG must be able to deploy into the area of operations within ten days. The area for the BG to deploy is decided by the Council of Europe. In addition, deployments must be mandated by the Government and subsequently endorsed by the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The European Union has a track record of leading operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Congo as well as counter-piracy operations at the Horn of Africa as a part of Operation Atalanta. In cooperation with Slovak Armed Forces, the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic prepared CZE/SVK Battle Group for standby in the second semester of 2009 and also assigned personnel to man the command structures. For our standby period, we used the offer Germany had made for us to potentially augment the Operational Headquarters in Potsdam, Germany.

This year's involvement by the Czech Armed Forces in EUBG is not the last one at all. In 2016, Czech soldiers and airmen will be forming a combined EU BG with their colleagues from the Armed Forces of the Visegrad Four countries.

international type of missions," the Commander of Czech contingent Colonel Jaroslav Trojan explains. "During the exercise, soldiers proved their ability to perform missions in medium intensity multinational operations."

The fictive country of Fontinalis is located on a large and little populated Canadian island of Newfoundland. The rationale behind such choice consists in the fact that Germans ordered the exercise scenario to be developed by



Canadians at a cost. "Such procedure may appear somewhat unusual to us, but Germans have a long-standing cooperation on development of exercise scenarios with Canadians. They already produced documentation for exercise European Endeavour 2008 and 2009. This type of field training was not realised in 2010 and 2011 so that they followed up this time around," says Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav Beneš, the Czech national representative at OHQ Ulm, Germany. "Besides common agenda I am responsible for at the HQ, I am also involved in working out the scenario and development of so-called incidents for the trainees to respond to. In reality, I am on the other side of the exercise at this stage than all of the colleagues from my section."

Alternate convoy routes

Commander of the Czech contingent, Colonel Jaroslav Trojan ranks among the most experienced soldiers. He served in KFOR twice, in 2000 and in 2005, when he was the commanding officer of the 6th Czech-Slovak Battalion. He was posted to NATO JFC Brunssum for

three years. Colonel Trojan currently serves as the chief of planning branch of the Joint Force Command in Olomouc.

"We are working in an international environment in exercise European Endeavour 2012. And we had to come here prepared accordingly. The precondition is to have an in-depth familiarity with the standard operating procedures; you have to have them down to a fine art. As to this specific exercise, we have also been provided the scenario and the expected developments. Soldiers had the opportunity to study all of that prior to their arrival to Wildflecken," Colonel Trojan underscores.

"I have some personal experience with such international environment, which I gained during my tour in Brunssum, Belgium. The exercise runs according to the European Union standard operating procedures, which are however nearly identical to those used by NATO. Nevertheless, this is the first opportunity for many trainees to have a first-hand experience. The communication is only in English, as is all the prepared documentation."

Major Milan Holusek, who served on the exercise as a logistics officer in the operations centre, concurs with that. The main supply route has just been cut off and his task is to identify suitable alternatives and redirect the convoys carrying materiel. "I pass the information from the operations centre on to the logistic support group to analyse it. As to the performance of Czech officers, I am confident we have been prepared to good standards. If our unit would go for a real deployment, we will surely manage, as we have served in international staffs for a number of years already," he adds.

A job for Czech engineers

One of the so-called incidents the exercise trainees were faced with a dam break and flooded refugee camp.

"I had to send a unit to check on the dam. Their objective was to find out whether there was any other threat imminent. Then they were involved in clearing the flooded road that leads to the camp. We would naturally be able to do all of that in a real situation as well. The conditions of staff work do not differ from reality in any aspect," First-Lieutenant Richard Janik accentuates. "My mission here is to control the operations of the Czech engineer company. Upon receiving an assignment, I coordinate their activities and naturally I also send regular situation reports."

All Czech service personnel assigned to the Battle Group have been through necessary examinations and vaccination. Those measures are driven by the fact that they may deploy as far as six thousand kilometres from Brussels. That includes equatorial Africa, where there is a pretty complex situation in terms of health risks. When our potential deployment gains a more specific shape and the location is determined for us to deploy, our contingent gets additional special equipment accordingly.

