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The 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade honours its 20th anniversary
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U.S. National Guard and Czech military professionals had almost 70 joint activities over the last four years

At the beginning of June, a delegation of the U.S. National Guard from Nebraska and Texas was on an official visit in the Czech Republic. U.S. National Guardsmen led by Adjutant General Texan National Guard Major-General John Nichols and Adjutant General Nebraskan National Guard Major-General Daryl Bohac had a meeting with the First Deputy Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Major-General Miroslav Žižka in Prague on Thursday 5 June 2014.

Following on General Žižka's visit in the U.S. in spring earlier this year, the objective of the U.S. trip was to discuss the options for

continuation and development of the existing successful cooperation between the Czech Armed Forces and National Guard of both states after 2014. Such cooperation saw its twentieth anniversary already last year.

At the start of the discussion General Žižka introduced to the American officials the reorganisation in the Czech Armed Forces' command and control system, which was carried out last year and at the beginning of 2014. They discussed the future, but also reviewed the existing cooperation that is regarded to benefit both parties. Since 2010, there were almost 70 joint

activities from workshops and training courses through exchange stays and joint training events. There were the total 19 activities just in the last year spanning all services. In 2014, joint training events have taken place for engineers, EOD specialists, CBRN defence experts, reconnaissance and electronic warfare specialists and forward air controllers. "Today we have reconfirmed the primary areas for cooperation after 2014, when Operation ISAF will be completed. First and foremost, we will focus on exchanging experience from development of the active reserve component, personnel training,



joint training events and exercises. I am confident that the cooperation will be as successful as it has been so far," General Žižka stated and thanked the U.S. partners for the support the Czech Republic received so far. "We benefit from training activities and joint preparation with the Czech service personnel and we would like to continue these activities," General Daryl Bohac confirmed the interest of the U.S. during the meeting.

In their discussions, they also touched on one of the two crucial points of their cooperation: the reserve component. General Žižka informed the U.S. officials about the current developments concerning new legislation at hand that awaits passing by both chambers of the Parliament

and that should allow more flexibility in the process of manning and training the active reserve component. They also debated the lessons both parties have learnt tackling the issue. "It will be a longterm process. You may not expect savings early," General John Nichols emphasises and pointed out it was particularly important to make sure compensations were provided to the employers in order for the Czech Armed Forces to avoid problems with releasing reservists for military service. He pointed out the U.S. military coped with the challenge as well, especially on long-term deployments.

by COL Jana Růžicková

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The 21st Airbase Čáslav was the venue for a ceremony to sign the Agreement on the Lease of JAS-39 Gripen aircraft, support systems and provision of associated services

The Gripen:

12 years more!

A bang over the airfield never augurs to anything good. But the one that resounded at the 21st Airbase Čáslav on Friday at 15:32 hrs. on 16 May 2014, was very pleasant. Figuratively speaking, it was a load off the mind of dozens of those involved. The impetus was the signature of the Amendment extending the lease of JAS-39C/D Gripen aircraft for the Czech Air Force.

The negotiation with Sweden on extending the lease of the JAS-39 Gripen supersonic multirole fighters lasted exactly two years: it started in March 2012 and ended on 12 March 2014, when the Government of the Czech Republic authorised the Amendment concerning the Lease of the JAS-39 aircraft, support systems and provision of associated services. The key factor is that the contract shows three positive parameters: a longer lease period (2015–2027), lower price (totalling CZK 16.4 billion in annual payments of approximately CZK 1.3 billion) and continuous modernisation throughout the period of the contract's performance (for example night vision goggles system, NATO standard Link-16 data transmission system, Crypto Voice communication system, acquisition of the LDP Litening targeting pod, air-to-ground engagement capability with unguided and guided ammunition). The Amendment also lists requirements for training technical specialists and flight personnel (including that Sweden will train 90 ground specialists and maintainers and 25 pilots). A two-year lease option till 2029 may also be invoked. The Czech Republic will continue to have no restrictions on the use of the aircraft. The fighters may be used for training and exercises both at home and abroad, for national defence in peacetime and wartime as well as for NATO or European Union led operations.

The contract signing ceremony was honoured by top officials of representing Ministries of Defence, Armed Forces and Air Forces of the Czech Republic and the Kingdom of Sweden. For the Czech Republic, attendees included Defence Minister Martin Stropnický, Chief of Defence General Petr Pavel and Air Force Commander Brigadier-General Libor Štefánek. Sweden was represented by the MoD State Secretary Carl von der Esch and Air Force Commander Major-General Micael Bydén. After their opening remarks, the Amendment to the Agreement on the Lease of Gripen aircraft was signed by Deputy Minister of Defence for Acquisitions Bohuslav Dvořák and Director General of the Swedish Defence and Security Export Agency Ulf Hammarström.

"Maintaining the supersonic capability for defending the Czech Republic's airspace is one of the primary attributes of state sovereignty. I highly value the correct, constructive and pragmatic approach Swedish partners applied throughout the negotiation. JAS-39 Gripen aircraft is the best choice for the Czech Air Force," Defence Minister Martin Stropnický said to mark the occasion.

General Petr Pavel regards the signing of the Amendment as the victory of common sense and responsibility. "If we want to be equal partners to our NATO colleagues, we have to have our hardware equipped appropriately. Acquisition of

the new systems to increase operational capabilities of the Gripen aircraft is a good step forward to achieve that goal," the Chief of General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces stated.

Apparently pleased were particularly the "guys in blue uniform". Commander of Czech Air Force BG Libor Štefánek particularly valued the fact that we were staying a part of the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System. "Operational capabilities Gripen pilots have cultivated for many year will be preserved. The effort for them to attain those abilities has been enormous. Giving up own supersonic capability would not be a reasonable decision. The objective was to extend the contract so as to create sustained stable conditions for an effective development of the Czech Air Force's capabilities. That goal has been accomplished."

The commander of the "Tiger" 211th Tactical Squadron Major Jaroslav Tomaňa believes extending the lease was the best solution to the situation at hand. "Continuity is preserved. We will not see a decline in operational capabilities of our squadron; contrarily, we will enhance them once the new systems are acquired."

Reminiscence of "Czech" Gripens

The milestones should also be pointed out in relation to the introduction of the JAS-39 Gripen multirole supersonic fighters into the inventory of the Czech Armed Forces.

In fact, Gripen was chosen twice for the Czech Air Force. First back in 2001, when the BAE Systems-Saab consortium won the tender with the offer of twenty-four JAS-39 Gripen aircraft valued at CZK 60.2 billion, after all other

corporations and consortia progressively withdrew from the tender. The Agreement was then authorised by the Government of the Czech Republic in April 2002, but the relevant bill on financing the contract was not passed by the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies did not overrule that vote.

The following step involved the Government Resolution No. 686 of 9 July 2003, which authorised the proposed measures to finalise the Czech Air Force Development Concept. The decision tasked the Minister of Defence to send request for feasibility study to the Governments of Belgium, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, United States of America, federal Republic of Germany and Sweden, evaluate them by 30 November 2003 and develop the proposal of next steps to be taken in the process of acquiring a supersonic aircrafts system. On 20 November 2003, the Government decided that acquisition of the supersonic capability was a strategic order and appointed an interagency commission for evaluation of the orders. The commission recommended the proposal by the Kingdom of Sweden for ten-year lease of fourteen newly manufactured Gripen JAS-39C/D aircraft as the best offer.

An intensive negotiation between the Czech and Swedish party commenced. It came out successfully and the then Czech Minister of Defence Miroslav Kostelka and his Swedish counterpart Leni Björklund signed relevant documents at the Czech Ministry of Defence on 14 June 2004. It was a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden (permitted for using the aircraft for national defence of the Czech Republic in wartime and peacetime, for performance of the Czech Republic's NATO



membership commitments, for other operations in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and for participation in military training exercises, exhibitions and airshows), the Agreement between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration (concerning the lease of the aircraft, support systems and the provision of associated services) and the Industrial Cooperation Agreement (offset programs amounting to 130 percent of the contract value). The value of the contract amounted to CZK 19.650 billion including the expenses for additional training of flight and ground personnel valued at CZK 150 million. The lease of the complex JAS-39 Gripen system (12 version C single-seaters and two version D double-seaters) started on the day of acceptance of the first aircraft in April 2005 and will terminate on 30 September 2015.

On Monday April 18, 2005, shortly after eleven o'clock, the wheels of the landing gear of the JAS-39C Gripen with Czech insignia and CZECH AIR FORCE inscriptions touched down on the runway of the Čáslav airfield. Five additional machines landed in turns. Eight days later, there was a ceremony commissioning the Gripens into the inventory of the Czech Armed Forces.

The other days that went down the history of the Czech Air Force and the Czech Armed Forces were July 1st and 12th 2005. From 1 July 2005, the multirole JAS-39C took over the defence of the Czech Republic's airspace in the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATI-NADS), presently the NATINAMDS (NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System). They took over from the MiG-21MF fighters that ended their service in the Czech Air Force with the

last machines departing from the 21st Airbase Čáslav on 12 July 2005.

Aviation fans will probably find interesting the following data. November 25, 2004 – the first JAS-39C Gripen (number 9242) manufactured for the Czech Republic was launched in a ceremony at the Saab factory in Linköping, Sweden.

Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Borůvka performed a solo flight with JAS-39C Gripen single-seater as the first Czech pilot at the F7 Skaraborg wing at Sätenäs airbase on 6 October 2004. His colleague Lieutenant-Colonel (today Brigadier-General) Petr Mikulěnka followed the suit a couple of hours later.

Obviously, ground specialists had to undergo professional retraining alike. The first batch of forty technical personnel were trained at the Swedish Armed Forces Technical School at Halmstad from September 2004.

Professional and expert qualifications of the military professionals from the 211th Tactical Squadron Čáslav that operates the Gripens was proven by two operational tours they served in the Baltic Air Policing mission. Concurrently with providing coverage to the Czech airspace, the Gripens defended the airspace of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; that represented a double operational effort. The operational premiere in the Baltic States took place from May 1 till August 31, 2009, with the commanding officer LTC Jaroslav Míka and rerun took place from 1 September 2012 to 4 January 2013 with task force commander Colonel Petr Lančí. Fighter pilots and ground specialists were stationed at the Šiauliai airbase in Lithuania.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

An epilogue of the first Czech NATO E-3A AWACS Aircraft Commander and Instructor, Major Milan Vojáček

AWACS

operation pilot

This endeavour definitely deserves a dedicated chapter in the history of the Czechoslovak military aviation, or indeed the Czech Air Force. Not just because it was a premiere, but also because of the professional progress achieved by a Czech military professional. In the course of his five-year contract with the NATO E-3A Component in Geilenkirchen, Germany, Major Milan Vojáček accomplished three professional achievements – he became the first pilot, commander and instructor on the NE-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) airplane!



A twelve-hour operational flight of the AWACS goes into the final stage. Boeing 707-320B with distinctive rotational radar antenna on top of its fuselage touches down on the runway of the NATO airbase nearby Geilenkirchen. The machine with Luxembourg registration LX-N and number 90454 is rolling to the apron precisely following the instructions from the tower.

A couple of minutes later, the AWACS flight crew switches off four Pratt and Whitney TF33 jet engines. Walking out of the airborne centre that monitors the airspace from the surface to stratosphere, both over land and sea during NATO operations around the globe, here comes Major Milan Vojáček. His invitation to the AWACS cockpit cannot be rejected.

A curious situation occurs when we get seated. In reality, the Czech pilot can sit both on the right and on the left, which allows for a double interview – with an AWACS aircraft commander and instructor – at the same time.

Unconventionally, our dialogue starts so to say from the end. "I was privileged to be selected for the instructor training course at the end of 2012. Approximately six months followed of intensive of intensive training with the squadron to get me ready for the higher qualification," says the member of the "Tiger"



1st Flying Squadron of the NATO E-3A Component and goes on to say: "One of the criterions for being assigned to the instructor course is to join the course at least one year ahead of their contract termination. The very last opportunity clicked for me: the last day of August 2013. After a three-month drill, I successfully completed examination and have served as NE-3A AWACS aircraft instructor as well as the aircraft commander since October 2013."

Major Milan Vojáček accomplished that prestigious achievement less than twelve months to go till the end of his five-year tour at Geilenkirchen. On August 1, 2014, he is returning to the 24th Airbase Prague Kbely and will undergo Airbus A-319 CJ type training. His achievements are magnified with the fact that he came to the Geilenkirchen with certain professional handicap.

Specifically speaking, he had logged 1,100 flight hours, while the entry requirement for an AWACS commander training is at least 2,000 flight hours in the individual's aviation career so far (regardless of aircraft type). Contrarily to some of his NATO colleagues, he had to work very hard to complete the needed 900 flight hours. Therefore, his professional progress could not be that fast because he started from

zero. His training also included flying with the "707 without the dish" – the Boeing B-707/320C Training Cargo Aircraft (TCA) with which MAJ Vojáček logged two hundred and fifty flight hours. "As opposed to the flight practice some of my colleagues had, my entry-level position was more complicated. It is common that pilots coming to serve on the base have a log of three to six thousand flight hours. I sought to boost the intensity of training, regardless of time, by working hard. For example, I logged over six hundred flight hours in 2011," recalls the Czech military professional, whose last type was the An-26 transport airplane at the Prague Kbely airbase. By now, Major Milan Vojáček completed roughly 1,600 flight hours with the AWACS aircraft and by the end of his contract (July 2014), he will undoubtedly have added some more flight hours.

AWACS instructor

Some may ask how far MAJ Vojáček made it in the AWACS flight crew: figuratively speaking, just below the top, because the instructor post is the second highest to the evaluator position. Timewise, the inspector position is assigned approximately for three years and the interesting

fact is that it is not designated just for flight personnel, but also for other specialists, including members of the mission crew. "You can serve as an evaluator after having served as an instructor for at least twelve months. After three years, with some minor exceptions, the incumbent is divested of the so-called evaluatorship and he continues flying as an inspector. Such rotation in the highest professional post provides for high standards of professional qualifications on sustained basis. The process of examining is always kept on the requisite level," the Czech Air Force member explains and adds he would need at least one more year on top of his current contract with the NATO E-3A Component to make the "evaluator".

Unanswered remains the question associated with the difference between the NATO E-3A Aircraft Commander and Instructor. The person eligible to discuss that is the first Czech to have served in those positions. "The key indicator is your teaching capacity. They train you how to mentor properly. Prior to going for the instructor course, you have to undergo training with a civilian company that specialises in training methodology. You will get additional necessary know-how at the Training Wing (TW). That falls into the Canadian basket; the Canadians have

practised here the well-proven British training methodology," MAJ Vojáček explains and bluntly describes the essence: "Before we start the flight phase, we are learning on the Full Flight Simulator when, how and what to say in a limited time, so-called Hot Debrief after a practise approach."

So, efficiency does not build only on theoretical phrases but on actual demonstration of the plot. For example, a glider pilot was invited to the base, for whom potential AWACS instructors were to prepare the preflight briefing. In other words, prepare the pilot for flying on a radically different type of aircraft in a manner easy to understand. Such non-standard situations best mirror your fitness for mentoring. It is not easy at all to explain to outsiders things that come natural to you. After the preflight preparation, instructions on the sim follow and then performance of the planned flight mission. Professional mistakes by the student, a glider pilot in this case, are in a way "credited" to the mentor, an AWACS aircraft commander in this case.

The above academic part is naturally not the end of it all. Another touchstone is the flight phase. To complete the picture, it should be pointed that Major Milan Vojáček, in his instructor capacity, also mentors students on sims. "There are two simulators: Full Flight Sim (FFS) and the Flight Training Device (FTD). My task is to run five four-hour lectures on the FFS or FTD. Every lesson focuses on some of the major malfunctions, which involves controls or hydraulic circuits defects. In addition, he performs the role of an Air Traffic Controller (ATC), as he watches the flight crew's reactions to his inputs and evaluates whether the crew members proceed in accordance with relevant checklists. A similar rule like in school applies here that every hour of academic training requires an hour's preparation," the Czech pilot explains and concludes the sim phase is the toughest phase of instructor training, which is concluded with an exam, after which instructor-students may start instructor flight training. During his five-year tour, MAJ Vojáček has spent on the sim (altogether in all positions) tough 350 hours! including in-flight refuelling.



Challenges? Repeated landing and refuelling to the limits!

No doubt future inspectors have to be able to show some mastery. Perhaps first goes the approach with the AWACS aircraft to the runway, touchdown and take-off. "It is a non-standard manoeuvre the aircraft commander is not authorised to perform except for cases of emergency. Instructors are permitted to do that. The aircraft touches down on the runway and your task is to perform the take-off. In just a couple of seconds, you have to evaluate the situation right: decide whether to continue or go for the brakes. In case you do not have the relevant parameters, you abort the take-off. Misjudging the situation may have a negative effect. It requires relevant experience, initially gained in the simulator as the instructors confront you with the mistakes you could have made in reality. It is very demanding, but necessary for your future practice," MAJ Vojáček argues and goes on to specify that one of the emergencies to possibly occur on repeated take-off, besides inappropriately resetting the stabiliser and flaps is that one of the engines conks

out. And that was what happened to him: "One of the engines conked out in the most critical phase of the manoeuvre. The aircraft tended to depart from the runway. Our reaction had to be quick and in line with effective directives. We evaluated the situation in a second and performed the required actions in the cockpit.

We coped and got the machine airborne with three engines. Flying with one engine out, you already prepare for another one to stop turning and that you would be landing with two engines only. That fortunately did not happen. After the landing, we only filled in the safety report. Training or operational missions do not get suspended for that reason. Figuratively speaking, it is like playing a bass guitar when one of the strings breaks.

You carry on playing on the remaining three," the Czech AWACS instructor says smiling.

The second trick that future instructors have to demonstrate to have mastered is in-flight



refuelling to the limits of the boom. The standard for aircraft commanders is to keep the refuelling boom within the notional cube with the edge of two metres for the period of ten minutes without breaking the connection between the aircraft and the tanker. In other words, he must not deviate from the ideal refuelling position more than plus minus one metre. Otherwise, he would get outside the refuelling envelope and the system disconnects automatically.

The instructor must be able to fly the manoeuvre even more precisely – following the edges of the notional cube. Simply, he must be able to fly the limits.

It goes without saying that the instructor must be able to communicate with the student during that, for example the tanker's visual references.

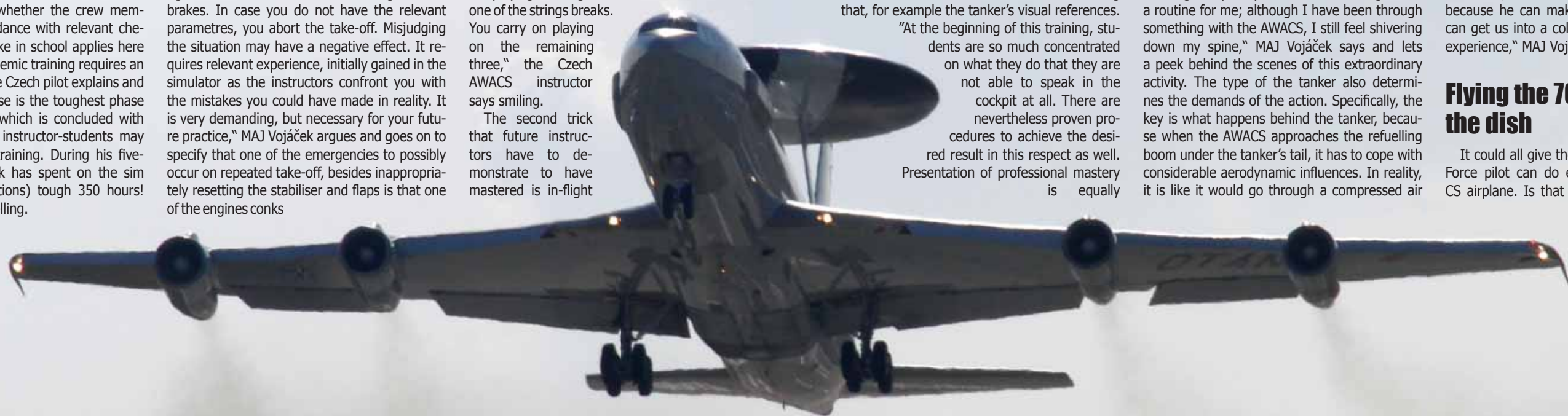
"At the beginning of this training, students are so much concentrated on what they do that they are not able to speak in the cockpit at all. There are nevertheless proven procedures to achieve the desired result in this respect as well. Presentation of professional mastery is equally

important. Instructors have to be able to fly the edges of the notional cube with the aircraft in order to demonstrate for the students how to safely return from the limit edge back to the centre. It is not that easy with this type of airplane as it could seem to some," says the experienced Czech Air Force pilot. And what are challenges of refuelling the AWACS in flight? Major Vojáček offers a narrative that is interesting not only for aviation fans. "I should admit that I did not speak much during my first in-flight refuelling either. I was really under a great pressure. In the Czech Air Force, I have experienced flying trainer jets in pair in clouds, but the proximity of AWACS and tanker here is something completely different. Refuelling is not a routine for me; although I have been through something with the AWACS, I still feel shivering down my spine," MAJ Vojáček says and lets a peek behind the scenes of this extraordinary activity. The type of the tanker also determines the demands of the action. Specifically, the key is what happens behind the tanker, because when the AWACS approaches the refuelling boom under the tanker's tail, it has to cope with considerable aerodynamic influences. In reality, it is like it would go through a compressed air

layer with unpredictable vortexes generated by the tanker wings. In case of the Douglas KC-10 Extender aircraft, it is relatively easier, because it is bigger than the AWACS that can use the draft behind the Extender better. Boeing KC-135 is a different story. The same version of Boeing 707 does not allow for the AWACS to use drafting in the slipstream. Given that the AWACS pilot is guided optically to maintain the aircraft in the right position and the total length of the boom comprising of two telescopic tubes varies between eleven to thirteen metres, one gets goose bumps. "Each in-flight refuelling is original, because there are always a variety of different factors entering the play. When training with a student, I have to be twice as more vigilant because he can make a mistake anytime that can get us into a collision situation. It is about experience," MAJ Vojáček explains.

Flying the 707 with the dish

It could all give the impression the Czech Air Force pilot can do everything with the AWACS airplane. Is that the case? "No. I was not



retrained for test flights. Otherwise I mastered the machine. I take as a bonus that I exceeded my original goal – I wanted to become an aircraft commander. The privilege for test flights holds my colleague from the 24th Airbase Prague-Kbely navigator Captain Jindřich Sněhota. The Czech eight-member team enjoys a high credit in Geilenkirchen. In fact all of us progressively accomplished the highest professional objectives," says MAJ Vojáček, who also acts as the Senior National Representative of the Czech Republic in their station in the Federal Republic of Germany.

But let us get back into the cockpit of 707 to listen to the narrative on piloting the AWA-CS. "Nice machine that I have a very positive opinion on, although piloting it is much more demanding than I thought, be it for the absence of actuators on flight controls or for the long periods of time spent in the cockpit. The priority is to know the parameters associated with the machine's performance. AWACS is an airplane that is based on modes. If you set the right parameters in specific situations, the airplane will react the way it is expected to. AWACS is typical with its general inertia, and so it is necessary to wait patiently for its response after the action is performed in the cockpit. Spasticity is not desirable for piloting, it is to be flown in a relaxed fashion although you hold a mammoth weighing dozens of tons in your hands," MAJ Vojáček argues and underscores the flight crew serves in support of the mission crew specialists.