No go without logistics

We have to carry full thirty days-of-supply. Although the BG comprises an Austrian combat support battalion, but they provide logistic support in place only after the first stage is over. The initial phase of possible operation is covered as



follows: the units forming the deployment carry materiel and stock for the first three days with themselves. Next seven days are the responsibility of the National Security Element. Supplies for the remaining twenty days would either have to be transported from the Czech Republic, or procured directly in the area of deployment.

As to the transportation of the Czech contingent, this would very much depend on actual location of deployment. In case of going on rail, seven trains would do for the contingent. Even possible combination with searift would not be a problem. Strategic airlift would naturally be the most expensive and most complicated option. It would claim twenty-seven Antonov-124 type of aircraft flights. According to Major Holusek, logistic support ranks among the most challenging services and it holds true of the Battle Group twice as much. The contingency plans envisage deployment over long distances plus operations in a forbidding terrain. "But we have to be able to cope with that. You will not get anywhere without logistics."

by Vladimír Marek



It is shortly past ten hours in the morning and two subsonic L-159 ALCA combat aircraft with distinct inscription Czech Air Force roll to the threshold of runway three two. They soon start and lift off the Shiauliai airbase runway after couple hundred meters. The morning mission of the NATO exercise Baltic Region Training Event (BRTE) has just begun...

The two-day exercise Baltic Region Training Event was organised by the ACC – Air Component Command headquartered in Ramstein, Germany. This is not the first time for the Baltic States to host this training event. This year's edition has been the thirteenth in a row and it has become a custom for BRTE to take place three or four times a year. Operational bases are the Shiauliai airbase in Lithuania or Amari, Estonia. "Participation in exercise BRTE is open to NATO as well as Partner nations. This is an open training event, whose priority is to increase interoperability among air forces," says the Commander of 21st Wing of the Čáslav airbase Colonel Petr Tománek and goes on to specify that this time around the two-day air missions in the airspace and over territorial waters of the Baltic States were performed by the aircraft of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Finland. "BRTE always sees the involvement of the task force currently providing air policing from Shiauliai airport in support of security of the Baltic States' airspace as a part of the NATINADS integrated air defence system."

In BRTE XIII, the Czech Air Force was represented by a pair of multirole supersonic JAS-39C Gripen aircraft and four L-159 ALCA subsonic combat aircraft of the 211th and 212th Tactical Squadrons of the 21st Tactical Air Force Base Čáslav and a CASA C-295M transport airplane of the 242nd air transport squadron the

24th Air Force Base Prague-Kbely. The Czech Armed Forces contingent comprised thirty personnel: the flight personnel plus ground maintenance specialists from both airbases.

Episodes played under the Baltic Region Training Event scenario did not come at random. "The reason for deploying Czech pilots in the Baltic States is twofold – practising for crisis scenarios and training activities in support of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian air forces," Major Jakub Štefánek of the Czech Joint Force Command says and elaborates: "By a joint flight effort, we react to possible escalating divergences in crisis areas. Scenarios are developed on and informed by current operational lessons. For instance the previous BRTE XII activity focused on Close Air Support (CAS). That way we helped to complete the full training cycle for the Forward Air Controllers of our Baltic colleagues prior to their deployment for operations in Afghanistan. Our assistance to the Controlling and Reporting Centre (CRC) Karmelava, Lithuania, is also highly valued by our Allies. In order to achieve NATO standards, the CRC needs to have proficiency in procedures controlling a higher number of combat aircraft. But they do not have them in their inventory. Our effort will undoubtedly foster a higher effectiveness of the local air defence system."

To get a better idea, some BRTE XIII scenarios can be elaborated upon. "The play envisages a situation, in which the United Nations Security

Council mandated intervention and subsequent maintaining of a no-fly zone over an area of interest," MAJ Štefánek explains and elaborates: "In the morning wave, our flight effort will focus on maintaining the no-fly zone by JAS-39C Gripen fighters. Subsequently, a humanitarian relief flight will take place, in which the CASA transport airplane will be escorted by two subsonic L-159 ALCA aircraft. Then a sea rescue mission will be performed as a shot-down Finnish F-18 pilot will be picked up by Estonian helicopter. The afternoon missions involve close air support to a land convoy at Adazi weapons range in Latvia and intercept by Gripen fighters of two "hostile" one-five-niners deserting and making an escape flight into the blue territory. But that way they will violate the no-fly zone..."

"Although these are standard air missions, the effort pilots have to exert here is much higher than in their domestic environment. The reason are the differences, ranging from a different environment to different English spoken," COL Tománek says and explains a professional trend followed at the 21st Airbase Čáslav. "On foreign deployments, we would not go for missions that we have not performed at home. First we have to be able to accomplish them perfectly in our mission training areas and only then in foreign airspaces. Why? The name of the game here is maximum safety," the Wing Commander underscores.

The Baltic Eye

After a two-day effort of the Czech service personnel in NATO BRTE, the Czech Air Force military professionals carried on fulfilling operational assignments in exercise Baltic Eye. "Exercise Baltic Eye takes places as part of what has already been a long-standing bilateral cooperation between the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic and the Armed Forces of Lithuania,

indeed from 2004 on, when Lithuania joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The primary goal is to support the development of Lithuanian Air Force's readiness. We perform regular flights over here to help improve professional readiness of local specialists, such as combat air traffic controllers, who have to have a mandatory number of controls," Major Jakub Štefánek says and relishes the benefits exercise Baltic Eye offers.

The Czech-Lithuanian defence cooperation was forged in a Memorandum of Understanding that provides for one-day missions flown to Lithuania's main operating base at Šiauliai. "On monthly basis, one day is scheduled for a pair of L-159 ALCA to fly from Čáslav airbase down here. The only exceptions would be technical problems or adverse weather conditions. Performing these missions, we provide quality training for them to keep national air defence system up to required NATO standards. We have made use of the fact that we are operating from the Šiauliai airbase at the moment and combined the two exercises together. A four-day effort is used effectively and enables us to have a particularly high intensity flight effort," COL Tománek adds.

Everything onboard a single aircraft

Before pilots' activities in the airspace of Baltic States can be described, let us spend a couple of moments on the apron. Although the activities in Lithuania have become routine for the Czech Air Force professionals from Čáslav airbase, their effort may boast two premieres this time. "For the first time, we have gone for a foreign deployment with so-called Czech Armed Forces deployable task force package that comprises four subsonic L-159 ALCA combat aircraft and a CASA C-295M transport airplane. We have proven in a real-world scenario that the relevant flight and ground personnel including essential logistic support can be transported for a foreign deployment using a single transport aircraft," MAJ Štefánek concludes. In other words: upon receiving an order, such contingent may pack its stuff quite fast, move into designated location using its organic assets and begin performing the operational assignment. Available information shows that after this premiere activity in the Baltic region, reruns can be envisaged in the short-term.

The L-159 ALCA aircraft experienced another premiere there. Specifically, those were three upgraded one-fifty-niners with cockpits equipped with new multifunction displays providing a better orientation for the pilots in foreign environments using a more sophisticated chart database. Colour displays five by seven inches both improve the flight software and enhance flight safety. As pilots of the 212th Tactical Squadron say themselves – the new technology opens new possibilities in employing the L-159 capability. The future will however largely depend on the budgetary resources to enable to make use of the new possibilities in practice.