This begs the question whether piloting the AWACS is easy or not. "It is like with any other type of airplane. When you can fly with it well, then it is easy. Here it is mostly classics. A sheer manual job," the Czech Air Force pilot smiles and disproves alleged effects of the dominant circular radar antenna on the fuselage. It does not have any significant influence on piloting the AWACS, there are only certain limitations associated with maximum speed and crosswind," says the Czech instructor from the NATO E-3A Component in Geilenkirchen, Germany.

Good atmosphere onboard the airplane solicits the question for dramatic experiences. Major Vojáček does not want to go back to them for reasons easy to understand but he nevertheless eventually consents. In his case, it is to two to one or two bad examples and one impressive experience. He starts with recent exercise Red

Flag in the United States, which amazed him in professional terms. "With the 1st Squadron of the NATO E-3A Component we were assigned to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, for three weeks. From there, we took off for Composite Air Operations (COMAO), but not standard ones we are used to. At one moment, there were over a hundred air assets of most diverse types. In my service career, I have not experienced such a huge air effort to gather in airspace. We were a part of top-level operational flying. The experience was the more intensive that state-of-the-art weapons systems were fired at aerial ranges. Those were so-called TOP flights at the end of my AWACS flying career," MAJ Vojáček recalls the Nellis AFB popularly regarded as mecca of operational flying.

Obviously, he will never forget the dramatic moments either. Those included forced switch-off of one of the Pratt & Whitney engines over Afghanistan due to problems in the oil system or a case involving a hydraulic system malfunction over the Middle East. Fortunately, both anomalies ended up well and now they are spoken about as new lessons for expanding professional qualifications of AWACS flight crews. Figuratively speaking, the world is not enough for NE-3A AWACS aircraft. As MAJ Vojáček says, anytime the media report something extraordinary going on on the globe, he may already pack his luggage for possible mission. Anywhere on the globe is not an exaggeration in this case. Except for the New Zealand and Australia, he performed

missions over majority of continents. During his five-year contract, he spent more than one year away from the NATO operation base located at Geilenkirchen. Operational tempo is extremely high there, although the planned annual number of flight hours shows a decreasing trend on the base. The flight time derives from the performance of missions in various parts of the world. Although it may seem extraordinary, the fact is that the standard is ten-hour flights. The longest flight mission Major Vojáček experienced lasted seventeen hours. Plus you have to count in activities prior and after the flight itself. Getting bored onboard? No way! There is always something to do.

Ground specialists are coming onboard the AWACS to prepare the aircraft for the next mission. We get our "two minutes" to finish the interview. That is an appropriate time for an epilogue by MAJ Vojáček: "I have been through an experience that meant a significant professional progress for me. I made it and even exceeded initial expectations in certain respect. I have accomplished my mission and can return home with honour. I have rendered my humble contribution to the high credit Czech Armed Forces professionals enjoy at this NATO airbase. The Czech flag is visible here and has a high respect in the international community."

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



A path full of RESTRAINT

We have been through twenty-one days spent on the longest, most challenging and elite training course in the Czech Republic, the Komando course. We have just been numbers here, separated from our families and friends, without any contact with civilisation and essentially left to rely on each other. Sleep deficit, mental and physical strain have been our daily bread, but we will not give up at any cost and nothing can stop us the inclement and adverse November weather notwithstanding. Manly pride, desire, will and resolve keep us going forward...

That was just a couple of words from the motivational letter written by the participants in the latest run of the Komando training held in the Březina Military Training Area from November 4-30, 2013. That edition was specific as the organisers had to respond to the fact that the autumn selection round was successfully completed only by a handful of soldiers. After organising another run of the selection procedure the number of participants on the starting line of the Komando course itself finalised at 16.

New! Combat trail

The course itself was conceived to make sure the trainees spend most of their time in the forest. Staying in the hut camp represented some sort of a reward for them. The contents of the course also featured some new training events. One of such elements was the warrior trail for example. Obstacle course roughly one hundred

metres long was made up by the organisers using own resources. The trail comprises many obstacles that participants have to negotiate, including bags imitating opponents. The task for course participants is to eliminate opponents with bayonets or with assault rifle hits. All of that takes place in a resounding cheer by the instructors and the scene is completed with stun and smoke grenades. Trainees are sent to the trail both at day and night. The objective of that training is to foster aggressiveness in combat. Selection of candidates primarily focuses on individual soldier skills, tactical movements, essentials of combat drills, including attack, disengagement and response to his other activities. And knowledge of those skills is one of the prerequisites for completing the Komando course as such. Week One is dedicated to practising combat drills from the selection procedure and blasting. The next week focuses on ambushes. The third week then covers assault. Over the

first three weeks, course trainees receive both lectures and practical training on subjects like planning process, aeromobile operations, negotiating water obstacles and rocks, night operations, hand grenade toss, survival and principles of patrolling. The last week sees a comprehensive training, where trainees had to sell what they learnt during training or indeed throughout their service career. "It is designed for the trainees not to have to walk miles but rather focus on command and organising combat activities. Missions are performed in a relatively confined area so that we were able to rotate as many individuals in command posting as possible and to make sure a high-quality training is performed of a maximum of subjects in the allocated timeframe. With a view to the length of the course itself, that way of practising seems most optimal. Soldiers may train for physical strain in the form of long-distance movements at their home stations or in their free time. As there is a need to rotate in the command assignments, there is no room for us to have the course trainees marching dozens of miles, then perform an ambush and walk the distance back or into a pick-up point. Our aim is that soldiers practised the subjects in a real-world environment," deputy chief of Komando training section First-Lieutenant Jan Kratochvíl explains. "The scenario for the final comprehensive training primarily included the planning process, assault, ambush, combat drills, simply basic tactical activities our soldiers perform to demonstrate their skills in organising combat activities and command over their assigned unit. On the first day, the soldiers were tasked to take control and hold an airstrip while supported by Mi-24 gunships, the next day saw them doing a combat patrol, in which the team followed their assigned route and the rotated commanders had to respond to the situations appropriately. That primarily involved responses to strong and weak opponents. The third day focused on assault and ambush with the objective of gathering information. On the last day they



were up to captivity with subsequent application of survival skills."

Icebreaker

The units sending their soldiers for the Komando course, particularly the 7th Mechanised Brigade, also responded to certain problems and lack of motivation in selecting candidates for the Komando course. "Soldiers were dropping out on progress tests in shooting and signals training, or from topography. We tried to figure out the reason. The Komando course has a long history and has always been a prestigious affair. It would definitely be a mistake to lose it. So, we wanted to change people's attitude to the course. Our aim was that they realised the fact that they can both learn much during the course but also have a high quality training. That was why we organised a two-week preparation for all soldiers selected from the units of our Brigade. The training events were led directly by Komando instructors who explained what the course involved and how it is conducted. We intend to increase the chances of success our soldiers stand," says the Command Sergeant Major of the 7th Mechanised Brigade, SWO Vladimír Blažek. "Although the session we organise is rather preparatory, in case we find out some are not up to the standards required, we do not send them to Vyškov. Successful completion of the Komando course is a hallmark for us; those are individuals who had to cope with adverse conditions and accomplished something. We seek that all soldiers in the most junior command posts undergo the course. We are confident it helps increase the team's combat value. We would also like to increase the prestige of this type of training.

Therefore, soldiers who complete the course are invited to an informal meeting with the Brigade Commander, and have a chance to talk with him informally. In addition, everyone who completed the course has an advantage in their service career. If there are two candidates aspiring for a team leader post, the one with Komando course completed will win. The same applies for foreign operational deployments." The Komando course is not a career requirement but a specialty one. And that is a difference. With the 7th Mechanised Brigade, the course is mandatory for commanders of small combat teams and subunits, that is squad, team, platoon leaders and deputy platoon leaders. In addition to those, the list includes snipers and recce guys.

The Brigade command obtains an evaluation of every course participant from Vyškov. Soldiers who did not complete the course are sent to Vyškov again and have to retry. In case they leave for medical reasons or because they did not pass a progress test, they will seek to complete the course until they meet those requirements or leave the post. Soldiers dropping out for a lack of motivation are not in position to serve with manoeuvre units, because they lost their credit. Those may hardly face their soldiers telling them to do something when they are unable to perform it themselves.

Working with the reserve component

The patrol work their way through the woods. There are no indications of opposing forces' presence. All of a sudden a shot cracks in relative proximity and then another one and yet another one. A team of Komando trainees have just got into contact. A mortar unit stands in their way.

The leader has to assess the situation and decide whether to retreat or eliminate the opponent instead. The leaders are evaluated based on their ability to handle scenarios they are faced with. They have to take into account several factors, including the situation at hand, usability of own unit, training standards achieved and equipment, the opponent's posture, strength, weapons, depth of the order of battle etc. After a short recce, the leader decided to attack and neutralise the opponent. The mortar unit was eliminated in a couple of minutes. Moving across the mortar fire positions, soldiers neutralise the last individuals and take control of the incident site.

In this particular case, the OPFOR is played by members of the Active Reserve Component company from Brno and members of the Support Battalion. "We have here ten reservists who help us play activities during the course. Such cooperation benefits both parties. Volunteers from among reservists have an opportunity to take part in a high-quality training event led by experienced instructors, receive the appropriate training, and we have a sufficient number of OPFOR members and replicants.

"Thanks to that, we are able to simulate enemy activities in the area where course participants train in a comprehensive fashion," an organiser underscores. Besides neutralising the mortar unit, there are many additional tasks for Komando trainees to perform. According to the course scenario, they are facing an insurgent army in the state of Březinko. Additional missions facing the participants included gathering specific information from assets the insurgency was equipped with. The aim was to for the soldiers to have a hands-on experience with real equipment and to count with the fact that each action solicits reaction. The equipment was provided by the Support Battalion.

Pros and cons

"Soldier who have violated safety measures, held unauthorised materiel, or have not followed the instructors' direction, or have not respected other instruction the trainees are familiarised with during the initial briefing. Trainees are evaluated by instructors on daily basis; they receive small pluses and minuses. The situation is a bit different during the comprehensive training. Trainees are evaluated as leaders and as individuals. They have to achieve a score not to get a big minus. Three big minuses mean farewell for underperformance. In case the trainees do not score the minimum limit of points during the comprehensive training, they leave immediately, regardless of the number of minuses they scored. "Course trainees mostly complain about the sleep deprivation and relative breadth



of specialist subjects and real possibility of injury. The biggest mistake is however to think that they would complete the course without having to undergo additional physical training. It is only viable without special prepping for soldiers preparing themselves in a comprehensive fashion well beforehand. Sometimes there is some friction in this respect between the instructors and individuals who think they can complete the course without exerting any extensive physical effort. The course has its internal system set with exactly defined goal. Victory goes to those able to cope," First Lieutenant Kratochvíl adds. "We have also recently seen prevalence of the personnel from the 7th Mechanised Brigade. We do not know the reason. It seems to us that the members of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade may have some misconceptions about what they will be up to here."

There will be additional innovations introduced to the course shortly. It should be expanded with additional elements of para training. The organisers plan to include abseiling from helicopter and low-level flight drop to water and a jump for paratroopers at the start of the comprehensive training event. The organisers also play with the idea to hold two selection rounds for each course edition. They were able to test that option recently and it seems to have proven well. Naturally, there must be sufficient time allowed for regeneration after the selection procedure is over. Foreign participation has been considered for while. Those options are discussed with the representatives of the Slovak Armed Forces for instance.

Eventually, the course was successfully completed by seven soldiers. They received the course certificate along with the Komando badge

from the hands of the last paratrooper alive of those who were dropped over the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia during World War II, General Jaroslav Klemes. And that happens in such a momentous place as is the crypt in the Saints Cyril and Methodius Church in Resslova Street in Prague, where those who had assassinated Deputy Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich and other paratroopers fought their last battle. That is also a novelty intended for realisation into the future. So, there are promising prospects. Perhaps one more sentence from the motivation letter written by those who completed the Komando course would be the best conclusion: "We are a good team and that keeps us together."

The endeavour to develop a curriculum for career education of junior and senior NCOs, also involved a Czech Armed Forces servicemember: Chief Warrant Officer Luděk Kolesa

(Extra)ordinary NATO handbook

Admittedly, editors in defence media very enjoy writing articles like these. It holds true twice as much for the Reference Curriculum, because the publication has an international impact and a Czech military professional provided a major input to making the handbook a reality!

Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Military Education REFERENCE CURRICULUM



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
Swiss Armed Forces



CWO Stéphane GUY	Canada	Canadian Armed Forces NMR	
Mr. Tigran HARUTUNYAN	Armenia	MOD Defence Policy Department	
SFC Levan JAVAKHISHVILI	Georgia	Education and Training Command NCO School	
John KANE	USA	Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes	
Stephen KOBEL	Switzerland	Tank and Artillery Training Unit	
Ludek KOLESÁ	Czech Rep	Allied Command Transformation/ Czech Ministry of Defence	
OSTER	Netherlands	Ministry of Defence/CDS	
	USA	Joint Forces Staff College	
	Canada	Unit CWO Canadian Forces support Unit, Europe	
	Canada	NATO School Oberammergau	
	Georgia	Education and Training Command NCO School	
	USA	USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning	



On January 9th, 2014, the NATO Headquarters in Brussels was the venue to the ceremony introducing a publication for junior and senior non-commissioned officers named the Reference Curriculum on the occasion of the meeting of Political and Partnerships Committee in attendance of senior officials representing roughly seventy countries. The project was sponsored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC) saw intensive efforts for thirty months with professional know-how contributed by over fifty experts from thirteen nations including the Czech Republic, represented by Chief Warrant Officer Luděk Kolesa. It should be mentioned that the Reference Curriculum resembles school curricula in terms of contents and recommends in-career academic training courses with specific focuses for service personnel of national armed forces, including those outside NATO. The Reference Curriculum follows on a similar publication designed for commissioned officers, which was launched in autumn 2011, and, interestingly enough, it may be used by any military in the world. In other words it is not dedicated exclusively for NATO or Partner nations' military professionals. It is also applicable for armed forces in the process building or indeed reforming the non-commissioned officers' corps, for instance countries in Africa. Cooperation and sharing experience on education represent one of the cornerstones of what is in full called the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes that associates over 800 defence and security education and research institutions from NATO and PfP nations. Obviously, the consortium was among those who initiated the first reference

curriculum in 2008 for the Partnership for Peace countries, which covered the issues of building defence civilian institutions.

A Reference Curriculum for commissioned officers followed in 2009–2011, and yet before that officers' handbook was completed, efforts started to draft the Reference Curriculum for non-commissioned officers. "The beginnings of the Reference Curriculum correspond with dynamic processes in the junior and senior non-commissioned officers rank category. There was a pressing requirement for such a source of reference. It was required to come up with a publication that would help bridge major differences present among NCOs and officers from various nations in the sphere of education," says Chief Warrant Officer Kolesa and recalls a meeting in Rome, where he was in the capacity of the Senior Enlisted Leader Allied Command Transformation ACT), with the Senior Enlisted Leader Allied Command Operations (ACO), and the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff laid the foundation for this unique piece of work. "We planned two workshops a year in that regard. Eventually, we had to meet nine times including a working meeting in Prague in June 2013. Unlike the commissioned officers' handbook, the one for noncoms goes much deeper. Therefore, it was necessary to take highly coordinated steps with emphasis on enhanced interoperability among NATO nations' military professionals," CWO Kolesa adds and underscores that one of the key indicators of success was the engagement of a Canadian expert who had been involved in the previous curriculum and then became the academic leader for the NCOs' curriculum.

The official launch of the handbook into professional practice at NATO Headquarters in Brussels in January was followed a couple of days later with the Allied Command Transformation approving it as a NATO education reference document. "It is really a pleasure. I have been through something as a military professional, including several foreign deployments, but I undoubtedly regard this reference curriculum for NCOs one of the greatest achievements of my service career. I feel proud to have been with it. For me personally, it has been a great experience and I learnt a lot. To be involved in an endeavour like that, moreover in English, is an invaluable experience," CWO Kolesa says and points the list of authors of the pub, which is also extraordinary for him. Only he has two defence institutions with their logos stated at his name. And because he started at ACT Norfolk and continued as a national expert of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, it reads "Luděk Kolesa: Allied Command Transformation and Czech Ministry of Defence".

According to CWO Kolesa, who is currently responsible for academic training of NCOs and Warrant Officers at the Czech MoD Personnel Division, the publication covers neither tactics nor field training, but academic training and education. "The curriculum intentionally does not include any national doctrines; it encompasses general knowledge of military professionals. It also deliberately does not focus on tactics or specialist technical subjects that reflect too much national specificity," the Czech Armed Forces servicemember argues. Readers of the NCO handbook would find there subjects such as leadership and ethics, military history, modern aspects of military operations, communication or instructing techniques. The publication is not binding for national military forces; it may inspire individual countries in the process of building or improving own defence in-career academic training system. The list of recommended literature therefore includes works in languages other than English. According to CWO Kolesa, a high-quality in-career education is a typical feature of all-volunteer forces that distinguishes them from conscription-based militaries. Those methodologies are primarily designed to improve interoperability among national armed forces.

"NATO views academic and field training as tools critical for improving interoperability. With the drawdown in Afghanistan, there is an increasing emphasis on multinational training exercises and cooperation in education. The Reference Curriculum is not only a model, although in the form of recommendation, which may be confronted with the existing national approach, but primarily an optimal method of lecturing that builds on practical lessons learnt," CWO Kolesa argues and specifies that the first printing of Reference Curriculum – six hundred copies in English version – was soon out and the handbook is currently not available. The good news is that a second print is prepared of additional 600 copies, not only in English language version.

Czech air defence missile batteries in LIVEX part the BALT 2014 tactical exercise in Poland ended up with excellent evaluation

Number one, Fire!

Servicemembers of the 251st Air Defence Missile Battalion managed to perform the most challenging combat test to excellent grades. Live fire exercise BALT 2014, which took place in Ustka range at the Baltic Sea from May 31 – June 5, 2014, proved readiness of SA-6 Gainful operation crews, including the command and control system.



This year's professional test in the Ustka military training area in Poland was already the ninth in a row for the missileers from Strakonice. The last one took place in 2009. A ninety-member contingent comprising primarily the members of the 25th Air Defence Missile Regiment, but also service personnel from the General Staff Czech Armed Forces, MoD Support Policy Division, Defence University, Training Command – Military Academy, Air Force Command and the Military Police, moved to the north of Poland on road, on rail as well as by air. Those transports also achieved one of the primary goals of the exercise: combined movement of forces and equipment over a long distance.

Before we get to the Baltic, let us review what had preceded the BALT 2014 live fire exercise – obviously a drill lasting more than six months. Military professionals from the 25th ADM Regt had intensive training both at their home station and at the 21st Airbase Čáslav. "The initial task was to select the personnel. It did not matter whether the incumbents already underwent a live fire exercise in Poland, but their professional qualifications. The selection was completed with a preparatory training exercise. The first and the fourth missile battery made the finals, from which the crews with the best results were chosen," says the commander of the 251st Air Defence Battalion Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Prskavec and relishes cooperative training with airmen at Čáslav, which helped the SA-6 Gainful operating crews improve their targets acquisition skills.

The Strakonice garrison was the venue on April 23-24, 2014, for the so-called SA-6 credit

fire exercise. Besides theoretical knowledge, the focus was on ability to act decisively in combat. In sixty minutes, every unit got allocated at least ten aerial targets. Soldiers had to be able to acquire and engage various types of targets, albeit in simulation mode. They were to engage quickly moving targets, group targets or such that suddenly appeared in the area of responsibility. Moreover, they quickly followed one another in the air, which put additional pressure on the Gainful operators.

"Sharpening" missiles after movement

Ahead of the CASA C-295M transport airplane carrying the exercise trainees from the Prague Kbely airfield to the Siemirówice Polish Navy base, equipment and materiel set off to the destination on road and on rail. The transportation of key items – twelve 3M9M3E missiles – was the responsibility of a team led by Lieutenant Ladislav Marcinko. "Transfer over more than eight hundred kilometres was without any problem at all and in compliance with safety measures. The missiles were carried in containers on a T-815 truck with a trail. First we moved from Strakonice to Žatec and then carried on via the German and Polish territory to Ustka. We were accompanied by the Military Police throughout our journey," LT Marcinko says and points out even the slightest hazard for civilian population or infrastructure does not come into question: "The warhead is activated by electric pulse that

is generated only after the missile leaves the launcher. Even accidents during road transport do not pose a hazard."

The so-called missile sharpening stage took place after they arrived to Ustka. Individual components went through an assembly line operated by a Polish support battery that was involved in completing the missiles and doing an in-depth check of correct operation in collaboration with Czech GBAD experts. The line also includes assembly of the UZ-K3 autodestruct and filling the missile with compressed air. Preparing one 3M9M3E missile for live fire takes approximately three hours.

It should be pointed out that four 3M9M3UD practise missiles were provided by the Polish party as a part of good cooperation. Although they lack components such as warhead, solid propellant booster with oxidiser and ram engine with gas generator using solid missile fuel and atmospheric oxygen inlet, were effectively used for practise by teams and crews for engagement of real targets. "Twelve 3M9M3E missiles underwent the triple check, one at Strakonice and two at Ustka. The Czech and Polish teams guarantee the missiles' readiness for live fire," Lieutenant Marcinko states.

Alpha and Bravo fire posts

Another stage leading to the performance of the LIVEX of SA-6 Gainful air defence missile systems continues on the next day. Alpha and Bravo batteries moved into fire positions on the sandy shore of the Baltic. The forces and



they are to perform the last check, so-called credit fire against real targets, naturally without firing live. "To practise tracking the flight path of both the remote controlled rocket target and its carrier, we will make use of a pair of JAS-39 Gripen aircraft from the Czech 21st Airbase Čáslav and Su-22M4 operating from the Swidwin airbase, Poland. The machines will fly the combat bearing same as later on when launching the target. Every pair of aircraft will perform three simulation attacks on Alpha and Bravo batteries. By that, they will act like during the live fire exercise," explains the exercise director, Brigadier-General Jaromír Šebesta, and states that action concluded the preparatory phase of the BALT 2014 tactical live exercise.

Continuing progress

Same as in previous years, the BALT exercise saw some innovations. Connoisseurs would know that the last exercise run in 2009 was an operational premiere for the SURN CZ modernised control and homing radars. Their obsolete

assets assumed combat positions and repeated rehearsals for teams and crews. Connectivity among individual components was also tested thoroughly.

"Preparation for the live fire exercise in Poland was long and now we are up to the final but most important step. In the end it will be seconds to decide whether we succeed or fail. I am confident we have done maximum possible for accomplishing the mission. The key factor will be teamwork and coordination among the crew of the SURN CZ radar. Each battery will engage three targets with six missiles," the commanding officer of the Alpha missile battery Captain Lukáš Málek adds.

Certain increase of the level of adrenaline can also be noticed at the Bravo fire post fifteen hundred metres away. The battery commanding officer First Lieutenant Helena Sekaninová performs the last checks of components comprising the order of battle before the so-called credit fire practise, which will be assessed by evaluators coming from Czech and Polish Armed Forces. "Every one of us realised the importance of the test. It is the highest examination of our professional readiness. We hyped ourselves up to a maximum concentration and are confident we will make it. Of course, we need a little bit of luck because everything has to come together at the right moment. Experience also plays a major role. Those who have already been through a live fire exercise at Ustka show greater self-confidence."

The clock ticks ever faster as the live fire by two SA-6 Gainful batteries draws nearer. Now





and hard-to-maintain assemblies were replaced with new high-performance subsystems and the modernisation enabled integrating the system into advanced command and control networks. In other words, analogue system was replaced with digital one.

The point is that the 25th Air Defence Regiment has continued to achieve progress and exercise BALT 2014 was a clear proof of that. The first example would be the systems' integration in the combat order of battle. "There are three radar sensors hooked up under the RACCOS command and fire control system, which are able to share 3D airspace picture realtime. In plain terms, when a radar tracks a target, all radars track it. The joint picture substantially increases effectiveness of cooperation among individual teams," explains Sergeant First Class František Hammerbauer, a training instructor of the 251st Air Defence Missile Battalion, and adds that previously every one was just for itself: "The system did not enable sharing the data. What one radar saw was sadly not visible to others. RACCOS interconnects them all," SFC Hammerbauer relishes.

The other major innovation was the EMU 3M9 device or missile emulator. "We were faced with the question how to effectively train the whole operation of the 2K12 KUB (SA-6) system when engagement of targets with live fire was not really affordable. After a three-year effort, we have a simulation technology that in fact substitutes practise missiles and enables comprehensive operator training. An EMU prototype was presented at the IDET defence technology exhibition in Brno and met with a very positive response, including by the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces. A utility model is presently applied for with the Industrial Property Authority and other actions essential for introducing it into practical use are carried out," says SFC Hammerbauer, who is credited, together with SFC Martin Jína and 1LT Jindřich Vlasák, with making this innovation a reality.

It is not a secret that the BALT 2014 LIVEX also saw the premiere of the ReVISOR (RVR) radar surveillance sensor.



Twelve missiles to engage six targets

Wednesday June 4th, 2014, became the D Day for the Czech Armed Forces task force. Exactly at 11:20 hours the officer conducting the exercise Colonel Vladimír Barca brought the subordinate Alpha and Bravo batteries to the highest level of standby alert: G-120. Upon that command, both units initiated loading the 3M9M3E missiles into the launcher and then took fire positions on the Baltic seashore.

Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Prskavec orders from the RACCOS fire control post: "Target three six zero, five zero acquire." Operator of the SURN CZ control and homing radar Sergeant Pavel Peřík acquires a Su-22M4 fighter bomber at approximately fifty kilometres distance and waits for launching the SRCP-WR remote controlled missile target. The key moment of the live fire comes up – the operator has to notice the target's launch from the carrier aircraft and switch to tracking the rocket itself. A great acceleration of the rocket and disproportion in size between the carrier and target do not make his life any easier. The target is launched twenty-six kilometres from the Bravo post. Its reflection in the form of a wave is well visible on the display. Time is the key factor now – in reality it is an interval from two to six seconds. "Target acquired," the operator reports.

At 13:20 hours, red LEDs lit before Lieutenant Martin Koman, the commander officer of the SURN CZ system. He turns the key to unlock the P button for fire. After relevant command, he instructs: "Number one fire" and pushes the red button in front of him. "Number two, fire" resounds in the radar in a moment. Two consecutive shots are a clear proof that both missiles went off the 2P25M2 launchers referred to as guns.

A couple of moments later, two explosions detonate over the Baltic. The Bravo post reports: "Target eliminated, two used." The situation is getting dramatic. At 13:28 hrs. Bravo takes out the second type SRCP-WR target and the third one four minutes later.

The rocket targets progressively fired by the Su-22M4 pilot in horizontal flight stood no

chance of success against the air defence missiles from Strakonice. The Bravo battery with commanding officer First Lieutenant Helena Seikaninová eliminated them completely with six missiles.

In the afternoon flight window from 15:30 till 15:50 hours, the scenario is replayed. The Alpha battery with commanding officer Captain Lukáš Málek also takes out three targets with six missiles and achieves excellent evaluation. The SURN CZ commander Lieutenant Radim Janák and operator Sergeant Jan Hochman were credited most with the accomplishment. Those two as well as other servicemembers on the exercise were not disturbed by some negative phenomena and proved their mastery. The triumphant cry of the three-member crew of the SURN – commander, operator and driver – could be heard over dozens of metres. Naturally, the traditional ritual also took place: who completes the firing successfully must go into the Baltic Sea.

Firing full of emotion

"Hands-on experience from a live fire exercise is an remarkable lesson thanks to which the soldier gains confidence in his arm and develops self-confidence that is critical for performance of every mission. My satisfaction is the greater that we achieved the main goal of the tactical exercise to excellent standards. We also benefited from functionality of the new fire control system that distributed targets across all radar sensors. It was also important that certain negative aspects did not affect us. A high professionalism and the right adrenalin defeated the concern about potential failure," says the commander of the 251st Air Defence Missile Battalion Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Prskavec, for whom it was already the ninth edition of the BALT exercise to take part in.

The BALT 2014 was contrarily a premiere big time for two "end players" in the LIVEX – commanders of SURN CZ radars at the Alpha and Bravo fire posts.

Recent graduate from the Defence University in Brno Lieutenant Radim Janák comments: "I experienced the greatest stress at school

during the final exams. Here it was even worse, because you do not shoot just for yourself, but for everybody in the unit. I worked hard for four months and the outcome is worth the effort. In several short seconds, I had to prove I was up to what it takes. It was a big professional challenge. The key to success is: listen and speak," LT Janák describes vividly.

His colleague Lieutenant Martin Koman has a rightful smile on his face. "I made it thanks to the level of teamwork displayed by the crew. It all clicked for us perfectly. I sweated most with the last target – I engage it literally in the very last moment. We eliminated the targets flying against us roughly at four-kilometre altitude from eighteen to nine kilometres' range from our Bravo fire post. I am delighted with the result that we downed three targets with six missiles," LT Koman says.

"The result of the live fire exercise is the more valuable that it was performed against a specific target that is at the very edge of the SA-6 Gainful system's combat potential," says the BALT 2014 Exercise Director Brigadier-General Jaromír Šebesta.

Much has been written about the activities performed by 25th Air Defence Missile Regiment Strakonice in the BALT 2014 LIVEX. But there has not been a word about the other player: the 2K12 KUB air defence missile system (designated SA-6 Gainful in NATO code). This is its curriculum vitae: the KUB is designed to engage airplanes, winged rockets, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles and other aerial targets flying at low to medium level from 25 to 10 000 metres, at range from 4 to 23 kilometres, at speed up to 600 m/s on ingress and 300 m/s on egress. The targets are eliminated with a blast wave and fragmentation effect produced by the warhead weighing 56 kilograms placed in the missile's body. The missile is controlled onto targets in a semi-active self-homing mode using a modified proportional alignment method.

by Pavel Lang and CPT Jana Samcová
photos by Jan Kouba

The Czech Armed Forces trains soldiers who are to be deployed in international mission for situations similar to that which Lieutenant Colonel Josef Přerovský found himself in Slavyansk, the Ukraine – that of being held prisoner.

Tough Mental Experience

On Friday, April 25, 2014, a bus carrying eight OSCE monitors set off from Donetsk, heading for Slavyansk. The group consisted of soldiers from Germany, Poland, Denmark and Sweden, and also Czech Lieutenant Colonel Josef Přerovský. Accompanied by local police, the column passed through several checkpoints and stopped just short of Slavyansk. In a matter of a few minutes, it was surrounded by unknown armed men; the monitors and their escorts were taken prisoners and carried to the city, where they were held in a cellar. For Lieutenant Colonel Josef Přerovský, it was the beginning of the countdown of eight days full of uncertainty, spent in the captivity of Ukrainian secessionists

However, this was by no means the first case of Czech soldiers acting as international observers being held prisoners. Perhaps the most medialized case was that of the UN observer Lieutenant Colonel Jaroslav Kulíšek. Together with three colleagues, he was captured in February 1998, during a raid on their post in Zugdidi, Georgia. The abductors were followers of the ousted president Zviad Gamsachurdia and demanded negotiations with the Georgian government, withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and release of prisoners suspected of an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze, which had occurred ten days earlier. Thanks to his excellent command of Russian and good negotiating skills, Lieutenant Colonel Kulíšek played the key role among the abductees. Step by step, he talked the kidnappers into releasing all his colleagues. Eventually, he also managed to

escape. Using his pocket knife, he opened the lock on the bars in the room he was kept in and hid in a nearby tea plantation.

Lieutenant Colonel Milan Kramárik, Major Jaroslav Herain, Captains Petr Matušina, Stanislav Štefanko and Ivan Gerhat and Senior Lieutenant Miroslav Drozd, Czech UNOMIL observers in African Liberia, experienced even more dramatic moments in the fall of 1994. On September 8, 1994, after months of a relative lull, fierce fighting broke out again practically in the entire territory of Liberia. Most of our officers were interned and faced an immediate life threat during the bloody and often brutal clashes. Captains Stanislav Štefanko and Ivan Gerhat, who operated in the southeastern part of the country, were in the worst predicament. On September 11, at 1PM, their post was invaded by soldiers of NPFL, one of the fighting factions, who told the observers they were their prisoners. Beating

and torture followed. The NPFL soldiers stole not only the mission's material, but also personal belonging of the observers – watches, rings or boots. Fist blows were interspersed with kicks between the legs. The captors' favourite idea of having fun was pushing a pistol in the mouth of one of the prisoners and pulling the trigger. The youngest soldiers, mostly underage kids, were the most aggressive ones. There were also soldiers of the opposing faction imprisoned together with our officers. Their fingers were broken on a table and the Czech observers had to watch. But even that was nothing compared to what was happening in Valhun. The local commander issued an order to cut the ears and gouge the eyes of captured enemy fighters. He handed over the gruesome collection to the commander of the local UNOMIL team, together with a message to tell his superiors in Monrovia that this was what awaited all observers, unless they took the first plane home.

After a few days of captivity, rumours were heard that an enemy force acting even more brutally was heading for the port town of Harper with 40,000 inhabitants. Panic broke out. Our officers made use of the situation and managed to get in touch with the UNOMIL HQ and summon a helicopter. However, as it was about to land, the loitering mob realized that they wanted to escape and attacked the aircraft. Riddled with bullets, the helicopter ultimately managed to lift off, but without our soldiers. It was then that the rage of the locals turned against. They were accused of trying to flee and leave them at the mercy of the enemy. They were imprisoned again and quite seriously threatened with a public execution. Their captors were sharpening their machetes on the concrete stairs of the prison, chanting warlike slogans. After endless rigmaroles, our soldiers



managed to escape again and to reach the neighbouring Ivory Coast.

Even Major Petr Pokovba, a UN observer who was captured together with his six colleagues on October 13, 1999, while monitoring the situation in the Kodori Gorge in Georgia, was finally set free. In his case, the abductors did not have any political objectives; they only demanded a ransom amounting to USD 200,000. The observers were kept in an abandoned house which was quite cold at that time of the year. Moreover, they slept on the floor. The psychic pressure was again the hardest thing to cope with. On top of that, the situation deteriorated, as ransom negotiations were getting nowhere. The abductors said that they would start killing the observers one by one if they did not get the money. They first chose the Uruguayan observer. They dragged him out, placed a submachine gun barrel on his neck. "You will die in ten minutes," they said. They started pulling back and releasing the charging handle; cartridges were popping out like crazy. It would only have taken a failure, a jammed breech, and a shot would have been loosed off. However, the captives were finally visited by negotiators who announced that four of them would be released immediately. The observers wrote down their names on pieces of paper and the Uruguayan observer drew four of them. Petr Pokovba's name was among the selected foursome.

Josef Přerovský too went through a psychic ordeal. "We spent the first two days in a cellar, guarded all the time and escorted even to the restroom. We were frisked; they even took our bootlaces and examined our boots to see whether something was not hidden under the soles. Our hands were tied with adhesive tape, they even put adhesive tape squares on our eyes, so we could not see anything," is how Lieutenant

Colonel Přerovský described those moments. "The first eight hours were worst. Then they untied our hands, perhaps not to damage our health, and let us move around the cellar."

These are exactly the situations which Czech soldiers preparing for missions abroad are trained for in special courses in Vyškov. In addition to a theoretical part containing a lot of useful information, there is also a practical part which gives them firsthand experience of what awaits them if they are captured. "The purpose of our courses focused on behaviour in captivity is not to break the trainee, but rather to identify his or her limits. Each of us has a secret room of sorts. Our objective is to avoid a surprise on the part of the trainee when the limit is getting nearer," Major Darina Záchová of the TRADOC Command – Military Academy in Vyškov told us some time ago. "If someone is really captured, the first thing he or she should is to answer three questions; who the captors are, what they want, and what value he or she has for the captors. One may be abducted to be pumped for information, or just to be exchanged for a sum of money. The captors may also intend to use the prisoner in the media, in a psychological war of sorts."

According to the Geneva Conventions, a captured soldier is supposed to disclose only his or her first name, surname, personal number and rank. Any other information may be abused. However, the Geneva Conventions are important mainly for the psyche of a person who was captured. Guerrilla fighters generally do not honour them. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to try how they would react to the above answers, for example during an interrogation.

It is true that Lieutenant Colonel Přerovský was not beaten or tortured by hunger, but the psychic deprivation was all the worse. "It was

mentally quite tough, as there were combat operations going on around Slavyansk. Trying to sleep while hearing grenade explosions is not really an enjoyable experience," he explained. "Another critical situation occurred when we were moved from the cellar to the fourth floor. They told us an attack against Slavyansk was imminent and that we would be dispersed around the building and used as human shields. We even considered an escape attempt at one moment. However, it was not too realistic. We might have got out of the building, but definitely not out of the city."

"Everyone must consider what his or her chances of survival are if he or she attempts to escape. As a matter of fact, all weaknesses that he or she possesses, surrounding nature, unknown terrain, and of course the abductors who will do their best to hunt the escapee down join forces against the prisoner. The escapee's only tools of survival are his or her knowledge, skills, and willpower; the abductors probably have taken away everything else," is what military psychologist Rostislav Číhal told us about this topic some time ago. "If the prisoner finds out he or she has been captured by zealots and that it is only a matter of time before he or she will be killed, then an escape attempt should be made. If no one looks for me for two hours and if I can cover ten kilometres during that time, the pursuers will have three hundred and fourteen square kilometres to search. It is also necessary to analyze whether they have a pathfinder, whether they are able to guess my escape routes and how long I will need to get to friendlies. If nothing else, the escape planning builds up confidence."

by Vladimír Marek
photos by Vladimír Marek and Petr Medek





Saber Junction II: A small war behind the Czech border

Soldiers talk about exercise Saber Junction with enthusiasm. What made it so unique?

It was like we would get into the middle of a true war. We faced a real enemy; armoured vehicles and tanks fought here. We had helicopter flights as well as drones flying overhead. What we could dare to do and use on the exercise was almost unreal.

Did you know beforehand what you were up to? Are such giant exercises rather not a show for functionaries?

In the initial conference, where I said how many soldiers and what capabilities I would bring, I was told we would rehearse defence, counterattack and attack. Nothing more. Along with a U.S. and Slovenian battalion, our battalion was a component of multinational brigade under US command. Against us, we had an OPFOR comprising local Americans, who had been consistently trained to play the opponent. Those were assisted by Norwegians. We had a preparatory phase at the outset for the lads to get to know each other better and get used to working with engineers or artillery for instance. And then we had a six-day LIVEX. The brigade commander issued a combat order, the mission was specified for each battalion and for the whole brigade. I gave orders to my units and off we went for fighting. I did not have to prepare anything, I just got a tasking what to do and that was what I did.

So you had a minimum amount of information plus your comrades were foreigners. Perhaps it was not easy to coordinate everything, was it?

That was the point. Everybody knows that if there is a conventional conflict in Europe in the

future claiming engagement of armed forces in an Article 5 operation, this is very much the way it could like – nobody would just command themselves nationally. We were three different units who had never seen each other before and everybody spoke a different language. We were combat ready within two weeks and it would be the same in reality, which is quite fast in my view. As far as I am concerned the period of time required for “activating” reservists would be in the order of months. That we got up on our feet so fast was very much thanks to similar methodology and procedures as well as military language with the same signs and symbols.

Based on what you indicated, it must have looked like on a real battlefield at Hohenfels.

We have not experienced anything like that before, it was amazing. It was a unique event for many locals too; they told us they have exercised like that more than a decade ago. We have prepared and built everything as if we were up to a real operation. Not like Afghanistan, but a conventional type – like the first campaign in Iraq for instance, when Norman Schwarzkopf commanded and all tanks got on their way. We worked completely along the same lines. We were out for six days, slept in our vehicles and tent shelters. The command post was moved all the time, we had a real opponent, two times stronger than us, who mostly attacked us because we had tanks and BMPs. There was a huge dynamic to the exercise, something new was coming all the time. Downtime to relax? No way – you do not have time in war either. We performed defence and off we went to plan a counterattack. The opponent played to spite us, assaulted us permanently, we had to tackle

“It resembled Iraq, when Norman Schwarzkopf commanded all tanks to get moving,” Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Botík, commanding officer of the Czech task force and the commander of the 72nd Mechanised Battalion Páslavice describes the international exercise Saber Junction held in November last year. About 600 Czech military professionals with 130 tanks and vehicles departed for Hohenfels, Germany, and the exercise was truly unique – it was all about conventional warfare.

something on 24/7 basis. Everything was imitated with practise ammunition, shots and explosions resounded all around us unceasingly. We had MILES gears on our personnel and on the equipment, so soldiers were able to see instantly whether they killed something or not. We slept four hours a day, but nobody minded that, we were pumped up with adrenalin. An unbelievable experience for me and for the lads too.

When it was so realistic, were there fatalities as well?

Absolutely. Fatalities or casualties were transferred on an armoured ambulance vehicle from the front line over two kilometres into the rear area. The doctor accepted the casualties and either took them to his aid station or had a MEDEVAC flying in for them. He searched the dead. The evaluators inspecting on us went even into such level of detail that they warned the doctor that the beds had to be separated with sheets because of psychological effect. The only difference to a real war was that fatalities got back on the game after eight hours. (laugh.)

Were the soldiers not tempted to get killed on purpose to take a rest?

Contrarily. Out of almost six hundred service personnel, I only had about a dozen of ill individuals and those were really unable to take part in combat. That primarily involved sprained ankles, knees, fever. No one played cough. My signal guy bandaged his broken finger with a splint and kept working. And there were more like him. A guy with twisted knee was sent for X-ray and they found out there he was having blood in the knee. And yet he wanted to go on warfighting! It is simply different nowadays, not

like with conscripts, who would complain about feeling cold and not having anything to eat.

The conditions during the exercise were nevertheless tough even for professionals, weren't they. Did the organisers think about making warfighting a bit more pleasant for soldiers?

No way. Moreover, logistic support and comprehensive preparation was in the hands of the commanders. I had a rough idea of what we were up to and I had to get everything planned so that we would be able to accomplish our mission. We perhaps managed well, we did not miss anything throughout the exercise; we were completely autonomous. We replenished food and fuel during combat and slept in our tent shelters. Americans told us: you are no trouble-makers, you have everything you need. I even took along some showers for the lads to wash themselves. It was wonderful to see, when they had a shower after three days, as if you have sprinkled them with the water of life. Zombies turned into warriors again. (Laugh!)

To be in coalition with Allies in a conventional conflict would involve using their equipment as well. How did that work during Saber Junction?

Completely the same way. In addition to my own 72nd Mechanised Battalion, I was supported by additional Czech units – engineers, tank and artillery gunners. Plus I got assigned signal-people from the Americans to have connectivity with the brigade command and a liaison officer to work with U.S. Air Force. During the exercise, we had a squadron of more than twelve Apaches and a dozen Black Hawks. We even dared to employ Raven UAVs and simulated Predators. We used what we could and we had no fear. We said to ourselves: it is a unique opportunity and we have to learn.

How did you feel about it?

Awesome. One gets a completely different compass of possibility for decision-making. I never dreamt to get allocated in a single day UAVs for four hours for scanning the front rim of defences or two teams of Apaches to cover my forward movement. It was amazing, regardless of the fact that I will probably never be

in command of soldiers with so many different specialties as if it was in reality.

The last conventional conflict was World War II. How would its shape differ when you have the most advanced weapons available?

Using advanced equipment, you have a better situational awareness on the battlefield, you can take decisions faster and more precisely. But it still holds true no territory is under control without boots or indeed tracks on the ground. Warriors are the key, the standards they are trained to and the way they operate their equipment. It does not matter whether you have a first-generation or third-generation weapon. If you cannot use it, it is no good for you. For example, we had our BMP-2s that many people scorn and yet we were able to defeat Norwegian Leopard tanks with them! And the point was that my lads have used them for years and know them perfectly. They know how they behave in the terrain, are able to manoeuvre with them and to use their capabilities. BMPs are good machines and I would never have them replaced.

Try and explain in plain terms what makes a thirty-year old tracked vehicle so amazing.

I would offer you an example that happened to us during the exercise: you have an area where you can move on roads or in the terrain. The Slovenian battalion was equipped with wheeled vehicles that did not do well in the terrain and so they stuck to roads. What would you do as the opponent? You wait for the Slovenians at the roads and – as was the case during the exercise – you would engage them with RPGs. But no one had a clue where our tracks would spring up.

Did you come up with a strategy during the exercise that really got the opponent?

It was during the last attack, when we made use of our BMPs. We discovered a minefield planted by the opponent so, that we went through a forest, which no one expected. We staged a deceptive attack for which I only assigned the maintenance vehicle and two BMPs to perform, and we took control of the town unheeded almost without any losses. Then a living



hell broke out there. We fought whole day long, once we were in control, then they took over. I had a feeling at times that all opposing forces who stood against battalions fell to us. It was incredible and I said to myself it was like the battle of Kursk. Anywhere I looked were flashing vehicles after being hit, the horizon was scattered with armoured vehicles, friendly and the opposing machines alike. It looked as if a huge tank battle had just ended.

You said there were twice as many opponents as you. OPFOR were locals, they knew the area by heart. Was it not a bit discouraging?

Not at all. It was a maximum challenge. Everybody sought to do their very best not to make fools of ourselves at least. One gets pulled in, you are full of adrenaline and do not have other thoughts than where and how to make use what you are able to get out of people and the equipment. It did not matter that we were not locals. As I already mentioned, we had a great advantage that our BMPs are able to get us through the thickest forest or any ground cover. I have to admit we benefited from the fact that we train at home at Libavá and Doupov training areas in terrain and we do not drive on roads.

Who won in the end?

The point was not to win but to try everything out into the finest level of detail. When we began to prevail, those controlling the exercise did something to prevent us from finishing it quickly. They only allowed us to complete the final attack. OPFOR had nothing left in the end; we had about three vehicles, we went to the very limits.

I was able to check how we performed afterwards in the simulation centre. The MILES has an in-built GPS and we were able to see on computer maps both how the manoeuvre looked like, but also the fact that we were always a small step ahead of the opponent.

It is commonplace for soldiers today to use GPS and other gadgets instead of maps. What about you?