Flying in foreign countries – new experience

Commander of the 212th Tactical Squadron Major Jiří Řezáč also gives a positive evaluation

on both training exercises in the Baltic region. From his perspective, the four-day mission for L-159 pilots and ground specialists brings a double benefit. "The first aspect is the international dimension. We fly in airspace where NATO demonstrates its presence in the Baltic States by the rotations filling the Baltic Air Policing mission. At this moment, as the NATINADS air defence system is supported by JAS-39 Gripen aircraft, the L-159s also enjoy a good visibility. It is a very good presentation for the subsonic combat aircraft. The locals have had a hands-on experience with the L-39 Albatros aircraft. Many of them would not tell the difference between the two types at the first sight. That is why it is our pleasure to show them the L-159 in a close-up. Many have been surprised to see on their own eyes that L-159 ALCA is much more advanced technologically than the L-39 Albatros," MAJ Řezáč says and adds: "In the BRTE exercise, we flew under direct command of the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) stationed in Uedem, Germany, which was not the way we do our job back in the Czech Republic. In addition, that was a tactical training, which generates new experience. We have proven for ourselves that we are able to perform the assignments. We are given an order, elaborate on it in adequately, get ready for mission performance and then we fly for the mission according to the requirements of our superior echelons."

The commander of the 212th tactical squadron regards the intensity of flight effort in a foreign environment as another professional benefit. "We have not flown in such a comprehensive way in the Baltic States. It is another step for us towards attaining deployability anywhere and anytime if we are ordered to."

The personnel of the 242nd transport and special squadron with the CASA C-295M airplane joined the first part of the mission in the Baltic. "Our mission was to transport humanitarian relief aid. We transported cargo from the Šiauliai airbase to a civilian airport in Riga, where we unloaded it. Throughout our flight, we were escorted by a pair of L-159 ALCA aircraft," CAPT Jiří Ulvr, captain of the CASA C-295M airplane describes.

Same as him, other crewmembers have already mastered that type of missions. But it is always original. "Every flight is different. That applies universally to foreign training exercises as well. Here in particular we improve our professional procedures, because the conditions in the Baltic region differ from those at home – from communication in a different language to unpredictable Nordic weather. We highly value the opportunity to take part in such events," CAPT Ulvr says and specifies there are several joint exercises a year that service personnel of the 242nd Transport and Special Squadron participate in along with the Čáslav tactical Air Force Base.

A report from the Baltic Region Training Event and exercise Baltic Eye would be incomplete without a mention of Captain Václav Svoboda. Although his service assignment is as a specialist engineer with the 21st Wing, he was responsible for all ground affairs at Šiauliai. Needless to say that he worked to full satisfaction of the whole Czech force in training. "For me personally, this event in the Baltic region started already three months ago and will have ended roughly a week after the exercise is over.



Winding it up is always quicker than the preparations beforehand," he concludes.

In the run-up to BRTE, he attended several planning conferences, or indeed talks in the area of deployment. "The exercise objectives determine everything else: quantity of airplanes, number of personnel and logistic support including accommodation and messing. The host nation would tell you what they are able to provide and you have to bring the rest over here: neither too much nor too little. At the same time, you have to be ready for any situation that may occur. You know, what you do not take with you is what you desperately need soon. It is about the small things," CAPT Svoboda says and admits it is not that easy as it may seem to outsiders. "Especially the last days before the departure are quite hectic. You have the responsibility for a larger team and naturally you are required to satisfy everybody's needs," he concludes.

The question whether he feels comfortable in the role of a general team manager here, as opposed to his senior ground maintenance specialist assignment at the home station, makes him smile. "I do not take it personally at all. It is still about airplanes and flying. Moreover, I am a travelling addict. I take it as a pleasant lot that I am able to see the world and yet do something good for my colleagues from the base," CAPT Svoboda says.

Defending the no-fly zone

Description of all events in the airspace of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia would definitely



make a dedicated publication. A two-hour mission of a pair of L-159 ALCA aircraft comprising two distinct phases will be described this time.

Having lifted off runway three two of the Šiauliai airfield, the two machines head north, or more precisely, towards the capital of Latvia, Riga. Approximately twenty minutes on, they arrive to the Adazi weapons range. "Our mission is to provide close air support to a ground convoy. We will be guided onto designated targets by forward air controllers," says First-Lieutenant Jaroslav Pekárek, who has logged about four hundred and fifty hours flying ALCAs.