I was on ordinary maps throughout the exercise; I made dots where we were and where the opponent was. I was the only one and they sometimes looked at me like if I was an oddball. All others were on GPS and trackers. Old-fashioned people would refuse those novelties, but if they do work, it is a great advantage that we sadly lack. For example, when I requested a helicopter to neutralise an enemy vehicle in the forest – and I was unable to give the position to the pilot quickly – he did not shoot, because he could destroy my own vehicle. Thanks to modern equipment, you know who are friends and foes, you can watch movement of all of them online on displays. And that comes in handy. But if your computers pack up, you have to manage without them. That is why my soldiers still train with ordinary maps. And when the equipment conks out and others go blind, we will still know about each other.

by Olga Haladová

photos by the 72nd Mechanised Battalion Páslavice

Exercise Saber Junction II perfectly proved defensive and offensive operations by heavy equipment of the Czech Armed Forces 72nd battalion task force

BIG Laser Battle

The opponent assaulted our light dismounted team from all sides with tanks and fighting vehicles. It seemed after some time that they managed to eliminate us all. American armoured vehicles victoriously rolled down the road and demonstrated their superiority. In spite of that, several surviving soldiers gathered down in the woods. They consolidated, took a wide turn to circumvent the American convoy and attacked one of the tanks with an RPG. A fierce firefight broke out immediately.

The U.S. Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, was the venue in November last year for the multinational exercise Saber Junction II that involved ten NATO nations' and Partner armed forces. Almost 590 service personnel with 120 vehicles represented the Czech Armed Forces.

Before they joined the exercise itself, they faced movement into Germany over several hundred kilometres, which involved tanks, Dana self-propelled howitzers, armoured fighting vehicles plus additional heavy equipment and several hundred tons of materiel. All of that was loaded onto railway cars at Velká Bystrice. From there, a seven hundred metres long train

travelled to Parsberg, Germany. Everything had to be reloaded onto low loaders there and moved into the training area on road.

All Czech soldiers and the equipment were fitted with the MILES engagement system, which is able to recognise all hits on warriors and the equipment while firing blanks. Thanks to that, the training could be as close to the real combat as it possibly could.

"The primary benefit of the JMRC is the mass employment of those systems. They enable making the training realistic to maximum extent. Not only because all soldiers plus the equipment are involved in a single system. It also enables the integration of additional assets



such as helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, airplanes, as well as the influence of the public and a range of additional factors that may occur in a real-world situation. That is naturally irreplaceable. For a modest sum of money, we gain capabilities to handle situations that would cost us much more in reality," Chief of General Staff Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel pointed out. While the first stage offered opportunities for soldiers to try out weapon systems and train interoperability with partners, everything had to be in full swing in the second one.

Manoeuvring defence

"Now we are moving on into the final stage of the exercise which will bring the whole effort to a head. From the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade we are a component of, we got an order based on which we deployed in the area of operations. Our mission is to defend the province against aggression. There are roughly six hundred of us here and we have heavy hardware. So, we represent the brigade's main combat power; that was why we were assigned to take defence in the most difficult area," the commanding officer of the 72nd battalion task force Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Botík commented. "We have staged two mechanised companies reinforced with tanks, artillery and air assets in the direction of the assumed main attack direction. We believe the opponent will try and break the defences in this very corridor. Over the past days, we have already encountered the opposing forces. We know the opponent is highly mobile. Therefore, we tried to conceive our defence in a manoeuvre manner so as to inflict the greatest damage as we progressed into the depth of his formations. Our next task is to defend the strategic airfield, which was meant to serve as a transfer point for the reinforcements and was also intended to relieve the main forces." Our soldiers were building the main command post on one of the places of the JMRC. They moved over here early in the morning. It was necessary to build tent shelters and lines of communication. "We have to have connectivity with the superior echelon, the brigade, and the subordinate units. In addition to that, we provide operation planning," deputy commanding officer of the battalion task force, Major Martin Hajduch, explains. "In the upcoming hours and days, we will control the defence of the battalion from this area, defensive warfare and in the final stage, if we manage, we would like to mount a counterattack."

Signalman's nightmare

The key person responsible for providing communication and information support is deputy chief of CIS team of the 7th Mechanised Brigade, Captain Marek Koutný. His subordinates were tasked to provide comprehensive connectivity with all means, i.e. using both radio and data communication. "We are working in a multinational environment. So, we have to provide connectivity both on national and on international level. In addition to radio and data communication, Americans have also helped us



here to provide satellite communication plus connectivity into U.S. Army data systems," Captain Koutný explains. "We are facing a very difficult terrain here, which is a nightmare for all signalpeople. In addition, we have a gamut of equipment in the area, many armies. So, systems interference occurs here. We had to take all of this into account when selecting the command post."

For the time being, some sort of probing has been going on. The simulation system records possible hits on any shot. Soldiers or equipment are however not always eliminated out of the battle. Two short beeps announce injuries, a long uninterrupted tone means a kill. A light gets lit on heavy armoured vehicles or tanks. In order for its elimination to be visible from distance, it should also elevate the gun up. But you have to score at least three RPG hits, sometimes five, before it is eliminated. Some weapons are naturally not able to eliminate it at all.

"No one in our armed forces has had the opportunity to train with these simulation systems on such a broad scale. It is really a huge exercise not only for our brigade, but indeed for

our whole armed forces. Last time we had the opportunity to take part in something that large was in 2006. It is a tremendous opportunity for everybody to prove their activities as if it was a real combat. There is no one who would not play a role here. Everything is simulated in a completely realistic fashion, from combat activities to casualty evacuation or distributing POL across the area," Lieutenant-Colonel Botík points out.

Refugee exodus

Whereas the combat part of the task force takes defensive positions, additional components also perform their duties, including the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) team. Their mission is to find out about the situation in the Merklabí community, from whose environs the exodus of local inhabitants is imminent. A convoy of infantry fighting vehicles gets moving. Crowds of refugees are rolling down the road facing the team. They are hauling carts and carriages overloaded with packed suitcases and other luggage. Two soldiers break up from the convoy and start to negotiate.

"We were tasked to fetch a CIMIC officer, get the individual into the Merklabí community and provide security cover to his meeting with the community leaders and the inhabitants. On the way, we were meeting groups of refugees, and the CIMIC officer obtained initial information from them," the leader of the 3rd mechanised platoon SFC Jindřich Podivínský explains. "On every stop, the first thing we did was to provide combat security to the convoy."

The Merklabí community is located at our front defence perimeter, so we had to provide security cover including in the open. We could not rule out that there were members of separatist army in some of the refugee groups."

On entry to the Merklabí community, members of the mechanised platoon move forward with maximum caution.

The CIMICKer First Lieutenant Michaela Řehová is most interested in the local hospital. That is where she learns the most important information on the situation in the whole agglomeration. The doctor's station is full of medical materiel and really strikingly resembles of medical facilities our soldiers may encounter on operational tours abroad. The replicators playing the locals

for the U.S. Army's training centre have mastered their roles outstandingly.

Requesting escort

By then, 1LT Řehová is approached by one of the local farmers who complain about the soldiers' having rutted his field and damaged the crop. But it turns out in the end that they are not right. So, the situation does calm down. "If such a case would really occur, we always seek to apologise on behalf of the military. Many times problems come up in the moment when we do everything we can to protect local inhabitants against some kind of threat," First-Lieutenant Řehová says. "Our primary mission here nevertheless is to check the current situation in the Merklabí community. As you could see yourself, we have been meeting hordes of refugees on our way, which indicated not everything was all right."

Directly on spot, we sought to get familiarity with the living conditions, security situation in the community and especially how we could help the locals in the most efficient way. They do not have enough food, drinks, there is a bad

security situation, they lack any protection. The result is extensive migration. People run for refugee assembly camps."

Although the Czech CIMIC may not immediately help the locals instantly, they can still contact the locals with civilian humanitarian organisations. The CIMIC team may also show them how their situation could be solved. After the end of the episode, the team also reports to their superior echelon. U.S. CIMIC team, who could also render some help, is a component of their superior brigade. First-Lieutenant Řehová exchanges greetings with the community inhabitants and asks how they are doing.

Communication represents the cornerstone of activities run by CIMICKers. "We have to behave in a forthcoming manner towards the locals and establish the most intensive communication with them. Only that way we are able to obtain from them the information we often do not think they could possibly possess. It is all about communication and mutual confidence," 1LT Řehová points out.

A vehicle with UNIDO mission insignia arrives in the meantime. The crew shows identification cards of that organisation and demand

an opportunity to discuss with the convoy commander.

Sergeant First Class Jindřich Podivínský learns from them that they need an armed escort on the way leading from the community southward. He consults the matter with his superior on the radio.

"The commander told me it was only up to me whether I would give them an escort or not. As our priority task is to provide security to the CIMIC team, I finally gave them negative answer," SFC Podivínský adds.

Passed through Slovenians

The sun begins to rise over two hundred square kilometres of the Hohenfels training area. The Czech troops were ordered to take defensive positions at full strength at six in the morning. But they have been in defence positions already from midnight. During the night, they were attacked by the first tanks and AFVs of the opposing forces. They managed to destroy two Norwegian Leopards and engage in



another big battle at the moment. After a fierce fight, they managed to neutralise a tank platoon and an AFV platoon. Then the Czech armoured vehicles abruptly start off. At full throttle, they are dashing for the task force's rear area.

"When the opponent realised they would not break through our positions, they decided to go in the north direction. They managed to break the defences of the Slovenian battalion and penetrate our rear area. We had to respond to the situation very quickly. Sadly the information that the Slovenian defence fell did not reach us early enough," Lieutenant-Colonel Botík described. "The opponent's posture was changing quite fast; I had to turn around the whole defence and move both manoeuvre companies into our rear, as the opponent managed to quickly take control of the airfield. They got as far as our main command post. We had losses in the fight for the post, but the opponent eventually did not capture it. Our reserve force arrived shortly after the opponent, we regained control of the airfield and neutralised the opposing forces."

Fortunately it was just some a company-strong tactical lead unit. Additional opposing forces did not get into the area in time. Our defenders managed to overtake them. They formed a manoeuvre defence in the north so that nobody could surprise them from that side.

Ready for the second wave

Another wave of attack however came rushing in through the Slovenian-controlled territory, primarily comprising Norwegian Leopard 2 tanks. "We were nevertheless already prepared for them, eliminated three of them and then the opponent started to withdraw. At that moment, we got an order from the Brigade to use the opportunity and push the opponent back to the original line, which we eventually managed. We lost four AFVs and two tanks. Considering that we sent in twenty-four IFVs and six tanks, our losses were not that high. As a matter of fact, we faced two tank battalions. Roughly forty armoured vehicles in total," LTC Botík describes. "When they paralysed our main command post for some time, I was forced to control the operation from a tactical command post. The more challenging it was to coordinate. That improvisation ended when we managed to push the opponent aback and restore our main command post. The key benefit of the day was that we had an opportunity to practise manoeuvre defence, counterattack as well as assuming defence positions again."

The problem of Slovenian defence was that it comprised a light unit equipped with AFVs, but only with fifty calibre machineguns. Firing them against tanks had a minimum effect. Although the brigade reinforced them with antitank missiles, it was still not enough to fight forty tanks and AFVs. Coordination with our forces was also slow. Had they received the information on serious penetration of the Slovenian defence early enough, they could reinforce it and would not have to retreat as far as their rear area and

push out the opponent from there. Rather than with Norwegian tanks, our lads had much greater difficulties with the opposing forces played by Americans from the JMRC. They simulated T-80 tanks with Bradleys and BMP-2s with M113 vehicles that are much faster and mobile. "It was very demanding. We had to make several tough manoeuvres. Plan something quickly and mount an attack.

We succeeded only because we have truly good soldiers and commanders who rehearse such assignments regularly. The U.S. observers also liked our manoeuvre. They appreciated the way we barraged the opponent's attack and then regained control of the airfield," the commanding officer of the 72nd battalion task force underscored.

"We have taken the following lessons. If we want to operate with partners from other nations, it is necessary for us to have trained together. When the opponent managed to penetrate the Slovenian battalion, we were short of any information whatsoever at certain stage. In case we would learn about the defence's being broken in time, we could have barred and blocked that attack much earlier. Indeed, information wins wars."

Prepping for attack

A velvet night covers Hohenfels. Lights from headlamps on soldiers' helmets flit around like fireflies. Military hardware also moves under cover of the night. Night vision devices are used subject to availability. Our battalion task force managed to stabilise the red line. They should mount a counterattack in the morning. LTC Botík ordered his subordinate commanding officers to come to his place at twenty-one hundred. They will not get any sleep tonight – they have to plan everything. It is also essential to consolidate forces and resupply them. Fuel and ammunition is brought in on trucks. In addition, there is not peace on the red line for a single moment. The opponent keeps attacking, checking vigilance of the defending forces. The A and B Companies are to bear the brunt of the attack effort. That

attack salient will graze the Ravensdorf community, which the Slovenian forces advancing on our right flank are intended to take control of. The C Company performs the role of light infantry in the exercise. Early in the morning, they are to be transferred by helicopters into the opponent's rear to ensure a seamless penetration of the A and B Company through main crossroads and other strategic points.

But the situation however changes in the morning. The weather worsens considerably. Clouds of steel literally touch the ground, dropping big soaking snowflakes. No-fly weather will not change until lunchtime at least. So, they must be inserted on land.

On land instead of by air

It is still dark as we depart on seven humvees. The first kilometres in the opponent's territory are high speed low drag. It looks as if the opponent was sound asleep. But then the recce team reports a infantry fighting vehicle monitoring one of the important intersections we need to go through. Company commander Captain Andrej Tomaščák is trying to find a solution to the situation with his subordinates. There are just two options. Either we would bypass the intersection with a bend, or we send out a patrol with RPG to eliminate the vehicle. We are trying to identify the way to bypass the intersection for some time. But there is no way to go for us, so we have to go for option two. When our soldiers assaulted the infantry fighting vehicle, the opponent answered with massive fire. The IFV was covered by another armoured vehicle plus with a tank from the above. Majority of the twenty-seven members of the dismount team eventually joined the battle. Only the company commander's vehicle with a small reserve force waited almost at a kilometre's distance from the incident site. Two American combat vehicles have been neutralised and now only the tank is left there. One of our soldiers gets emotional over having scored three hits on the tank and the tank is still shooting. A complaint by SFC Jindřich Němec with a U.S. observer does not help either. But even the tank is eventually eliminated. Czech soldiers walk down the road and quickly replenish their ammunition. Downtime comes. The score is still positively in our favour at this stage. Although we have lost five soldiers and two humvees, the opponent has suffered a substantially greater loss. That moment will soon turn out to be decisive for potential withdrawal.

Avalanche of steel retaliated

But in several minutes, the Czech unit is getting under attack with tank gunfire from a parallel road leading down below along a forest. One of our team immediately sets out in that direction. Another surprise attack comes from the road that was cleared a while ago. None of the Czech servicemembers can yet figure out that they have got into a well prepared ambush. Fire resounds from all sides. There are U.S. tanks and fighting vehicles everywhere. The cannonade up on the road goes silent first. All Czech vehicles are neutralised and soldiers eliminated, but there are still active hostilities going on down in the woods. We have only a couple of soldiers left. The opponent advances through the woods upwards. Our lads nevertheless retain a good sense of humour, even in the hardest moments. Taking a cover behind trees, they invite the OPFOR personnel to give up, that nothing would happen to them. But they only receive laughter in response. Yet they nevertheless managed to disengage and bypass the opponent. The last desperate attack described at the beginning follows. The Czech dismounted team has been neutralised. The only way ahead leading to mission accomplishment in given circumstances would involve giving up part of the force in the first stage of the encounter. The rest could go through and continue their mission. But soldiers debate whether they would be able to do such a thing at all. To cut all ties binding you to your comrades, moreover realising that they would be doomed in real combat, is surely not an easy decision to make.

Company commander Captain Tomaščák also seeks to figure out where they went wrong. "You should have withdrawn immediately after the first attack. I attempted to recall you on the radio, but the connectivity was poor." Soldiers shake their heads in disbelief. "Connectivity was OK but no info reached us." Whatever way it was, one learns best from own mistakes. And that was the meaning of this training exercise.

As a matter of fact, the rest of the task force redressed that mistake just a little later. The task force's fighting vehicles and tanks literally wiped the opponent out and dashed past the Ravensdorf community. The only mistake was that the Slovenian unit intended to occupy the community was eliminated. And so our soldiers were up to that clearing operation as well.

by Vladimír Marek



Virtual Tiger meet

For three and a half years, military professionals of the 211th Squadron operating the JAS-39 Gripen multirole fighters at Čáslav airbase have been full members of the prestigious NATO Tiger Association (NTA). While dozens of Tiger Meets have been organised in the NTA's fifty-three years history, the initiative of airmen from Čáslav and the staff of LOM Praha state enterprise, specifically of the Tactical Simulation Center (TSC) in Pardubice was truly unique. They became the organisers of the Virtual NATO Tiger Meet 2013!

To start with, the impressive entry by the Čáslav-based 211th Squadron into the elite club of NATO's air units should be recalled. That happened in October 2010 at the Tiger Meet in the Netherlands hosted by the 313th Squadron home-stationed at the Volkel airbase. Czech airmen scored an outstanding double there – they obtained a full membership in the NATO Tiger Association and simultaneously the most prestigious award, the Silver Tiger Trophy, presented to the best performing NATO squadron. By the way, that was for the very first time in the NATO Tiger Association's history that a newcomer accomplished that! On the fourth day of October 2010, the 211th Tactical Squadron Čáslav officially became NATO's twentieth Tiger squadron and the second Czech Air Force unit to win that accolade after the 221st Helicopter Squadron from the Náměšť airbase to boast the full membership in the prestigious professional association of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It should be pointed out that the Mi-24/35 gunship squadron from Náměšť became a full NTA member at the Tiger Meet hosted by Belgium in 2001. In the very next year, members of the then 331st helicopter squadron Přerov stroke a big success. At the NATO exercise Daring Eagle 2002 in Beja, Portugal, which included an NTM, they won the silver tiger trophy and became the first helicopter unit to hold the NTA's most prestigious award and the first squadron from the former Eastern bloc. The badge on the Silver Tiger Trophy with engraved inscription: 331. SQN CZAF 2002 bears a testimony to that.

Premiere Czech style

To organise a Tiger Meet, which is normally the largest NATO air exercise in Europe in

given year, is an extremely challenging assignment. As sixty plus air assets of various types alight, demanding a considerable airspace for their Composite Air Operations (COMAO), it is indeed not conceivable for a Czech Air Force squadron to host the event. But even such logistic and spatial handicap did not prevent the 211th Squadron Čáslav, which performs airspace policing missions in the framework of the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS), to live up to the Tiger motto – improve joint operating procedures in planning and performance of air operations by NATO forces on possible foreign deployments. "This premiere event, Virtual NATO Tiger Meet (VNTM) 2013, is an optimal way for us to contribute to increasing professional readiness of NATO air community.

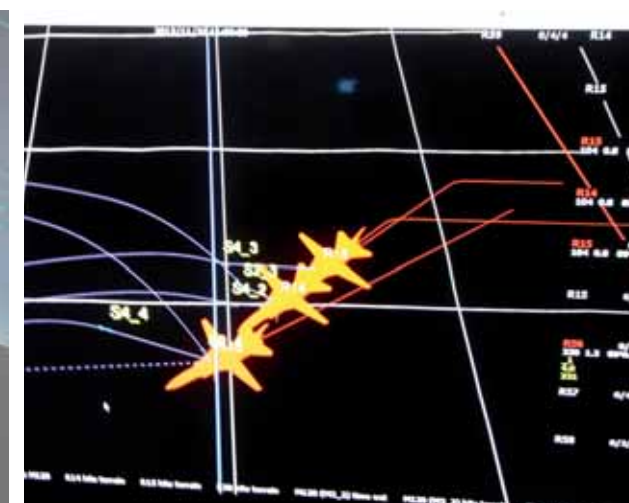
We are coming up with a new know-how into the NTA, and if it proves well, we will continue this activity periodically. The flight effort in the Tactical Simulation Centre at Pardubice will be both intensive and effective. Scenarios for dogfighting are extremely realistic and there will be minimum restrictions. It is an excellent mix of professional performance and training cost. The key thing is that we share our experience here," says deputy commander 211th Tactical Squadron Čáslav Captain Pavel Pavlík and introduces other participants in the Virtual NATO Tiger Meet: German pilots of Eurofighter Typhoon fighters of the 74. Jagdgeschwader Neuburg and airmen from the 51st Tactical Taktisches Luftwaffengeschwader Schleswig-Jagel equipped with Tornados. Attendees furthermore included Hungarian pilots from the 59/1 Puma Squadron Kecskemét operating the JAS-39 Gripen multirole fighters and military professionals from the Jet Trainer

Squadron Vogler flying Saab 105 aircraft in Austria. Along with them, Ground Controlled Interception specialists joined the virtual air training exercise.

"As a matter of fact, we contacted all Tiger squadrons and offered them flying sim air missions that are analogous to the operational missions at Tiger Meets. For a variety of reasons, but primarily for other commitments, the participation is as it is. Finding a free day is hard. We are nevertheless not disappointed, as we are at the very beginning of making this idea happen. Thirty Tigers attending the event is on the edge of the capacity available at the TSC Pardubice," explains deputy commander of the Čáslav-based Tiger squadron and leaves for one of the briefing rooms to communicate some details of the upcoming flight mission with other participants. "We will talk the tactical scenarios through and the real conduct of the mission. It will be in an international community and in English, which is always a good training," Captain Pavel Pavlík, nicknamed Speedy, says curtly.

Training benefit

Based at the city of Pardubice, the Tactical Simulation Center (TSC) that is part of the Flight Training Centre in the LOM Praha state enterprise became the venue for the VNTM 2013, specifically for simulated air fights of blues against reds. And as all those involved concurred, that unique training facility for simulated tactical flight training was a place most professionally appropriate and cost effective. "There was a maximum intensity of flight effort. COMAO flight missions, usually defensive ones, followed one after another. Operations were



conducted from eight pilotable cockpits of JAS-39 Gripen multirole supersonic fighters and a range of computer controlled identities was always incorporated into the play. There were complex scenarios based on combat operations in realworld operations. When it was necessary to train specific tactical elements, we provided a turnkey solution for the participants of the Virtual NATO Tiger Meet," says Otakar Prikner, the head of tactical training section at the TSC Pardubice.

It is not a secret that fighter pilots from Čáslav AFB fly missions based on their professional focus at Tiger Meets. In other words, they primarily focus on air-to-air missions. In the home airspace, they normally practise four versus four or two vs two. There was a much broader range of operational scenarios during VNTM 2013 in Pardubice. Everything was in the responsibility of the mission commander. The individual got an assignment and then it was completely up to him and his "subordinates", what tactical plan to choose to accomplish the mission. Professional invention was not restrained by any means.

There were two waves flown at the Tactical Simulation Centre, in the morning and in the afternoon. While eight of the pilots were fighting the other eight were getting ready. Every mission lasted roughly ninety minutes, including planning and a debriefing, while the real or indeed simulated flight activity in airspace of interest took approximately forty minutes. Obviously, dogfights were always replayed at the end of the action, the tactics was analysed and effectiveness evaluated of operation effort. The role of "blues" and "reds" switched. Each of the pilots repeatedly tried to act on

both sides. In total, there were six COMAO operations in three flight days at the Tactical Simulation Centre. That is undoubtedly a positive thing! And it is not diminished in any way by the fact that no live flying was performed. "Real flight is always much more difficult than training in a high fidelity sim cockpit. In the air, you have to take into account a whole range of indicators you can be confronted with at any single moment. You go to the maximum with exactly performed activities. On the sim, it is about methodology and about tactics. You drill it at ease on the ground not to do a mistake in the air. You learn to handle situations in an optimal way," CAPT Pavlík argues and does not brag about the experience of his comrades from the Squadron. "Although we are no rookies on the Gripen, we still need intensive flight training. You cannot be successful without a hard training. The level of professionalism we have achieved needs to be maintained, or improved. Sims are very instrumental for us in this respect and represent a indisputable training benefit. That is why we come up with this premiere event. That is why we expand the Tiger spirit with the Virtual NATO Tiger Meet," says the experienced JAS-39 Gripen fighter pilot and praises the sophisticated facilities in the Tactical Simulation Center Pardubice.

For the members of the TSC, who are very close to the Tiger spirit, the Virtual NATO Tiger Meet 2013 was one of the key tasks of the year. "We just continue our close cooperation, as the Czech Air Force JAS-39 Gripen and L-159 ALCA pilots go for training courses to our place. The idea to hold a Virtual NATO Tiger Meet intrigued us, and so we actively joined the organisational effort. It is a prestigious affair for us to demonstrate the potential of our centre to the representatives of NATO operational squadrons," Mr. Otakar Prikner says and describes the VNTM 2013 program. First two days were dedicated to a crash course focused on flying the Gripen and operating the JAS-39 weapon systems. On the next three days, blues versus reds missions were flown over the territory of the Czech Republic. Although those were simulated air fights, nobody wanted to lose. Many a firing of the AIM-9 Sidewinder or AIM-120 AMRAAM (Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile) missile was accompanied by a multinational commentary in the simulation hall of the Tactical Simulation Center Pardubice.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

Czech instructors deployed at the Koulikoro Training Camp in Mali review their six-month tour in Africa

Very cheerful soldiers

Besides the Czech forces providing security to the Headquarters European Union Training Mission (EUTM), there are presently additional four Czech servicemembers deployed in Mali to provide training to the Malian armed forces personnel. They are stationed at Camp Koulikoro, some fifty-seven kilometres downstream Niger river from the capital city of Bamako.

The Czech instructor team reached camp Koulikoro in mid-September 2013, right after they had arrived Mali and taken over their weapons and materiel. On the very same day, Czech

service personnel were made familiar with the headquarters and the KTC Camp (Koulikoro Training Center). They presented themselves to the KTC commander, Colonel Tessard of the

French Army, Irish Camp Commander Ryan and the leaders of the French training company, and became its members based on an agreement between the Czech Republic and France. "The French received us very well, took us in right from the start and helped us to settle down here. We have quite a good understanding with the soldiers of our company; they are members of SAED 126. RI infantry regiment, roughly an equivalent to the Czech reconnaissance unit.

"They are very good soldiers, and we have quite similar military thinking," the Czech team leader Sergeant First Class Petr Kopecký describes.



The KTC Camp is situated at the Military Institute of Malian Armed Forces, which made majority of buildings on the premises available for the EUTM mission. Soldiers are accommodated in houses of bricks in rooms sized approximately three by five metres. All four Czech instructors are accommodated in one room. It is furnished with bunk beds; every soldier has a closet, table and chair. There are toilets and showers on every floor, which usually has eight rooms. "Our neighbours are Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Polish soldiers," SFC Kopecký adds. "Food is on very good standards here; most of the input materials are imported from Europe. With more than four months on, none of us has suffered from diarrhoea or nausea as a result of food quality. Meals are prepared by the French, and locally hired employees help them. There are enough liquids and we get issued drinkable water in plastic bottles anytime. In case there is a two-day training session or cleaning day in the cookhouse, we get issued French MREs. Those are similar to the Czech ones, they just contain more sweets."

There is a gym on the base and horizontal bars almost at every corner. You can go for jogging inside the KTC, the fence perimeter is approximately one kilometre long. There is another larger circuit approximately eight and half kilometres long. The compound also has several volleyball and basketball courts. But it is only possible to do sports early in the morning and in the evening.

Learning doctrine and terminology

When our team arrived, there was just a three-week intermission separating individual training periods. The program only included a re-training course for Malian platoon leaders and company commanders of the new GTIA battalion task force. And that was what the Czech service personnel attended. The thing was for them to gain familiarity with the French training doctrine, particularly tactics and terminology. All training is held outdoors – open-air lecture areas are located behind the camp gate. That essentially





involves several benches, board and sheet metal roof. Theory is always followed by practical sessions in the area behind the lecture shelters. That resembles of the Hradiště Military Training Area back in the Czech Republic. The terrain there is quite rocky; there is much shrubbery and trees here and there. For two-day training, vehicles are used to take soldiers further into the country. The range is located about ten kilometres north of Koulikoro. In November last year, the range was extended over up to six hundred metres. Heavier weapons, 50-cals, mortars and SPG-9 man-portable recoilless guns are fired at Kati location one hundred kilometres away.

The allocation for training Malian GTIA IV battalion task force is ten weeks. Training is delivered to soldiers of whom there are two thirds of absolute rookies. Training is conducted according to French standards and methodology. Toyota Hilux and Land Cruiser vehicles are available. Czech instructors brought along Land Rover LR Defender 110 vehicles and they are happy with it. The British legend is said to belong into African savannah. Training is performed

based on a fourteen-day plan that is continuously adjusted based on the needs of individual companies. It starts on Monday morning and ends with lunch on Saturday. Emphasis is placed on tactics and the use of weapon. On Saturday afternoon, there are lectures covering human rights, first aid and other essentials. Sundays are free. During training, Malian soldiers are continuously tested by the Czech instructors. GTIA training culminates in a three-day training exercise, during which all the initiative is already in the hands of Malian soldiers, instructors just oversee and mentor every now and then. After the training program, there are ten days off, then the soldiers get issued their personal equipment and move into the troubled north of the country.

Dancing even in formation

In two weeks' time from their arrival, Czech instructors started with training as part of GTIA

III. There was a three-week intermission on Christmas. The GTIA IV battalion task force formed at that time. The Czech instructors joined the GTIA IV training process from January 6, 2014. A Malian company has around 120 soldiers, platoons roughly comprise thirty personnel. Units are not manned to 100 percent levels. As is known, the problematic situation in Mali is deeply rooted in history: there have not been really friendly relations between Touaregs populating the desert northern part of the country and black inhabitants from the South. And that is exactly why the national composition of the units we help to develop is interesting. While GTIA II roughly had forty percent of soldiers with Touareg origin, GTIA III only had fifteen percent and the GTIA IV just around one percent. The rest are blacks from the South.

"They do not know any military training areas here. Savannah is large enough and local people are glad to see their soldiers. Our primary mission is all-arms training of infantry companies. We work in conjunction with a French

company; all methodology is theirs. To that, we add our experience, improvements and various tricks. We are Czechs indeed," Sergeant First Class Petr Kopecký says. "Martin Borovička with Pavel Štrobl help with heavy weapons training. We with SFC Mužátko are assigned to an infantry platoon, where we have a relatively free hand from our French colleagues in specialised tactical training sessions, such as ambush, assault and so forth. In addition, both of us are involved in medical training under leadership of Austrian medics and a doctor. I believe Austrian medics appreciate the knowledge we gained in the CLS course in Hradec Králové. Pavel Mužátko and Pavel Štrobl also help train Malian military drivers. Obviously there is a job to be done."

Training is planned by French officers. Malians are very cheerful by nature. Everything runs smoothly thanks to that, there is not that much stress and haste, although people work from morning till evening. They also have much less bureaucracy than we have back at home. All paperwork ends on the level of platoon leader. And that individual is only required to fill in the necessary document and he can engage in

training. Thus, he has more time to concentrate on his job.

But the attitude by Malian soldiers to the performance of service duties is different too. It often happens that five out of a platoon do not present themselves for the morning muster and others have no idea where they are. By the time they finally appear for training after several hours, others are missing instead. "As instructors, we may not punish anybody for misconduct. The only way is to notice Malian commanders and they settle everything themselves. But Malians are otherwise very cheerful and open-hearted. They enjoy laughing, singing and dancing, even when marching and running in formations. They sing their original pieces but songs by Shakira for example too. They are also very clever and curious by nature. They do not bear so much stress and haste as we Europeans do. Time means nothing here.

After arrival, the first thing we had to do was to get on terms with the calm rhythm of life – everything must be adjusted to the local soldiers," SFC Kopecký adds.

Soldiers protected by grigri

According to Czech instructors, the mission in Africa is a big school full of interesting lessons. It is not possible to compare deployments in Afghanistan and here. It is completely different in Mali – a much friendlier environment. Working with most of European nations involved in EUTM militarily is also absolutely seamless. There are military personnel from twenty-three European nations at Koulikoro. The primary language here is naturally English, used to arrange most of affairs. Czech instructors also attempt to speak French. "I believe the Czech military lacks experience from Africa; it is a big unknown for us. We have much to learn from the French, British or Germans, be it cooperation with locals, or life in the African nature," SFC Kopecký says. "The possibility to compare with nearly all European armed forces is also invaluable. We spent most of our free time discussing with the others. And based on what we learnt, I dare say that the Czech Armed Forces is well off, almost in all respects from wages through equipment, professionalism and

grigri, which, although originating from Islam, influenced voodoo for instance. It is a talisman made of leather or fabric. It usually looks like a bracelet with pouch that holds bones of small animals or other objects. There are verses from the Koran engraved on the bracelet. The amulet is meant to protect its bearers and help them on the life path. But it is not a universal carrier of good fortune. There are various grigri with various verses for different occasions. Consequently, local soldiers using grigri carry the one protecting them in combat. So, it is sometimes difficult to explain to a soldier kneeling in the open that he should take cover behind a rock or shrub. He does have a grigri..."

On the other hand, Malian soldiers are closely tied with the nature and know very well where danger may come from. They have the local landscape under their skin. Their eye detects snakes or a wasp nest early enough. They know where to pass through, where to sit, where to lay down. Knowledge of the territory also helps them in medical terms. For example, they use leaves of shrubs to stop bleeding and diarrhoea, plant roots to repel insects. They brush their teeth with the twigs of a small tree called



Salvadora Persica. Positive effects that plant has on teeth were even confirmed by World Health Organisation.

Fauna and flora at large is a great experience in Mali. "We arrived when the rain season was ending. We felt like in a Jurassic Park: all insects are large, plants either venomous or at least thorny. Plus you have snakes, scorpions, megabats and camel spiders at night, simply Africa. Donkeys and local children frolic on the base. It is amazing," SFC Kopecký describes. "There are lots of rather pestering insects and we always seek to extinct them in our room before we go to bed. As one of our Polish friends coined it, first thing Europeans have to learn on an African mission is so-called Hand Defence System. Simply slapping insects."

by Vladimír Marek
photos by Vladimír Marek, EUTM training
instructors and COL Martin Vybiral



We rely on you!

We rely on you! Czech Armed Forces servicemembers deployed abroad for foreign operations and missions of international organisations (EU, UN, OSCE) address those words to the community of Semtín that is a part of Pardubice, because that is where a unique military installation is located to meet their requirements for logistic support – the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre.

For nine years, this unit was known as the Distribution Centre Pardubice. Since 1 July 2013, its successor organisation – the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre – has been operational. That new component is directly subordinate to the MoD Logistics Agency, which is a specialist body of the Director of MoD Support Policy Division.

Entry point for all property classes

To start with, an explanation should be offered concerning the scope of responsibility of the centre in Pardubice. "All logistic support of Czech military professional abroad falls into our basket. That involves materiel and military equipment of all classes of supply, which we distribute into areas where our deployments operate in case required. The demanded items are either collected from military stocks at depots or they have to be acquired through procurement," says the Chief of the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav

Beneš and adds that the centre is also the hub for the retrograde equipment from foreign operations and additional missions.

Many a reader would not have an idea what the center's coverage in terms of support is actually in question. It should be pointed out that Czech soldiers and airmen do not perform missions only as part of the Czech deployments in ISAF in the territory of Afghanistan, but they are also in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, in the Sinai and Mali. As a matter of fact, every mission has its specific aspects, plus there are various numbers of Czech Armed Forces service personnel deployed downrange to provide logistic support. So, it is not possible to say which one is more demanding. "The Centre is in fact a doorway for all property that is supplied to foreign deployments. Every deployment abroad requires its specific logistic support. On our side, we have to exert a considerable effort to gather, clear and get the materiel to the carrier," Deputy Chief of the Centre Major Radka Martýkáňová explains. Asked to single out the most complex support task, she ponders for a while and names Lithuania. She alludes to the

double deployment of the Czech Air Force fighters for the Baltic Air Policing mission at the Šiauliai airport in Lithuania, from where the Czech airmen provided security to the airspace of the Baltic States. "Besides missions in Lithuania, I would also mention the deployment of the Czech Armed Forces field hospital. Those were truly challenging assignments for us. The key thing is that we managed them," MAJ Martýkáňová says.

Thanks to the forthcoming attitude of the Centre's management, it is possible to look behind the scenes of how Czech foreign operational deployments are supported. "Logistic support requirements are forwarded via the Joint Operations Centre of the Ministry of Defence and then through the MoD Logistics Agency to us. In case it is impossible for the National



Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav Beneš

Comprehensive logistic support to the Czech Armed Forces service personnel delivered from the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre based at Pardubice

Support Element to complete the task, we take over. Requirements are realised either from our stock or by procurement. The reality is that four fifths of the required items are not in depots and must be procured. It goes without saying that we do not export all necessary materiel from home. We have a close cooperation with our NATO partners in areas where our deployments operate. In case mutual logistic assistance is feasible, we realise it. It is the best we can get in terms of effectiveness," LTC Beneš says.

Speaking about finance, another interesting piece of information should be mentioned. For every fiscal year, the Centre is allocated a financial limit to meet the costs of required items. Doing so, it is obligated by the Public Procurement Act to buy items valued up to one million Czech korunas (without VAT) a year. But that is not a reason to panic whatsoever. There has not been an event recently that the Pardubice-based installation would cause the slightest harm to Czech Armed Forces military professionals in supporting their operations abroad. "Such a case has not occurred," Major Martýkáňová concludes.

Some may be interested in the timelines followed in realisation of the requirements. The Chief of the Centre indicates it is largely dependent on whether the contract requires a bidding process in the so-called tender market. That

involves the necessity to strictly observe specific procedures, including mandatory limits. A standard period of time from the requirement into the phase of realisation takes roughly six weeks. The staff of the Centre are however able – in case needed – to react operatively. When there is a very urgent situation, they are able to handle it literally overnight. To that effect, they assign a working team with 120 minutes standby readiness, who are capable of responding immediately. They duly prepare the needed items for distribution and the rest is up to road, rail or air transportation organisations and agencies. It is particularly important that air transportation complied with the requisites of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) that stipulates the conditions for transporting hazardous materials.

To complete the picture, explanation should be provided on the second part of the Centre's name – emergencies. It is correct to say that it is nothing heartbreaking. In case of an emergency, primarily a natural disaster, the Centre is ready to provide its professional know-how. That also involves vehicles, including loaders and materiel handling cranes, and special equipment including power generators or transport containers including refrigerators. "In case the systems and equipment we operate would be usable for managing the consequence of

emergencies, we will provide them," declares the Chief of the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre.

Attentive readers noticed that no word has been written about any negative aspects in the Centre. Insiders are however aware of the fact that the level of manning is getting critical. By the way, as opposed to the previous Distribution Centre, the number of staff is currently lower by more than twenty five percent. No tasks dropped out nevertheless, contrarily: the scope of responsibilities expanded in some respects. It is not a secret that performance of service duties in some positions is on the edge. All deadlines, which are sometimes very tough, need to be met nevertheless. There is no other way as there are soldiers and airmen deployed thousands of kilometres away from home waiting for the needed logistic support. Apparent details may have fatal consequences. "The support system realised by our centre performs well. It has been thoroughly proven by dozens of recent missions. Not even the fact that Czech Armed Forces service personnel show satisfaction with the support leads us to maintain the current status. There is always room for improvement," LTC Beneš says.

Broad range of missions

Generally speaking, every success or failure in this or that military installation ultimately associates with the top manager. In the case of the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre Pardubice, that individual is Lieutenant-Colonel Jaroslav Beneš. He has been in command since 1 August 2013. He came to the Pardubice-Semtín barracks from Wilhelmsburgkasarne in the city of Ulm, Germany. That was where the NATO Response Forces Operations Command (RFOC) was headquartered, where LTC Beneš served a three-year tour in J3 operations. The Multinational Joint Headquarters (MN JHQ) Ulm was newly established in Ulm at 1 July 2013.

Obviously, he was not given the chief's post for nothing. He had to prove himself as the best candidate for the position. "It is not a professional downfall after Ulm by any means. Contrarily, I am going back to logistics and moreover in a position that allows to control it immediately. I have a vision what to improve and how, but I realise it will not happen overnight. I am building on mutual communication with the members of my team here," LTC Beneš says and admits he was initially surprised by the broad range of missions assigned to the Centre. "I handle a considerable number of documents with high price tags attached to them on daily basis," concludes the Chief of Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre in Pardubice and relishes the high professionalism displayed by his subordinates, which builds on previously gained expertise.

by Pavel Lang

photos by the Foreign Operations and Emergency Support Centre Pardubice



Exclusive coverage of the introduction of the new OVP-12SL parachute system into inventory of airborne units of the Czech Armed Forces

New parachutes in action

Every piece of equipment introduced to the Czech Armed Forces' inventory deserves attention. This time, the Czech Armed Forces Review focuses on the OVP-12SL personal parachute system approved for introduction to the inventory of the Czech MoD components in November 2012 by the Chief of Defence, General Petr Pavel.

There were multiple serious reasons for introducing a new personal parachute into the inventory of the Czech Armed Forces. Perhaps the decisive fact was the OVP-80 system in use was nearing the end of its life cycle. The available number of the OVP80s decreased rapidly, to the very level that no longer ensured full training for military professionals. It was therefore essential both to allocate the necessary funding but also to define the specifications including tactical and technical performance data for a new personal parachute. The involved MoD components set up a requirement for potential suppliers that the parachute system would be used for performance of combat group and training drops of paratroopers, low-level jumps of teams as well as mass drops from fixed-wing and rotary-wing assets used in the Czech Armed Forces and NATO. The parachute system comprises the main parachute (OVP) and the reserve parachute (ZVP). The key requirement was also the forced deployment of a parachute by static line. Naturally, additional functional parameters and operating conditions were specified. For instance, that involved maximum operating weight of the paratrooper with equipment and weapons and with OVP and ZVP parachutes (160 kg), the altitude of airplane when jumping on static line and aircraft speed up to 250 km/h (from 150 m/T), controllability (two steering elements), landing (upwind and downwind), jumping weight of the system (max 17kg) or surface wind value (0 to 8 m/s). Quite interesting data is also the operating temperature interval for the main parachute (from -40 to +93.3 degrees Celsius), as well as its life in terms of jumps (270) or years (maximum 15.5 years).

Introduction of military materiel into use with organisational components of the Ministry of Defence is usually not a straight-forward affair. In case of the OVP-12SL parachute system, the mandatory procedures were additionally complemented by certain aspects that delayed the whole fielding process. Specifically speaking, everything took almost three years. Dissecting the causes would not be to professional

standards. At the end of the day, the outcome matters. Taking a look into the results of the tests could nevertheless be of interest.

The mandatory tests were initially realised by the authorised parachute test facility of the LOM Prague state enterprise. Their results were confirmed by the MoD Military Aviation Branch. Military acceptance tests followed. At that stage, the testing commission identified some shortfalls and the tests were suspended. Supplementary tests were performed to full satisfaction. The commission concluded that the OVP-12SL systems met all the evaluated parameters and recommended the introduction of the parachute system into inventory. Additional affirmatory positions were given by the Defence Standardisation, Codification and Government Quality Assurance Agency, MoD Logistics Policy Division, MoD Military Aviation Branch, MoD National Armaments Directorate, MoD Capability Planning and Development Division and finally the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces. The winning supplier (manufacturer) of the OVP-12SL parachute system for the Czech Armed Forces was the MarS Jevíčko joint stock company.

Jumping light

At this point, it is appropriate to introduce, the parachute system in nutshell. The personal parachute is designed to perform individual, group as well as mass combat and practice jumps from minimum altitude of 1,000 ft, at day and night from fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft. The parachute harness can hold paratrooper's weapons and equipment approved for use with personal parachutes in the Czech Armed Forces so, that the weapons and equipment do not hamper on correct use of the parachute. For properly trained paratroopers, the parachutes enable a safe landing. The OVP-12SL parachute harness has a three-round disengagement system to separate the canopy from the paratrooper's body in case he is dragged along on the ground.



The ZVP-80.08 reserve parachute serves as a back-up during planned jumps with the OVP-12SL parachute. It is used in case of failure or damage of the primary parachute. The ZVP parachute is activated upon pulling the operating toggle.

"The contract is for four hundred OVP-12SL systems. We received the initial badge last year," says Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Štěpán, deputy head of the rescue, para training and physical training section of the MoD Capability Development and Planning Division and specifies that three hundred sets will be allocated for the 4th Rapid Deployment brigade, fifty to the



Special Forces Group in Prostějov and fifty will be distributed in the paratrooper training centre at Vyškov. "We have accepted three-hundred and twenty sets from the supplier. The remaining eighty pieces are to be delivered later this year," LTC Štěpán adds.

Some may find the number of 400 interesting. The comment by LTC Štěpán is as follows: "We have equipped with the new parachute set the primary airborne units. The OVP-12SL is also planned for introduction with the Reconnaissance Battalion in Prostějov. We aim to use the parachute in the future, but the contract

only guarantees delivery of four hundred sets. Whether the armed forces will receive additional personal parachutes depends on a whole range of factors and decisions," says the seasoned military paratrooper and concludes that the number of potential users in the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic significantly exceeds the number of delivered OVP-12SL parachute sets. One does not have to be a phenomenal mathematician to figure out that one "twelve" is used by multiple paratroopers. "Ideally, we should have at least fifteen hundred pieces of this type of personal parachute," LTC Štěpán argues.

The good news though is that all three hundred and twenty delivered parachute sets have already been jumped, meaning a jump was performed with them. The less favourable news is that the jumps performed with the parachutes are so-called light ones. In reality, without the paratrooper's equipment and weapons attached! Apparently, the upcoming jumps with equipment and weapons only come after mandatory approval procedure that will be accomplished with the military acceptance tests. Finally, operating procedures will be developed and practical training launched. "I trust the second half of this year



will see us complete military tests and resume jumps with equipment and weapons with the new OVP-12SL parachute in 2015," LTC Štěpán describes his objectives.

It is not a secret that certain recent circumstances impacted the way training was practised for Czech Armed Forces paratroopers. In uncouth terms, jumps without equipment and weapons in fact negated the meaning or indeed effectiveness of employing paratroopers for action in areas of interest. Jumping "light" lasted almost four years and admittedly represented a considerable professional setback. "Of course that was not an optimal status. Resuming jumps with equipment and weapons is finally a step ahead. But we are at the beginning of a whole process. You cannot jump headfirst here, because safety is paramount. Haste is not the key indicator and we will proceed cautiously," LTC Štěpán states.