After mandatory procedures between the earth and the sky, both one-fifty-niners go for action.

"Cleared hot!" the Latvian FAC instructs the Czech pilot. "We have performed two assaults in pair in support of the convoy with a simulated drop of guided bombs," 1LT Pekárek specifies their performance at the weapons range.

Both ALCAs then fly back south. The exercise scenario orders them to become "deserters", who would like to start a new life on the side of the "blues". Their attempted escape flight activates the NATINADS system, which scrambles QRA Gripen fighters to the ALCAs in a couple of minutes. The Gripen leader performs visual identification of the intercepted targets and orders the L-159 pilots on the radio to follow them to the designated airfield. ALCAs deploy their

landing gear, which is a convincing signal that they would comply and land. Escorted by a pair of JAS-39 Gripen, they are brought in the shortest possible way to the Šiauliai airport runway. Their violation of the no-fly zone was not left without response. The skirmish between the "reds" and "blues" roughly a kilometre above the ground had a well-justified rationale. At any one time, this may no longer be an exercise scenario, but an alpha scramble to defend the airspace.

by Pavel Lang
Photos by Jan Kouba

His country turned its back on him

During his life, General Sergej Jan Ingr was involved not only in the 1st, but also 2nd and 3rd resistance movements. Army General Sergej Jan Ingr was the Minister of National Defence in our exile government during WWII. However, it was not always that he held such a position. During his eventful life, he had experienced quite a few slings and unjust accusations.

Ingr was born on September 2, 1894, to a family of a small farmer and mayor of the village of Vlkoš, off Kyjov, Moravian Slovakia, and was christened Jan, after his father. In addition to its own seven children, the Ingr family was also raising Jan's cousin, Anežka Čechová, whose parents had died. While attending the one-room school of Vlkoš, Jan ranked among the brightest pupils and it was thus hardly surprising he started studying at the eight-grade grammar school in Kyjov. When he finished it in 1913, he was, according to his father's plans, to become a veterinarian, a profession offering a successful career in the agricultural region of Moravian Slovakia. However, young Ingr wanted to improve his knowledge of German, and thus joined the army as a one-year volunteer. In mid-September of the next year, he finished the Reserve Officers' School in Královo Pole in the rank of cadet-NCO. At that time, the world war had already been raging in full swing. Ingr was appointed a platoon leader and he and his regiment were dispatched to the Russian front. He suffered a leg wound during his very first combat action.

The legionnaire's anabasis

Ingr was captured by the Russian off Rovno, in September 1915. At that time, the recruitment of Czechoslovak legionnaires had been suspended, which was why he joined the 1st Serbian Volunteer Division. As a platoon leader, he fought against Bulgarians on the Dobruja front and was also involved in tough actions during the retreat to the Danube. In December 1916, he was finally able to join the Czechoslovak Legions' "Hussite" Reserve Battalion in Borispol. He manifested his sympathies to the Russian nation and aversion to the Habsburgs by joining, like many others among his fellow-



legionnaires, the Eastern Orthodox Church in February 1917. He chose the baptismal name Sergej. He was the leader of a reconnaissance platoon, an emissary responsible for recruitment of volunteers in POW camps, and a company commander in the 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment of Jiří of Poděbrady. He was one of just a few legionnaires who spent a stint in all Czechoslovak legions. After his time in the Serbian division and our legions in Russia, he was transferred to France where he held various command positions in the 21st, 22nd and 23rd Rifle Regiments. In August 1918, our troops in Italy were short of officers, which was why Ingr was transferred to the 33rd Regiment operating

around Doss Alto. In the course of the fighting, he advanced from the company commander to the battalion commander. Shortly before Christmas 1918, Captain Ingr and his battalion returned home. Here Sergej Ingr and his battalion participated in the taking of Bratislava and later also of the Jablunkov Pass. During the offensive of the Hungarian Army in May 1919, Ingr's battalion led several successful counter-attacks in the area around the middle section of the Hron River.