Go!

It is a couple of minutes before ten o'clock as Mi-171Sh multipurpose transport helicopter from the 22nd Airbase Náměšť nad Oslavou lands at the Chrudim airstrip. Soon it is approached a fifteen-member team of the Czech Armed Forces service personnel. The first sight reveals that they are equipped identically with



the new OVP-12SL parachute system. The scene repeats several times on that Wednesday. That is because there are practice jumps going on by the paratroopers of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and other units. Checks confirm everything is the way it should be. Captain of the Hip gets cleared for take-off. Two powerful TV3-117VM engines find it easy to lift the helo off the ground. A couple of minutes later, the Mi-171Sh flies at altitude five hundred metres and heads for the drop point. First goes the flare to determine the wind direction.

Fifteen paratroopers onboard the machine find themselves under a careful supervision of the jumpmaster. The first five are instructed to get up. The jumpmaster points his hand to the cord and commands: "Hook up!". Then he steps aside the door and his place is taken by the first paratrooper to go. The command to jump is easy to understand – slap on the shoulder and shouts "Go!". It just takes a second's interval for the next one to jump until the fifth leaves the door. The helicopter egresses from the area of the Chrudim airstrip to return in a bend. The second and third sticks follow the suite. Then the machine lands to take another team on board. Everything runs seamlessly. Those involved in this training activity are also apparently satisfied.

"In the morning part one hundred and five jumps with the new OVP-12SL parachute were performed," says the deputy head of the rescue, para training and physical training section of the MoD Capability Development and Planning Division Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Štěpán and adds that today's jumps with the OVP-12SL are also planned for night.

Eleven. That is the current log of jumps Colonel Miroslav Hlaváč, Commander 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, completed with the new OVP-12SL parachute. "The replacement was truly needed. The old OVP-80s were close to the end of life and there were not enough of them available. Introduction of the OVP-12SL is definitely a positive step forward, including because the new system clearly outperforms the parachute it has replaced," COL Hlaváč underscores.

In that respect, the 4th RDBde Commander comments the fact that out of the four hundred parachute sets delivered to the Czech Armed Forces, three hundred fell to the paratroopers based at Chrudim: "In the Brigade, the 43rd Airborne Battalion is the only purely airborne unit and so it has a rationale behind it. Moreover, the para training for the whole 4th RDBde is organised at Chrudim."

Colonel Hlaváč takes the quantity of three hundred parachute simply as reality. On one hand he does not regard it optimal for one OVP-12SL parachute to be used by multiple paratroopers; on the other hand, COL Hlaváč realises the economical situation, or indeed the compass of possibility the MoD has in introducing new equipment and materiel into the Czech Armed Forces' inventory. "I say with full responsibility that the existing number of the new OVP-12SL parachute systems suffices for us to provide a full-scale training for the 4th Brigade. The paratroopers maintain their professional skills and that is essential.

The next step we seek to take in the second half of this year are jumps with equipment and weapons. Jumping light was sort of a restriction limit for us, but now we are able to see the light at the end of the tunnel," says Colonel Hlaváč and, shortly after landing on OVP-12SL, comments as follows: "I personally find jumping with this type of parachute well. I am satisfied with it. It marks a progress in para training." The commander of the 43rd Airborne Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Róbert Dziak speaks very much the same tone: "Replacement with the OVP-12SL actually meant for us that we were able to carry on training. Another good news is that this type of parachute is suitable not only for services represented by our 43rd Battalion, but also for senior or better put experienced paratroopers, who prevail among men forming the Battalion." His professional evaluation is also in favour of the new OVP-12SL as opposed to the old OVP-80. "It suits me well, and I am content with very much," LTC Dziak concludes.

By Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



Field Surgical Team in ACTION

The Czech Armed Forces 10th Field Surgical Team (FST) was deployed in Kabul from February through June 2014. It comprised the personnel of the Czech Armed Forces 6th and 7th Field Hospital stationed in Hradec Králové and staff from the Central Military Hospital Prague and Military Hospital in Brno. The 10th FST has experts with vast experience in foreign operations. They were deployed in Kuwait, the Balkans, Iraq and repeatedly in Afghanistan. Following disastrous earthquakes, some of them were also assigned to Pakistan, Albania or Turkey. Downrange in Kabul, they serve in senior posts in the local field hospital, where they again prove the high professionalism of the Czech military medicine. They have also successfully gone through the period of transition of the local medical facility into the responsibility of the U.S. Army, which was previously under French command and the personnel was also predominantly French.

The CO's perspective

The Commanding Officer of the Czech Armed Forces 10th Field Surgical Team in Kabul was Lieutenant-Colonel Josef Roubal. M.D. Not only was he in command, but he also provided treatment in the operating room as an orthopaedist - traumatologist to patients who mostly had war injuries on their extremities, which are very frequent in Afghanistan. During their deployment, the Czech FST had to bridge a difficult time period, as 2014 number of French medical

personnel went down by half from February (the facility transitioned to Role 2+) for Americans to take over progressively. Nevertheless, the volume of medical treatment remained the same. That period of time was quite challenging for the Czech team both in terms of labour and organisation.

"I believe working in the Kabul medical facility was interesting for us as we were able to practically apply and prove the principles of war surgery, which we thankfully do not encounter back at home. Good communication with our

French colleagues was critical. We also worked in combined teams and good knowledge of English is a must here for the team to successfully work in this international environment," Lieutenant-Colonel Josef Roubal sums up.

The 10th FST commanding officer regards teamwork a key precondition of success. "We all pulled on the same rope and supported each other in these demanding conditions. It helped us get through the four months spent far away from home."

Emergency

Emergency ward at Kabul Afghanistan International Airport (KAIA) base serves for accepting casualties delivered through medical evacuation and for provision of medical support on the base, but it also provides to some extent medical assistance in the form of consulting and treatment for out-patients such as NGO workers and, last but not least, the local inhabitants. The spectrum of patients is surprisingly broad.

The other factor relates to working in an international, meaning linguistically different environment. The daily duty shift comprised representatives of three teams – French, Czech and Bulgarian. The working mode of the whole hospital does not allow for anything else anyway at this time. In addition, Czech soldiers only form a tiny percentage among treated patients. "Thanks to the attitude of our senior colleagues who have amassed extensive experience from

foreign deployments and are willing to share them, this first deployment of mine is interesting professionally and rewarding personally for me," says the Czech doctor at the Emergency, CPT Dominika Chrásková, M.D.

Perspective of anaesthesiologist – intensivist

Major Radek Uher M.D., who served in operating rooms and the intensive care unit, says: "After initial 'sizing up', gaining mutual trust, respect and harmonising urgent care procedures, we developed a very friendly cooperation to very high professional standards, which allowed us to operate in combined Czech-French teams." According to MAJ Uher, the trickiest part is the spectrum of patients. "That is truly broad and variegated here. Medical doctors in Kabul must be able to cope with anything, including patients who would be sent to specialised clinics or wards back in the Czech Republic."

Besides classic war and especially fragmentation injuries, which the team members had been largely prepared from previous tours, the 10th FST members treated with several severely burnt children, especially in the first months of their deployment. Their care required highly specialised and time-consuming treatments both from the viewpoint of surgery and anaesthesiology – intensive care.

Along with such demanding cases, the Czech team in Kabul encounters common spectrum of diseases like back at home in infants to old-age persons. There are cases of appendicitis, hernia, fractures, lacerations, as well as patients regularly treated at ICUs in the Czech Republic: polytrauma, highly decompensated diabetics, lung failures and other cases. Major Uher concludes: "Although the procedures we follow back at home do not exactly match the French ones, we were able to find common ways ahead and learn a lot from each other both professionally and personally."

MEDOPS

The 10th FST also included a Medical Operations (MEDOPS) specialist, a non-medical member of the team, whose mission is to support the FST in various other areas of responsibility. What the acronym entails was explained by Captain Petr Pražák, a MEDOPS expert: "I sit in daily meetings of the National Support Element (NSE) so as to create a notional bridge between our FST and the 8th Task Force Czech Armed Forces stationed at KAIA we are subordinate to. I develop and send individual statistic reports and items into the order of the Task Force Commanding Officer."

Concerning the French Role 2+ facility, the Czech MEDOPS (and liaison officer) took many responsibilities after his French predecessors because of progressive personnel drawdown. He was in charge of the medical facility's security as a security manager, who communicates

information on security threats on daily basis and gives the team members new security codes and passwords. In case of Mass Casualty (MASCAL) CPT Pražák acted as a member of the Scriber Team tasked to record actions taken during primary treatment of the specialist to the relevant form.

High demands for lab specialists

The 2014 deployment of the Field Surgical Team is the first opportunity for medical lab specialists to work in an international environment as is customary in French field medicine. Czechs had to accommodate to those new conditions. Lab specialists obtained initial information already during a foregoing internship. Warrant Officer Radka Köhlerová comments: "I learnt only during the internship that lab specialists in French field medical facilities are responsible for performing analyses across laboratory branches: haematology and blood transfusion, clinical biochemistry, microbiology and parasitology.

After returning home, I intensively focused on microbiological and parasitological training."

During her previous tours with the Czech Field Hospital in Kabul, she always performed laboratory jobs only in her specialty area. Thanks to understanding of her superiors, she was able, after an intensive training at specialised microbiological department at the Central Military Hospital in Prague, to perform laboratory analysis in other above-mentioned fields to the standards required in the KAIA medical facility.

It was very pleasing for the Czech service personnel to find out they were able to manage mass casualty cases to high standards and with necessary level of professionalism, which was proven in reality in multiple instances.

It should be pointed out that majority of the Czech 10th FST medical personnel deployed at KAIA have been through a foreign operational experience. "I realised that here again and I am very glad that the Czech military medicine does not have to be ashamed of anything," WO Köhlerová continues and adds: "It will be interesting to follow the lessons subsequent teams will learn already operating as part of the U.S. field medical hospital."



MAJ Uher at work, CPT Pražák right



CPT Chrásková, WO Stavělová and LTC Roubal performing a surgery



MAJ Vlachovský and CO 10th FST during operation



Czech X-Ray lab specialist (right) with her colleagues



Czech medic in an international team

X-Ray and tomography differently

Warrant Officer Lenka Stuchlíková, an X-Ray lab specialist, served her fourth foreign tour with the 10th FST already. She was a member of the deployments mounting the Czech Field Hospital in 2002 and 2007 in Afghanistan. The French field hospital's radiology unit comprises two sections – central tomography room and X-Ray facility. The former one is nearly identical to what the Czech Field Hospital has, but the latter is to higher standards in our facility.

"Predeployment preparation was more demanding in specialist terms and different, and because there is no medical doctor-radiologist posted with the French field hospital, the X-Ray and Tomography analysis fully depends on professional qualification of the X-Ray lab specialist," says WO Stuchlíková, who has a record of over thirty years' of service in this specialisation, and goes on to say: "Here, the lab specialist is responsible for examination performed by the surgeon, orthopaedist, urgent medicine doctor or general practitioner. Those only perform diagnostic sonography (ultrasound) in Kabul in patients with polytrauma. The presence of a doctor– radiologists is not necessarily needed here in my view."

The local field medical facility only performs standard basic X-Ray and tomography

examination or diagnosing with the use of contrasting fluid, but not complex radiologic examinations. With today's communication possibilities, it is possible to reach back and consult with radiologists at home in more complicated cases.

The experienced Czech X-Ray lab specialist adds: "I should admit cooperation with the French team is another valuable experience for me. In specialist terms, we had agreement with our colleagues almost universally and the language barrier diminished every day. I departed Kabul for the third time again with a feeling of a job well done and hope to have represented the Czech military medicine, the Czech Armed Forces and our homeland well."

Anaesthesiologic and operating room personnel

Warrant Officer Vít Baroš served on the Czech team in the post of anaesthesiology nurse. "From the viewpoint of anaesthesia, it was a definitely a huge experience for me for several reasons. First, I have only served in this specialty area for a shorter period of time, mostly in a district hospital, where an overwhelming majority of operations is planned and one hardly encounters urgent surgeries, but the conditions in Afghanistan differ radically," WO Baroš draws a comparison. The different standard of anaesthesia applied here enriches people with new experience and observations. Anaesthesiologic nurses have a different scope of responsibility than those in the Czech Republic, which leads to a greater autonomy, resolution and a more comprehensive understanding of anaesthesia.

Staff Sergeant Zdeněk Baťa has a long practice in the perioperative nurse specialty and joined the armed forces, specifically the field hospital, two years ago. "Asked to go downrange, I hesitated for a moment but then I realised the benefit of new experience in war surgery, because I serve in an operating room nurse position."

French medicine has its specificities even in the operating room: "Before operation, all

patients undergo so-called betadine protocol that has its specific sequence and order and involves multiple disinfection that significantly reduces the risk of infecting the wound," SFC Baťa explains. He also points out that there are multiple teams involved concurrently when treating patients with multitrauma.

Nurse at Emergency

The post of the medical nurse in the 10th FST was filled with Warrant Officer Adéla Stavělová, who serves in a cardiology ICU in the Czech Republic. She expressed the impressions from her first foreign deployment as follows: "It was obvious when we arrived that I would not be up to anything easy. But all my concerns dispelled soon. Tackling the language barrier seemed easier every day, working in new branches suddenly came natural to me. The Czech team proved to be cooperating outstandingly and to be friendly. Long duty shifts allowed me not to miss a single interesting case that I could be put to good use or learn something new." Last but not least, working with the French team taught me patience, adaptability and also to improvise in case needed.

Czech drivers – paramedics in Kabul

Sergeant David Ramík confirms that the mission has benefited him from the perspective of driver-paramedic in expanding his horizons with other than civilian injuries. In addition, most of the transfers are performed by air (MEDEVAC) both day and night. Therefore, this job requires people to be able to communicate well. Master Sergeant Radim Svoboda adds: "Further, we provide transport of the locals into the hospital and struggle with the language barrier in them. But communicating with some ISAF personnel is sometimes difficult too, because at least basics of English are not so commonplace in some militaries as in our armed forces."

by LTC Josef Roubal M.D.
and CPT Marek Maxim Švancara



The Air Defence Missile Regiment has fielded the unique ReVISOR surveillance radar.

The ReVISOR has augmented V-SHORAD combat capabilities

April 22, 2014, became another significant date in the recent history of the 25th Air Defence Missile "Tobruk" Regiment, as it received the ReVISOR short-range radar complementing one of the basic pillars of the V-SHORAD (Very Short Range Air Defence) module designed for the ground-based air defence task force.

The V-SHORAD module, which constitutes the core of the ground-based air defence task force of the AD missile platoon or battery, has taken almost a decade to build. Step by step, its various components, including command and control systems, missiles and surveillance assets, were added. The first step was the fielding of the RACCOS automated command and control system in 2004, followed by the acquisition of RBS-70 man-portable short-range SAM launchers designed to destroy hovering helicopters, cruise missiles and incoming (but also departing) aerial targets, which are also effective against lightly armoured ground targets. There was also an upgrade of the Strela S-10MD self-propelled SAM systems the mission of which is to support troops, particularly those involved in dynamic combat activities, and to protect them against combat aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles and other air assets to the Strela S-10M2D/IFF version, the takeover of twelve Dingo armoured vehicles by the 252nd AD Missile Battalion, or the acquisition and fielding of the RBS-70 Mk2 missile systems. The last piece of the jigsaw, so to say, was the ReVISOR, a radar unit designed for battlefield airspace surveillance and monitoring, the manufacturer of which is the Pardubice-based company Retia. Its essential feature is compliance with NATO standards.

Suffice to say for the lay community, the V-SHORAD module consists of the following elements: Standby System Access Node (SSAN), Combat Command Station (CCS), ReVISOR radar system (RVR), Airspace Observer Unit (AOU) and the man-portable RBS-70 and self-propelled S-10M2D (potentially to be replaced by RBS-



RBS-70 Man-Portable SAM System

70NG) SAM systems equipped with the launch terminal and mobile platforms for the RBS-70NG SAM system (Tatra T 810 AD or Dingo).

The Four "Eyes" and "Ears" of the Ground-Based Air Defence System

The ReVISOR unit is a surveillance radar designed to scan low levels of the airspace and to control and direct the fire of a SAM platoon which is a part of the V-SHORAD system. It is a fully coherent, frequency-jumping, digital Doppler radar. It is mounted on a single-axe

trailer and comprises two basic functional elements; the so-called R-Module, a short-range radar surveying the airspace, and the C2-Module with an information and communication subsystem, which takes care of command and fire control. Each module has its own workstation that can be operated either directly at the radar unit, or located in a tent, a nearby building or the vehicle towing the trailer. The antenna speed is 30 to 45 revs/min; the radar's horizontal and vertical ranges are 30km and at least 4km, respectively. The C2-Module radio range is 20km. The radar crew consists of two specialists who must be able to deploy the unit in under 20 minutes. Another significant feature of the radar is its resistance against jamming.

"We have fielded the first ReVISOR surveillance radar unit today. Additional units will be taken over by the end of November 2014 and during 2015. All in all, our regiment will have four of them. These will undoubtedly improve the combat efficiency of the V-SHORAD module deployed as a ground-based air defence task force. The completion of the V-SHORAD module, which has taken several years to build, allows us to deploy it in NATO or EU operations," says Colonel of the General Staff Vladimír Barca, Commander of the 25th Air Defence Missile Regiment; he adds that a platoon-sized SAM task force can cover an area of up to 400 square kilometers, protecting it against low-flying incoming aircraft in both daytime and nighttime and even in a jammed environment. To give you a better idea of its capabilities, the AD missile task force can be deployed for the benefit of both ground forces (as an element of, for example, a brigade-sized task force or NRF – NATO Response Force) and the air force (augmenting the defence of essential elements of infrastructure or air bases). At the tactical level, it can be used to support defensive or offensive operations of a mechanized battalion, deployed in urban areas, or its SAM assets may be transported by air to wherever they may be needed.



10m 9k35m Strela 13 Self-Propelled SAM System



Technology Progress Achieved by the Strakonice-Based AD Regiment

The April presentation of the V-SHORAD module taking place in the barracks of the 25th Air Defence Missile Regiment in Strakonice was attended by leading representatives of the Ministry of Defence, including Deputy Minister for Acquisitions Bohuslav Dvořák, a delegation of the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces led by the Chief of Defence, Lieutenant General Petr Pavel and his deputy, Major General František Malenínský. Also worth mentioning was the presence of Regional Governor of the Region of Pardubice Martin Netolický and representatives of the town of Strakonice. The audience was first given a thorough presentation, then a sight-seeing tour of a static display of components of the V-SHORAD module and a dynamic demonstration of an AD section deploying the RBS-70

SAM system. "The conclusion of the process is fully in line with the current requirement of the North Atlantic Alliance, which demands that the allies retain their ground-based air defence capabilities," Bohuslav Dvořák stated, voicing his recognition of all those who made the exceptional professional success possible, no matter whether they were from the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic or civilian experts.

Lieutenant General Petr Pavel was also satisfied with the technical progress demonstrated in the V-SHORAD module. "The very short range air defence is absolutely essential for the protection of ground forces. We have achieved a capability which can be made use of in any operations, including those mounted abroad. The successful completion of the project, in spite of all cuts and changes, is a great achievement indeed. The Strakonice AD Missile Regiment has thus acquired a comprehensive airspace defence capability which is fully compatible with those of our NATO partners. It can be effectively used to protect deployed ground units against aerial threats," the Chief of Defence stated.

Major Jan Suchý, Co of the 252nd AD Missile Battalion, sees the fielding of the ReVISOR system as a turning point of his professional career so far. "The sophisticated ReVISOR surveillance radar means a major step forward for us in the acquisition of necessary information on the situation in the airspace segment we are responsible for and in command and fire control, thereby substantially improving our combat efficiency."

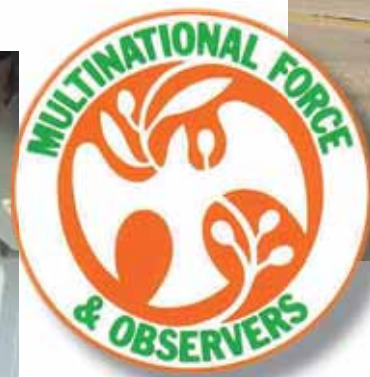
At the very end of the important project, there will be two thoroughly trained and fully operational AD missile batteries equipped by RBS-70 man-portable short-range SAM launchers and Strela S-10M2D self-propelled SAM systems, respectively. "At the moment, we have two fully trained crews capable of operating the ReVISOR in combat conditions; by the time the remaining units are delivered, i.e. 2015, the necessary number of specialist will have been trained as well," says Major Jan Suchý.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

The Czech air unit in the MFO mission in the Sinai gains invaluable experience with each flight they complete with the C-295 CASA

Feeling for Landmarks

Fifteen months of the Czech air unit's deployment with the C-295 CASA aircraft in the MFO (Multinational Force and Observers) mission in the Sinai Peninsula marks the half of the overall effort timewise. In more than five months spent far from home, the Czech flight personnel did a tremendous job. They have logged over a hundred of flights, hundred thousands of kilograms of transported cargo and several thousand passengers transported into their destinations. They had to cope with a range of challenges and obstacles; they learnt, for example, how to cope with sandstorms. When the storm was raging, it was necessary to tie the CASA airplane to the ground, seal all openings with plugs, cover the glasses of the cockpit and so forth.



The Czech air unit is stationed at El Gorah in the so-called North Camp, where they are accommodated and operate from. It is a square area roughly 2 by 2 kilometres in size. The base perimeter comprises double fencing with guard towers. There is everything necessary for the life of soldiers inside. A dining facility, library with DVDs, an education facility, gym, football field, swimming pool, the movies, accommodation structures, motor pool and materiel depot, headquarters and staff building, shooting range, training area, hangars and apron. The runway as such is outside the fenced base. Prior to each departure and landing, security forces have to perform necessary action to provide for air traffic safety. The MFO also uses the so-called South Camp in the Sharm el Sheik resort, which is built in the same spirit.

"Although we had information available ahead of our deployment from former MFO members and from two previous flights to El Gorah, we still needed to cope with acclimatisation and so to say settle down in our new station. The first month brought about some difficulties. Besides our and an U.S. unit with C-12 airplane, there was another U.S. force stationed at the airfield with two C-23 Sherpa aircraft. Given the lack of space, we had to position all of our materiel on pallets into a hangar and wait until the premises assigned for us are free," pilot and the Czech



Air Unit commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Milan Laniak explains.

"Similar situation was with accommodation on the base. We had to wait until the building allocated for us had been refurbished. Those minor complications nevertheless could not hamper on the performance of our operational assignment. Mere two days from the start of our assignment, on 6 November 2013, we were to perform the first transport mission."

Daily program

The MFO has its specific Battle Rhythm that sets timing for all activities such as working hours, dining, morning and midday physical exercise etc. The daily program for the Czech Air Unit is driven by the flight effort, i.e. performance of operational assignments. A member of the Czech team is assigned to the AirOps office on daily basis. There are permanent working hours from eight a.m. till five p.m. and then night duty shifts. The individual is however employed to cater for flight planning requirements and active monitoring of all changes based on the situation. Given that, it is virtually a 24/7 duty. Ground specialists spend their working time in the airfield performing preflight and afterflight activities on the aircraft.