When these actions were over, Ingr stayed on. He completed his education at the War College in Prague and then held a number of both command and staff positions. In 1934, he was



promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, followed by his advancement to the rank of Division General four years later. During the May 1938 mobilization, he was responsible for the defence of the border section between Znojmo and South Bohemia. During the next mobilization, in the autumn of 1938, his task was to defend the section between Vranov nad Dyjí and the Vltava River.

Second Resistance

When the remnants of the republic were occupied by Germans and transformed into the Protectorate, Ingr was in Brno. In the next few months, he participated in building up the "Defence of the Nation" resistance organization. However, he crossed the Polish border in June 1939, from where he travelled to London and thence to France. He became the highest-ranking military representative of our resistance in exile. In 1940, he was appointed the Minister of National Defence of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government in London.

Since the very beginning, he found himself clashing with Ludvík Svoboda, commander of our troops in the Soviet Union. Still, he was successfully building up and controlling Czechoslovak units throughout the war.

There were many telltale signs as early as in the second half of 1944. In the spring of 1945, the Czechoslovak government was busily



preparing for a move, via Moscow, to the liberated territory. Before they took off, President Edvard Beneš thanked the leading representatives of the resistance movement in exile in London, including General Ingr.

However, he noted that the new political situation would require new people and that their position in the liberated motherland probably would not be what they, and he himself, would wish. He did not have to add anything else.

Early in April 1945, the new government of Czech and Slovaks was established in Košice. The Ministry of Defence was entrusted to General Ludvík Svoboda. On April 20, 1945,



On 2 September 2012, the urn with the ashes of Army General Sergej Jan Ingr, a prominent politician, diplomat, participant in three resistance movements and a fighter for freedom and democracy, was deposited in a ceremony into the monument in the cemetery at the Vlkoš community in attendance of Defence Minister Alexandr Vondra and other guests.

General Ingr was shown a presidential decree whereby he was removed from the position of the Commander-in-Chief; at the same time, he was sent to an R+R holiday. Even his request early in May 1945 to be dropped, together with General Neumann, into the territory of the occupied country to organize an uprising there in the last days of the war, did not help him. It went unnoticed. He was permitted to return to his home country only in June 1945.

reason for it. The trial was closed only on November 9, 1945, with a verdict to the effect that the case was not punishable under criminal law. In addition, he became a victim of a witch-hunt media campaign led by Rudolf Slánský, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The case was ultimately reopened by a ministerial commission, but even that failed to find even a single piece of evidence of Ingr's guilt; it recommended that Ingr be promoted to the rank of Army General and assigned a position in the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps.

And this was what happened. In September 1947, Army General Ingr was appointed the extraordinary ambassador and plenipotentiary minister in the Netherlands. It was there that he received news of the takeover of power by Communists in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. Since that time, he was just waiting for a signal indicating that his second had also succeeded in crossing the border to safety. He resigned to his position and left for London.

His economic situation in London was very difficult. Still, he was trying to help, both with his influence and financially, our officers returning to Britain as émigrés. At that time, most of the burden of providing for the family rested on the shoulders of Ingr's wife, who had resumed her original profession of a pharmacist. While still in London, General Ingr founded a preparatory committee of the Free Czechoslovakia movement.

After moving to Paris in the spring of 1950, he established an intelligence centre known as Renova, which had its own printing shop and transmitter. His actions did not go unnoticed by the Communist Czechoslovakia. He was demoted, divested of all his decorations, as well as indicted of the criminal acts of plotting against the republic and high treason. Sergej Ingr died of a sudden cardiac arrest in Paris on June 17, 1956. He was fully rehabilitated, returned his rank and decorations only after 1989. On the occasion of his 118th birthday, the urn with his remains was deposited in the cemetery in his birthplace, Vlkoš, in the presence of Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic Alexandr Vondra and other prominent guests.

by Vladimír Marek

Photographs by Central Military Archives – Military Historical Archives and Olga Haladová