"Maintaining the airplane requires an intensive effort, including because of the different climate conditions and dusty environment. The program for the flight crew comprises prepping for individual flight missions and their realisation. The flight effort is extensive and there is

not much downtime left," LTC Laniak explains. "The program of our unit also includes shooting practice, physical exercises, maintenance of assigned equipment and materiel and many other activities associated with keeping it up and running. Also, we have to be ready to perform unplanned flights on call at any time. That involves medical evacuation missions."

Flight missions are tasked through command and control system using LAN network in accordance with monthly planning. The very mission planning under supervision of airplane captain is carried out in a standard manner of preparing a tactical flight mission. The Czech service personnel obtains all information necessary for the performance of flight planning from AirOps, open sources on the Internet and dedicated U.S. sources.

Magic of Sinai

Flight missions primarily comprise COU (Civilian Observers Unit) verification flights and transportation of persons and cargo; secondary tasks involve VIP transport and MEDEVAC. Majority of the flights carrying persons and materiel are missions connecting the North Camp and the South Camp in the territory of Sinai. Then come the flights between the camps and Cairo performed for the sake of force rotations. There were also several airlifts to Israeli airports such as Tel Aviv and Eilat.

"We became known to Ambassadors of several countries by a VIP transport from Tel Aviv, Israel. It was for the first time that all invited

Ambassadors were transported jointly to attend a ceremony held at an MFO camp.

Speed, safety and comfort of air transport only magnified the positive response we received from our passengers," Lieutenant-Colonel Laniak recalls. "Flying over desert radically differs from flying we are used to back in Europe. The list of specificities would definitely include the lack of landmarks, minimum infrastructures, large unpopulated areas, absence of rivers and lakes, just a monochromatic view of omnipresent sand. After some time though, even people from Central Europe obtain certain feeling and appreciation for landmarks over that brown-and-brown land. You start to recognise the types of surfaces of individual areas: sand dunes in the north, plain rough landscape without a single sign of vegetation with arid riverbeds in the middle of the Sinai and the looming peaks of the mountainous south of the peninsula. Hard to recognise from the distance, small settlements with minimum vegetation form the notional beacons in the sea of sand. Every landscape has its peculiar magic, which also holds true for the harsh Sinai Peninsula."

Verification flights

According to the unit commanding officer, flying over the territory of Egypt and Israel furnishes a host of experiences and observations. Everybody entering the airspace of the two countries would experience differences from European standards. Over Sinai, communication with air traffic management authorities on the

radio is rather complicated as opposed to the communication with their Israeli counterparts. Traffic in the confined Israeli airspace is a bit dense, which also reflects in smaller vertical separation. That shows in passing by traffic on the flight level, but also on approach.

"For example, approach at Eilat is interesting. The airport there is situated in an area with high building density right next to a seaport. On visual approach, you fly unusually low above the rising cranes and shortly before touchdown you literally stroke a shopping center roof. Traffic here is completely different from what we are used to and the noise from an airport located in the very proximity of housing is completely inconceivable for people in our country. The airport nevertheless lives in harmony with the city and its people," LTC Laniak describes. Always veiled in smog, the international airport at the centre in Cairo is not a different case either. Approach to all three runways lead across the city.



It was just a couple of times that we were lucky enough to see the amazing pyramids from the times of famous pharaohs."

Verification flights are performed at low levels from five hundred to one thousand feet with observers onboard. Performance of those assignments ranks among demanding flights. Low level flights are particularly demanding for navigation and orientation. To that, you need to add modification of the planned route according to current requirements of observers themselves and also an increased level of attention the aircrew has to pay to eliminating conflicting traffic (Egyptian military helicopters fly with their transponders switched off). A standard COU mission lasting five hours of continuous flight along the whole Sinai is very impressive, but also demanding. An exhausting flight, during which you will gain an in-depth familiarity with the country and its historical sights," LTC Laniak adds.

Dry and warm climate suiting the hardware

Composition of the Czech air unit reflects the structure and numbers authorised by the MFO. It is a small-size force comprising just thirteen military professionals, which provides for a very limited but still maintained personnel substitutability. The higher demands are then placed for work effort in performance of the flight missions. Particularly the flight crew, who changes the location they stay overnight several times a week, and so they are "packed to get on the road" based on their destination.

The work personnel perform here does not differ much from the activities performed at the home station. Ironically, it is rather the humid, cool and chilly weather in the Czech Republic that adds work for the maintainers. Warm and dry Egyptian climate suits the CASA aircraft systems well. Nevertheless the high dustiness poses increased requirements for cleaning and oiling individual parts and components of the machine and increases periodicity. Perhaps the greatest difference as opposed to current

maintenance back at home is the internal washing of engines, which has to be done every month in the Sinai.

Logistic support of the CASA air unit can be divided into two parts. Accommodation, dining, office and regular consumable materiel are fully provided by the MFO. Members of the Air Unit are accommodated in standardly equipped single rooms that provide an appropriate degree of privacy. Boarding is provided cafe-style at the Main Dining Facility (MDF) that offers varied diets every day. Fuel is provided and paid by the MFO. The Czech unit brought along a basic set of spares and operating equipment – so-called Fly Away Kit (FAK) – set up based on the manufacturer's recommendation and experience the service personnel gained operating the system. On the other hand, even the best equipped FAK may not comprise all spares. For such instances, options are prepared for deliveries of the necessary materiel to ensure full serviceability.

Exotic colleagues

The MFO is a multinational organisation. In addition to the Czech Armed Forces service-members and other NATO nations' military personnel, there are also soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Uruguay and Columbia, with whom our soldiers do not come into contact much. "We meet members of all nations represented in the MFO practically on daily basis. The limiting factor for cooperation with Columbian and Uruguayan soldiers is the language barrier. Majority of them only speaks Spanish.

We maintain the closest working relations and everyday contact with U.S. service personnel who comprise the other half of the MFO air unit. We also share the hangar and its facilities with them," LTC Laniak explains. The MFO has clearly defined rules for going off base. Those are adjusted according to the current security situation. There are safe locations, hotels and routes that must be strictly observed.

Principles of reasonable conduct and acceptance of Arab world apply when it comes to relations with the local inhabitants. Even the armed security guys on the airport gate have are permitted to pray regularly. Many times, one does not have any choice but to nerve oneself and wait until the gates opens and a go-ahead is given. The security situation in Egypt has been unstable and aggravated for a long time, especially in the north of the Sinai. After the Czech unit joined the mission, the situation changed markedly. An area of unrest is in close proximity of the North Camp. That is shows practically every day in shooting and detonations. An Egyptian military helicopter was shot down several dozen kilometres north of the camp in January. Consequently, the MFO adopted enhanced security measures. "MFO personnel have never been targeted with an attack in the past. They maintain neutrality, oversee compliance with truce and conventions, and are therefore an important actor in the realm of stability of both states involved.

Event the attack by Berbers several years ago did not target the MFO organisation itself. It



was just an instrument to increase visibility and attract attention of local Egyptian authorities," Lieutenant-Colonel Laniak explains. "Information security situation is obtained from open sources, analysed and measures are taken accordingly to ensure maximum security of all

MFO members. Restrictions are primarily applied to the freedom of movement, which is in complete contrast to everyday life MFO members lived several years ago. At that time, it was possible to move freely without any limits not only across the Sinai but also throughout the whole territory of Egypt. Off duty, it was possible to familiarise oneself with the country rich in history, its historical sights and recreation resorts. Today, off-base movement is restricted to maximum extent."

Depending on the security threat level and the adopted measures, transfers to the airport and back are performed in a convoy with

ballistic protection and with weapons. Air traffic is also meets the needs of the current security situation. Tactical flying principles have their say as well. Every aircrew member is equipped with special materiel used for tactical flights in crisis areas (survival vests).

"Every one of us has had many experiences during this deployment. Demanding but beautiful COU missions are among those most interesting ones. Remarkable are also experiences induced by the African climate, quickly changing weather with greatly reduced visibility, kicked-up dust or sandstorms. Those are all lessons we have learnt," the unit's commanding officer concludes.

by Vladimír Marek
photos by the Czech Air Unit

Exercise Saber Junction II saw a battery of the Czech Army 13th Artillery Regiment provide a critical fire support

DANA even took out Leopards

Although the Czech tank and mechanised unit managed to push the opposing force out of the airfield, the opponent was far from giving up and tackled badly. At that moment, the support by the Czech artillery came in like help from the above. In a relatively short period of time, a battery of eight Model 77 DANA self-propelled howitzers managed to take out three Norwegian Leopard II MBTs.

That was, at least for the Czech forces, one of the key moments of the international exercise Saber Junction II that took place in the US Army Joint Multinational Readiness Centre at Hohenfels, Germany, in November last year. Artillery gunners took to road at Jince, Czech Republic, on November 7th in two columns. On the Czech-German border, they contacted with the German Military Police and continued in a single convoy on into Hohenfels. The whole stage took place without slightest problems. Movement organisers did not hide their satisfaction. They regarded that phase of the exercise one of the most demanding. It turned out commanders at all echelons had considerable experience both with field tactics and with organising such movements. The exercise had two levels. Phase one was designed to prepare the artillerymen for the

exercise itself. It focused on harmonising tactical procedures and coordination of the whole system. The Czech contingent became a component of brigade task force formed on the basis of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. In addition to Czech service personnel, it also incorporated Slovenian light battalion. All those main components, i.e. American, Czech and Slovenian, had to be harmonised into single machinery.

Always on the move

We headed for the battery's standby positions. We did not even manage to get out of the vehicle and the whole unit got moving. The howitzers were quick to leave their covert positions, automatically lined up into a convoy and

climbed up to a nearby road through muddy terrain. They covered two miles' distance in a couple of minutes. There they arranged for the firing position. In parallel with that, platoon leaders aimed the fire azimuth and shots could be fired. "We received an order to perform a fire mission. We had to leave our standby positions, perform a quick manoeuvre into the identified firing post. Then they contacted with the recce unit and accomplished the mission," Major Marcel Křenek explains. "Some may regard it chickenhearted, but it is a part of our tactics. We have to fire a salvo round as quickly as possible and get lost. Firing gives away our position and it is obvious that the enemy will seek to eliminate us."

Major Křenek was assigned to the ops-tac centre of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade. There was a multinational team mostly comprising U.S. Army service personnel and a small Czech fire coordination team and liaison elements of manoeuvre battalions became a part of it. MAJ Křenek was responsible to the Brigade commander for coordinating all fire support in their sector.

The Czech Armed Forces had battery comprising eight DANA self-propelled howitzers at Hohenfels. The other battery was simulated virtually so as to generate activity by a full field artillery battalion. That represented primary artillery assets of a multinational brigade that also had airborne fire support assets, such as helicopters and FWA. In addition, each manoeuvre battalion had its small artillery element, usually a mortar company. "Our mission was to coordinate the whole support. It is similar like in our military, the only difference being that the American system is quite centralised. They have



technological edge in that they are able to maintain a continuous digital battlefield picture. Each battery of the mechanised battalion with assets larger than calibre 120mm had to coordinate with us before they opened fire. Our task was to clear the airspace not to cause any harm to own air reconnaissance and fire support systems," Major Křenek explains. "At the outset, we had to explain to the Americans the tactical procedures to employ the artillery battalion. Their observers evaluated us throughout the exercise somehow. The differences between our and their tactics are driven by varying technology. In addition, our guns are not fully autonomous like theirs. Ours do not have own satellite navigation. American guns are equipped with GPS that enables them to operate in substantially smaller teams. In our environment, the primary artillery component is battery."

Insurgency hard on your heels

By then, the whole battery has lined up into a convoy and returned back into their standby position. That is already within sight, but the radio reports the convoy has been tailed by unidentified pickup truck. There is a suspicion that it could be an insurgency vehicle trying to identify the position of our artillerymen. They may not afford any risk in such situation. The convoy turns around, gets rid of the vehicle tailing them, and departs for an alternative standby area. "We were faced with the threat of being detected by forces active in the area of operations. That may be performed by regular as well as irregular elements such as guerrillas,

insurgency groups and the like. And that was what happened. We try to be as fast as we can not to allow the opponent to detect acquire our position," Major Křenek adds.

The artillery part of exercise Saber Junction II did not focus primarily on fire support as such, i.e. live firing exercise. Same as mechanised forces, artillery gunners and their equipment were also equipped with MILES units. That was why the exercise was rather conceived tactically, including from their perspective. They had to manoeuvre, evade regular and irregular opposing forces. "Having MILES is undoubtedly an advantage. It forces us to avoid incorrect command decisions to maximum possible extent. Every mistake we make is immediately reflected in our 'losses'," Major Křenek underscores.

Seeking better ways

Artillery platoon leader Lieutenant Veronika Rajská graduated just eighteen months ago. Saber Junction II was her first multinational training event. "The experience I gained is invaluable. We could not anticipate at any single moment how it will evolve. It depended on what the OPFOR would do and on the situation around us. The most challenging for me here was to respond to some assignments that I have not had an opportunity to tackle before. That involved a hot calling of MEDEVAC for example. Orientation in a completely unknown area was demanding. Communication with their American counterparts was not always seamless either. But Americans are very forthcoming. We usually speak with them about what we do and how we do it. Then we have a discussion whether it could not be done differently. That naturally



meant a progress for us. We have drilled certain procedures and suddenly we were led to consider other ways to accomplish the mission," LT Rajská adds.

Other artillery gunners concur. In the very start, they managed to establish an excellent cooperation with the artillery unit from the Joint Multinational Readiness Centre Hohenfels. "Those guys know what they can expect from us. They are able to understand the differences between their tactics and ours. I would say they are very forthcoming experts. They asked every day what else they could do for us, what training they could prepare. A considerable part of the exercise actually involved experience sharing. We offered some sort of lectures, and they reciprocated with certain information thanks to which we were able to speak common language in the artillery domain. That was not just about coordinating fire, but indeed about how the whole artillery system works. If a multinational artillery task force was to be formed in the future, we would have a foundation to build on in this respect," Major Křenek pointed out. Some of the U.S. observers were already familiar with the Czech equipment from the last exercise, but for others it was a completely new stuff. They did not hide their surprise over some of the performance parameters, for example the quantity of ammunition DANA carries onboard. Each howitzer has sixty artillery rounds, which is a big amount for the Americans. They obviously did not expect to see the speed at which our artillery men replenished ammunition. They were also pleased to see the logistic support too. "The terrain was quite bad, soaked in many places. And so it happened every now and then that a howitzer got stuck. But we are able to deal with such situations very quickly. We connected the howitzer to a towbar and recovered it using another howitzer. The whole thing took no longer than seven minutes. They often found those time limits amazing," MAJ Křenek concludes.

by Vladimír Marek



The 3rd Czech unit in the EUTM in Mali has coped with omnipresent heat and gathered experience

With tanks on the border, it is too late

Arid, cracked and hot land resembling of freshly spilled lava was all around. A Malian training area was to be located there. Although we looked around thoroughly, we could not see a single stationary facility. There were just a couple of recently erected tent shelters on the horizon.



We have just arrived at a training area nearby the city of Kati approximately twenty kilometres north of the capital city of Mali, Bamako. Four Czech instructors from the 7th Mechanised have been training the Malian 1st GTIA (Joint Task Force) battalion that had recently returned from operational tour in the north of the country.

"On standard basis, we provide training at the Koulikoro Training Camp. The unit is however stationed in barracks close to the local training area. In order to save everyday journey for the Malian soldiers, we moved over here. We sleep on the ground in the open. Termites are a problem – they have eaten everything we had, even the mats. We are here together with instructors from France and Germany and the cooperation we have is excellent. They treat us like true professionals. They primarily value our specialty. The Malian Armed Forces has primarily Russian weaponry in its inventory and we benefit from having familiarity with those weapons," explains one of the four Czech instructors Staff Sergeant Radim Kulík. "When we arrived Mali at the beginning of March, we overlapped with our colleagues from the 2nd Czech deployment and we jointly attended the final exercise of the Malian GTIA IV. Now we are in the process of training GTIA I. After operational tour, the task force was manned with novice soldiers to full levels and undergoes training again. Just about twenty percent of the original manpower remained. Certain dropout occurs already upon completion of the training. By then, the unit moves

into desert areas in the north of the country. When the first governmental soldiers are killed fighting the insurgents, drop out rate further increases."

Keen to learn

One of the biggest challenges the Czech service personnel had to cope with in Mali was the temperature. It is not really easy to learn to sleep in the open at thirty degrees Celsius at night. When the thermometer shows forty-five at day, it is not completely commonplace for people from Central Europe either. Having commenced performance of their operational assignment in March, this deployment fortunately had some acclimatising nevertheless. They started at roughly thirty-eight degrees Celsius that progressively rose to forty-five. The good thing was it was dry weather. Now the rain season has started. The temperatures dropped to thirty-five but at ninety to one hundred percent humidity. So, Czech servicemembers like to recall the time when it was forty-five. But otherwise they concur that they managed to acclimatise fast. Shortly after the arrival, they were able to join training and yet keep up their physical training standards. We could see it on our own eyes driving through the city as we passed by the local ZOO. Not only French but recently also Czech soldiers go for jogging into the park next to the ZOO. It is one of the few places in the town with some green foliage.

Refreshment training is shorter than the standard ten-week program; it just takes three weeks and teaches the basics such as operating weapons, tactics, shooting, defence, attack etc. The positive thing is that unit has experienced soldiers who have gone through combat. They are in position to pass on their knowledge and tell what the others should focus on, what will come in handy.

They also have a lecture on human rights. An American female instructor is just explaining those principles to Malian soldiers taking cover before the piercing sunshine under a patulous tree heavy with ripening mango fruits. One would assume they would find such theoretical lessons tedious, but the contrary is true – they are keen to learn. They introduce specific situations and ask how to behave in such circumstances.

Beware of rashness

The lecture ends at twelve hours. Then there is a four-hour intermission. Every afternoon, life stands still for several hours in this African country; the armed forces is not an exception. Malian soldiers climb onto a truck. They take the advantage of the truck's being parked under a large mango tree. They stuff their pockets with the ripening fruits. SSG Radim Kulík says good-bye to several of them. "Malian soldiers are quite hot-headed; we have to emphasise safety and weapon handling for them. On the other hand, I must admit they are very studious," SSG Kulík adds.

Malian Land Forces comprise two tank battalions, a mechanised battalion, four infantry battalions, special operation forces battalion, airborne battalion, two artillery battalions, engineer battalion and three air defence batteries. The total strength comprises 7,350 soldiers, 400 airmen forming the Air Force and 130 personnel serve with the river navy. In addition, there are paramilitary forces with the Republican Guard being the most numerous with the headcount of two thousand. There are eighteen hundred service personnel forming the Military Police, plus one thousand regular Police forces. The backbone of military education is the Joint Military School in Koulikoro, where the Czech training instructors have been stationed. Given that personnel strength, four battalion task forces progressively formed and trained to good standards with the assistance of EUTM instructors represent a significant fighting force.

In love immediately

Besides four training instructors, there are 34 additional Czech soldiers of the Czech Armed Forces' 3rd unit EUTM deployed in Mali. Their mission is to provide security to the Headquarters of the European Union Training Mission in Bamako, escorting vehicles carrying the EUTM commander and staff and other convoys. The EUTM HQ is based at Hotel Nord Sud in Bamako. Before we even enter the premises, we meet Czech soldiers at the gate guard post. The unit



commanding officer is Captain Martin Náplava of the 71st Mechanised Battalion based in Hranice. "Apart from those key priorities, we may also pursue own training at the range. MEDEVAC rehearsals also rank among interesting and productive events. After so-called dry practise at the airport, all our teams had a field training exercise including loading the casualties into the helicopter for medics to take over," Captain Náplava explains. "There is a STARLITE contractor company from the RSA to provide those services. Their workforce predominantly comprises ex-military personnel who have been through various operational deployments. And South African English, moreover coupled with the helicopter noise and stress, that may already make the training difficult. Those trainings are nevertheless always a welcomed change for us, which we request ourselves. Even to the extent that we are sometimes kidded that not all flight hours are committed just for our unit."

Many of the Czech servicemembers do not hide that they immediately fell in love with Mali. While Czechs run into incredible mess every

step they take, there are perhaps the nicest and friendliest people they have ever encountered. The only disadvantage is lack of knowledge of the language. But there is always a way to communicate or indeed understand each other. The greatest experiences include the joy of the local children when Czech soldiers give out something for them. Most of the members of the Czech unit strive to do some sports and keep up their physical training standards so that they have many sweets and biscuit left when they eat their meal. And then they give those to children.

Acclimatising not underestimated

Although Mali is a Moslem country, most of the inhabitants are very tolerant. Therefore, Czech soldiers do not have to observe any strict rules; they just do with good manners. EUTM forces are accepted here very positively. As a matter of fact, the EU Training Mission is not the only one to have operated in the country. EU

forces also enjoy a high popularity and respect among security services. When Czech military vehicles drive through the city and local policeman notices them, he would start to control the traffic in our favour in majority of cases and give an exemplary salute.

There are no great differences among national militaries forming the EUTM. Their mutual cooperation is to excellent standards as well. "We are in Africa, where time is not what really matters, but that rather applies to locals. A standard international environment prevails in our mission. Yet some things may raise a laugh. For example, when a French officer comes up to thank me for cooperating on an escort and values our men were in the place in time and everything clicked the way it was meant to click," Captain Náplava points out. "I should touch wood, the threat of malaria and other serious diseases has avoided our soldiers so far. We have been vaccinated against some diseases, and we take medicaments continuously to prevent others. The key thing is to perform hygiene thoroughly and strictly use bottled water,



including for teeth brushing for example. Invaluable were particularly the observations and instructions we got from the members of the 1st contingent whom we met during our predeployment training at Vyškov. They served their tour in the same season as we do, so they knew very well how to instruct us. Equally important was not to underestimate acclimatisation. It was not a pleasant measure to undergo for many of us: any increased physical effort was prohibited during the first two weeks. But it was definitely worth it and I may only recommend that for the next deployments."

Occasional demonstrations

Insurgents in the north of Mali divide into two main groups. First are Touareg separatists from the national Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and the other are so-called Islamist militia represented primarily by radical Al-Qaeda Islamists. After several months of relative



peace, the insurgents took advantage of the fact that the new Prime Minister of Mali Mr. Moussa Mara visited the town of Kidal in the north of the country and attacked the local governor's residence. What came out of that was a capture of thirty governmental officers some of whom were executed and the remaining ones were released after difficult negotiations. The Government had to augment the forces in the town significantly with additional reinforcements. Many governmental soldiers were killed in the ensuing fights. "The aggravated security situation does not practically affect the way we perform our job. That only applies to the north of the country. The influence it has on us here in Bamako is that there are demonstrations taking place here from time to time. But those are mostly organised to voice support to the government and are rather peaceful. In case we are off base at that time, we avoid those areas," Captain Náplava adds.

At the beginning of last year, the Czech contribution to the EUTM was set to fifteen months. That expires in June 2014. It is most likely

to be extended though though the end of the year. There are also discussions to authorise the mandate for the mission through 2015-16. "For a variety of reasons, I will personally vote for its extension. Although for ordinary people Mali can be slightly abstract faraway country with strange shape looking like drawn with a ruler, it is actually a very rich country. They have gold, gas, oil. Most of those materials are however in the northern part of the country where insurgencies render it impossible to extract those resources and turn Mali into a flourishing state. In addition, that territory is on a drug trail where various mafias intersect and come together. We may not pretend it does not concern Europe. It is not far from Algeria and local resources are already very important. The time when countries are defended only when enemy tanks are on the border is long gone. Now it is critical to anticipate developments in the context, think forward and plan defences," Czech Defence Minister Martin Stropnický said during his visit.

The 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade honours its 20th anniversary

Where others fall behind

The decision to establish a rapid reaction force was made in the context of an overall reorganisation of the Czech Armed Forces in the second half of 1993. General Karel Kuba became the founding father of the new unit. Originally a paratrooper, who had once served with the 22nd airborne brigade, realised how much the nature of conflicts in the world was changing and that heavy armoured formations needed to be quickly replaced with forces capable of performing peacekeeping duties in addition to combat missions.

The newly formed brigade was built on the basis of the 71st Airborne Battalion in Chrudim, which transformed into the 43rd Airborne Mechanised Battalion. The other Brigade components were also formed from the existing tank, artillery and mechanised units. Specifically, the 42nd Mechanised Battalion was established on the basis of the 18th Tank Regiment in Tábor and the 41st Mechanised Battalion was reorganised from the 79th Motorised Rifle Regiment in Benešov. The 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade (4th RDBde) was officially activated by the ordinance of the Chief of General Staff Major-General Jiří Nekvasil at 14 January 1994, but it only began training on 1 July that year. Its first commander became the future Chief of General Staff, then Colonel Jiří Šedivý. Almost a year's preparations were directed by another future 4th RDBde commander, Lieutenant-Colonel František Štěpánek.

Besides the command, the brigade originally comprised of the 43rd Airborne Mechanised

Battalion, 41st and 42nd Mechanised Battalions, the 4th Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Signal Battalion, an engineer company that was later reorganised into the 4th Engineer Battalion, a support battalion and a medical detachment. What was originally the 4th Artillery Battalion was later equipped with DANA self-propelled howitzers and transformed into the 46th Combined Artillery Battalion. The Brigade was planned to the size of 3,500 personnel. The roots of the 41st Mechanised Battalion are to be found in the Territorial Defence Battalion No. 30, which was formed in the town of Vysoké Mýto in 1870. After the 1919 unification, Infantry Regiment 30 was built on the basis of that unit and Infantry Battalion 98, which was given the honorary name of "Alois Jirásek" in March 1930. After World War II, the unit was restored in the original garrison. At the end of 1950, it underwent reorganisation into the 30th mechanised regiment and the town of Benešov became its permanent station. In Benešov, the unit was transformed in 1958 into the 79th Motorised Rifle regiment that became the personnel and materiel core for building the 41st Mechanised Battalion in 1994.

The tradition of the 42nd Mechanised Battalion goes back to the 3rd Tank Battalion of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Tank Brigade in the USSR. That unit was the basis on which the 3rd Tank Brigade was formed in Pardubice, which became the basis for forming the 18th Tank Regiment stationed in Tábor after some reorganisation and restationing measures. And that was where from the new 42nd Mechanised Battalion was born. Six years later, the President of the Czech Republic bestowed the historical title of Saint Wenceslas to the Battalion.

The history of the 46th Artillery Battalion also reached back into the first days after the war. In summer 1945, the Artillery Regiment 203 was established in the town of Příbram. After many reorganisations, it turned into an antitank brigade in 1956. After abolishment of that unit seven years later, it gave rise to the 216th Antitank Artillery Regiment that became autonomous. Its core was used for forming the 11th and 21st Anti-Tank Battalions in Jince and Žamberk. The year 1994 saw the 21st battalion transformed into the artillery battalion of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade. In 1997, the unit moved from Žamberk into the Pardubice garrison and gained the historical name of "General Netík". The Brigade was built as a modern unit with a high mobility and combat readiness. All career soldiers progressively had to undergo para training. Red berets were not commonplace either. After some discussions and considerations of various options, the red beret was eventually introduced to use with all units. Development of the brigade was associated with many problems. The unit was stationed in seven bases. Not all facilities were in good shape and they did not always match the training requirements. Construction effort was essential. Most of the units lacked service personnel, who would match the qualities of the 71st Airborne Battalion stationed in Chrudim. Lack of parachute materiel did not make things any easier. There were also certain



difficulties with available flights hours of air mobility and paratroop airplanes.

That naturally affected para training. And so a reduction had to take place. Already at the end of 1996, i.e. within mere thirty months, 989 males and 15 females successfully completed airborne training. Progress was stepwise achieved. Soldiers adopted the brigade's motto – "Where others fall behind". They realised they belonged to the army's elite. That motivated them to fulfil the motto with their deeds. From its inception, the brigade was subordinate directly to the Chief of General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces.

Only in 1997, the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade was transferred into subordination of the Land Forces Command in Olomouc and then the Joint Force Command. With the accession of the Czech Republic to NATO coming up, units of the 4th RDBde were assigned into the NATO Immediate Reaction Forces. In May 1999, the unit was bestowed the historical name "Obrany národa" by President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel. So, it claimed allegiance to the traditions of the illegal military resistance organisation that operated in the territory of Bohemia and Moravia during World War II.

During the 2003 Armed Forces reform, the Brigade was in danger of being renamed the 11th Mechanised Light Brigade. Such "threat" was fortunately warded off, but the unit had to undergo reorganisation and restationing nevertheless. Its organisational structure only retained three manoeuvre units – the 41st, 42nd and 43rd battalion, which were complemented with the 44th Light Motorised Battalion stationed in Jindřichův Hradec in 2008. Further, the Brigade comprised of the command and staff, a signal company and a support platoon. Other units were either abolished or transitioned into other structures. For instance, the 46th Artillery Battalion was renamed and incorporated into the 13th Artillery Brigade.

Its members however resisted the pressure and kept on wearing their red berets, as they were assigned for artillery support to the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade.

The brigade command headquarters moved from Havlíčkův Brod to Žatec. The 41st Mechanised Battalion also restationed there from

Benešov. Named Cooperative Spirit, the first training exercise of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade with foreign forces took place as early as March 1994 in the Boletice Military Training Area. Airborne troops from Chrudim trained there with Dutch marines. Soldiers practised hand-to-hand combat barefooted in snow then. That training event was followed by a number of highly successful efforts by the 4th RDBde personnel not only in the Czech Republic, but also in the U.S., the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Turkey, Poland, but also in exotic countries such as Peru or the French Guyana.

In 1995, the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade servicemembers took part in exercise Cooperative Nugget in the territory of the U.S. and the international exercise Cooperative Challenge held in the Czech Republic. Particularly the exercise in the U.S. was an extraordinary event. It was the first time for most of the 4th RDBde members to get to U.S. Army Base Fort Polk. Along with them, Canadians, Brits, Americans and servicemembers from fourteen other Partnership for Peace countries also took part in the manoeuvres. Besides demanding and highly realistic training with MILES, they had to cope with temperatures exceeding fifty degrees Celsius and a high humidity in Louisiana.

From 1994, members of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade served tours in UNPROFOR and UNCRO missions in the Balkans. They formed the core of the first Czech contingent in IFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, already led by NATO. The commander of the first contingent was Major-General Jiří Šedivý and Battalion Commanding Officer LTC Josef Sedlák. They were in charge of around eight hundred Czech service personnel of whom majority belonged to the 4th Brigade. Later on, the 4th Brigade servicemembers performed operational assignments in Kosovo, Macedonia (FYROM), Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan. Airborne soldiers from Chrudim are presently deployed in Mali, Africa.

Czech Armed Forces deliver on the Open Skies Treaty obligations on behalf of the Czech Republic

Quota Four

Quota four. Do not expect any conspiracy or secret. It is the number of observation flights the Czech Republic has been allocated under the Open Skies Treaty. In reality it means the Czech Republic may carry out four inspection flights over the territory of other state party a year, and has to allow performance of four surveillance flights over our territory at the same time.

By the way of introduction: the active involvement of the Czech Republic, or indeed the Czech Ministry of Defence, into the Open Skies Treaty involves performance of obligations under international arms control and confidence and security building treaties. Besides the OST, there are also assignments arising primarily from the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, the Vienna Document, Chemical Weapons Convention, Dayton Peace Accords and other international documents.

The initial idea of "mutual aerial observation" that would support transparency in gaining information on military forces came into being in 1950s in the Cold War period. The vision of open skies was then discussed by officials of the United States of America and the Soviet Union, but actual positive outcome was nevertheless achieved much later. The Open Skies Treaty was signed in Helsinki on 24 March 1992. After a decade, on 1 January 2002, the OST entered into force after being ratified by Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine. By the way, the then Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, which was represented at the signature of the Treaty, ratified it as the second state party after Canada by the Parliament. The OST presently has forty-three signatories, primarily from Europe and Northern America. That number is definitely not final. It is opened for accession of additional countries

subject to their meeting the conditions and consensual decision by the Open Skies Consultative Commission based in Vienna.

Photographing without limit

The benefits of the Open Skies Treaty are obvious. It deepens mutual confidence in the realm of security! Presently it is regarded the most effective vehicle available for arms control and international confidence and security building. In addition to that, the OST state parties are able to verify the data they declare. The Treaty provides for photographing any places in the territory of the host state, including strategic military and civilian installations and facilities. At the same time, observation flights may be performed, if desired by the inspecting team, in airspaces designated as prohibited (no-fly) or risky. It is also of interest that open-skies flights have a priority in the airspace. In other words, air traffic management authorities make sure regular airliner flights yield to OST aircraft. Observation flights may however only be performed by airplanes specifically certified for that purpose. "That observation aircraft is allowed to perform aerial photographing over the whole territory of signatory countries is the essence

of the Open Skies Treaty. In case a state party would declare you may not fly here or there, we cannot let you, then it would lose sense. For reasons easy to understand, flights are carried out over territories having some importance. Naturally, photos of the Karlštejn castle or Hluboká chateau may be amazing, but do not fall into this category," says Lieutenant-Colonel Šupšák, deputy head of verification section of the Arms Control Department the Foreign Activities Directorate of the Czech MoD.

OST surveillance flights are performed in accordance of exactly defined principles. The intention to carry out an observation flight is notified by a state seeking to do so through a diplomatic note not later than seventy-two hours beforehand and all other OST state parties are informed at the same time. Observation flight may also be affected by acts of god – the weather. It happens from time to time that effectiveness of photography is hampered by consistent cloud layer over the area of interest. But inspection mission over given state territory is nevertheless performed, and so the number of its allocated quotas decreases by one. Consequently, timing of the slots reserved for performance of observation flight is definitely important. Obviously, there is a difference in taking photos in July and in November. Discussion on OST time limits gains on importance also in connection with the fact that the so-called inspected state is not obliged to receive another OST signatory in its territory at the same time..

Max 1ft resolution

For a better idea, scenario of an OST mission S-ON should be described. "According to the Open Skies Treaty, an inspection over the territory of the inspected state may last up to ninety-six hours. It is stipulated for the Czech Republic, that the length of an observation flight over its territory may not exceed the distance of eight hundred kilometres," LTC Šupšák specifies basic indications.

A typical four-day mission by an OST inspection starts with arrival to the declared point

of entry, which is the Pardubice airport. As the inspected state, the Czech Republic is entitled to perform preflight inspection of the airplane to verify it is equipped with instruments and surveillance systems in compliance with the provisions of OST and prescribed certification. Simultaneously, the inspection team presents the inspection flight route for approval and the escorting team of Czech Armed Forces specialists has four hours to assess it.

After two days of requisite action on the ground, the time is right to perform an observation flight lasting roughly three hours with Czech military professionals onboard to supervise compliance with the approved route and conditions for using the surveillance systems. Aerial photos taken by special cameras may not have a higher resolution than 30 centimetres as limited under the Treaty. Once the observation flight is completed, the exposed films are developed in photolabs at the Pardubice airport. The original film belongs to the inspecting state and the first copy to the inspected state. Moreover, the outcomes of the observation flight are available to all state parties of the Open Skies Treaty indicating interest.

It is not a secret that the Czech Republic has not operated own surveillance airplane since 2003. The special military Antonov An-30FG aircraft is no longer operational to take photos of strategic facilities on the European continent, but it poses (on the ground) as a museum exhibit close to the city of Pilsen. For surveillance flights, we use foreign assets falling in the OST regime (surveillance aircraft are found in the inventory of the United States, Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine, Sweden, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania). Czech Armed Forces are left to share Czech quotas in international observations missions.

Russia's and Ukraine's open sky

The considerable number of observation flights performed over the territory of the state parties, which has amounted to more than nine hundred since the entry of the Open Skies Treaty into force, undoubtedly attracts the attention of both experts



and the general public. We do not intend to make reference to the accident of a Russian An-30B machine on landing at the Čáslav airbase in the Czech Republic in May 2012, but completely different interesting set of facts. As a good example, there were two interesting activities held last year with the participation of Czech Armed Forces professionals. From March 18-22, 2013, the Czech Republic conducted an OST observation mission together with the United States over the territory of the Russian Federation in the Far East and western Siberia region. The Czech team onboard the U.S. Air Force Boeing 707 OC-135B aircraft comprised five members of the Czech Armed Forces' Foreign Activities Directorate. The mission started on take-off from Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska and continued to the point of entry into the Russian Federation for surveillance flights, which is the Ulan-Ude airport located at the Lake Baikal. Totalling 5,873 kilometres in length, the mission was split into two separate flights and took over eleven hours in aggregate, generating almost four thousand aerial photographs. Those underwent the development and duplication process in attendance of the Russian officials at the Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio.

Eight months later, Ukraine opened its sky for a Czech-Swedish observation team complemented with an OST specialist from Spain. Swedish Saab-340 aerial surveillance airplane covered some two thousand kilometres for the

inspection team to take approximately 140 photos in two flights. Given a good weather, the rate of success over majority of interest areas reached almost ninety percent.

Territory size and armed forces strength

Quotas for the start, quotas to end with. It is important to note that setting the quota is determined by the size of national territory and the strength of the armed forces of individual OST state parties. "In the autumn, Vienna is the venue on regular basis for the Open Skies Consultative Commission to discuss allocation of quotas for the next year. The negotiations have to end by an agreement among all OST state parties. The quota remains constant and may not be changed arbitrarily. What can change is only the location (state) where the inspection is performed," Lieutenant-Colonel Šupšák explains and goes on to say that the highest quota – forty-two – is allocated to the Russian Federation. Although the Czech Republic is entitled to perform four observation flights over a territory of an OST state party, it normally performs just two.

by Pavel Lang

Photos by Arms Control Department of the Czech Armed Force's Foreign Activities Directorate



A report from an air-to-ground live fire exercise involving aircrews of Mi-24V gunships and Mi-171Sh/ShM helicopters in the Libavá Military Training Area

Cleared hot: rockets, machinegun!

Exactly at eight o'clock, the chief of the flight shift kicks off the preflight briefing on the live fire exercise of the 221st "Tiger" Helicopter Squadron. After a short introduction, he hands over to all involved specialists reporting the essential information to the flight crews of the Mi-24V gunships and Mi-171Sh/ShM transport helicopters. Standardly, weather goes first. The meteorologist focuses on visibility range, changing cloud formation and wind in areas of interest, the lead senior engineer specifies the helicopter configuration including weapons on-board, and goes through safety measures once again. Leading specialists then report that air traffic management, airfield systems and radio support are ready for the action. Prior to the final go-ahead for the flight activity, the word goes to the Forward Air Controller, who provides an in-depth explanation of the tactical scenario at the Velká Střelná range in the Libavá Military Training Area.

Concurrently, technical personnel finish the preflight prepping on the helicopters. Specialists for airframe, powerplant, electrical and radio equipment finalise the prescribed actions and yield to armourers. Red flags five metres

before and behind the helicopters are a sign telling enough that a no-go zone for unauthorised personnel was established around the machines. Armourers load live ammo into the rocket blocks, gun pods, machine guns and ASO-2 rocket launchers for flares and hand the Hinds over back to maintainers.

Roughly forty runs daily

Captain of the Mi-24V gunship with number 7358 climbs approximately to fifty feet and performs the final check. Everything is OK. The Hind quickly gains speed and altitude. Following the prescribed route at bearing zero-six-three degrees, the aircraft leaves the airfield area and heads towards the first turning point, which is the town of Kuřim. It passes Vyškov and Prostějov heading for the Libavá Military Training Area. The peace at the concrete apron called "Mike" at the 22nd Helicopter Airbase Náměšť nad Oslavou does not last long though. Number 7358 hardly disappears behind the horizon and two additional Mi-24Vs with tail numbers 7354 and 3369 are taking off. A couple hundred metres away the main rotor on the Mi-171Sh

helicopter with tail number 9806 starts spinning. Insiders know this is not a standard flight activity but a live fire exercise of the 221st Helicopter Squadron. The following three days with three flight windows a day, the Velká Střelná range will be the location for the helicopters to engage targets on the ground, both individually and in formation. After roughly a thirty minutes' low-level flight from Náměšť, the Mi-24V gunship arrives the designated point of contact. The captain establishes a radio connection with the fire director and requests clearance to continue into the ingress point. At the same time, he specifies the weaponry, including the quantity of S-5KO rockets and the rotating quad .50 calibre machinegun.

The finale comes a couple of minutes later. The helicopter captain requests: "Final Attack Cone!" and soon he receives approving direction. The Hind turns to zero-nine-zero degrees and flying at almost two hundred kilometres per hour ingresses the target area. "Five three four, final attack bearing, rockets, machinegun," the captain reports. When the "7358" finds itself fifteen hundred metres from the targets replicating a low structure, the captain takes



decoys with denomination PPI-26-IV that are designed to decoy for infrared homing systems on the rockets.

"In a LIVEX, you have to combine a range of professional skills. Everything has to come together ideally for you to achieve the desired outcome. That is why this exercise is one of the most interesting in the air training curriculum," says the Mi-24V captain CPT Jaroslav Šimek once he lands and explains the sequence of efforts that goes from day fire exercise at horizontal flight performed by a single machine through a pair and a helicopter flight to night fire exercise. With all due respect for combat employment involving one or indeed two gunships, let us shortly elaborate on live fire performed by a helicopter flight. "Helicopters operate at the range in an echelon formation. Every-one of them has an assigned sector with the ground target. There are several low structures prepared for today's live fire exercise. Helicopter aircrews divided them among themselves and engage them," CPT Šimek adds. The Hinds achieved their goal at Velká Střelná range. By the way, they completed roughly forty attacks on ground targets in a single flight day. The flight crews of the Mi-171Sh/ShM transport helicopters also demonstrated their professional mastery. That was proven for instance by the effective fire by aerial gunners from the calibre 30 PKM machineguns. The combat employment scenario was built on the target situation: fire from port door, tactical manoeuvre, firing from starboard door, tactical manoeuvre, after flying low over the target and shooting from the rear ramp and tactical departure. The mission has to be performed at maximum possible speed. The helicopter cannot operate in the hot zone longer than really necessary.

No shot without drill

One of the key factors driving the amount and type of ammunition eventually used at the range

is the meteo situation. In other words, adverse weather may complicate continuity in the training of flight personnel at the 221st Squadron, because missions at ranges in military training areas are planned long in advance. "We have allocated the timeframe for air live fire exercise in annual plan. Because the military areas are quite busy, it is in fact impossible to change the timing. Inappropriate meteo situation would therefore cause that the planned exercises are not realised," Mi-24V helicopter captain CPT Martin Douda says and specifies that the live fire exercise is planned for three days a month, normally on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in one week.

It is not a secret that live air-to-ground fire exercises were planned for the Náměšť airbase every month. But the situation is different now. "The reality is that the likelihood of successful performance of a LIVEX is low in some months. Therefore, we planned first LIVEX in March and the last one in September," CPT Douda describes.

Activities like these admittedly require drilling, in other words a continuous and intensive training. Every longer intermission immediately shows in performance of the flight personnel, in terms of a lack of self-confidence in operating weapon systems. The undesired outcome that we would fail to meet the standards does not come into question at all. "All pilots have to undergo, according to their class, verification of flight skills. In reality, the question is whether the pilots have sufficiently mastered procedures to use weapon systems. For Third Class Pilots, it is six months, second class has nine months and twelve months for the first class. The exercise may be conducted either by shooting simulated with photography, or live fire in a range," Captain Douda explains. But it does not involve flight effort only. Various forms of air fire practising are performed on the ground as well. Live fire exercises are the cream of the crop. The Commander of the 221st Tiger Helicopter Squadron comments: "Periodicity of live fire exercises is sufficient for us to maintain our professional standards and be able to perform those missions with requisite degree of certainty," Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Jand'ourek describes the essence.

Many a reader may ask to what extent it is challenging to have in the squadron's inventory completely different types of helicopters – Mi-24V gunships and the Mi-171Sh air mobility assets. "There are differences undoubtedly. Every type of helicopter is designed to perform a different mission set. I do not hide it poses increased requirements. On the other hand, there is a clear benefit: we may share experience directly – we learn from each other. Although those may seem as two different units at the first sight, the key thing is that it works in flying practice and the squadron performs its assigned missions," LTC Jand'ourek explains.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



Only the lucky ones survived

He was not broken by war, imprisonment or treason. This is the life of Emil Boček, one of the Czechoslovak aviators in the United Kingdom, an elite part of the Royal Air Force, and the youngest fighter pilot of the 310th Czechoslovak Squadron, in a nutshell.

"We won't just sit, we will do something," is the motto that has wound like a red thread throughout the life of Colonel (ret.) Emil Boček, aged 91. Even when he was sixteen, in 1939, when our republic was going through one of the darkest chapters of its history, the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, he knew he would not sit with arms akimbo. He decided to leave the country and join the French Foreign Legion.

A skiing trip that took six years

"No one knew I was going to leave, not even my mom," Emil Boček recalls. "In the morning of December 27, 1939, I and my friend set off under the pretext of a skiing trip to the Jeseníky Mts., and I came back six years later. All our friends whom we met on our way toward our first waypoint, Brno Railway Station, wished us a good skiing experience. And so we traveled via Slovakia to Budapest, where we were apprehended and returned to Slovakia. However, luck was on our side; we managed to get to Budapest again, to the French consulate, and from

there to Yugoslavia. Then we continued through Greece and Turkey to Beirut, from where I finally sailed on the MV Compiegne to Marseille on April 5, 1940."

This was where Emil Boček, then 17, signed a five-year contract with the Foreign Legion. However, the war then broke out and he joined the Czechoslovak army in France instead. "I joined our army in Agde on April 16; I passed a training course for telephone operators and was assigned in the rank of private to the 9th Company of the 1st Infantry Regiment; I was then reassigned to the 2nd Infantry Regiment with which I took part in rear-guard actions against the Germans," Emil Boček continues. "After tough fighting, I reached the Mediterranean port of Sete in June 1940, and on the next day I boarded the Egyptian

coal ship Rod-el-Farag and sailed to Gibraltar. We joined a convoy of other ships there, and arrived to Liverpool on July 12. Then I traveled with others by train to a camp in Cholmondeley. We were the last evacuees from France to reach the camp."

From the airframe mechanic to the fighter pilot

In September 1940, Emil Boček joined the Royal Air Force. He attended a training course



for air mechanics, graduated at the top of the class, and became a qualified airframe mechanic in February 1941. "At that time, the commander of the hangar of the 312th Squadron requested two Czech mechanics for his team, and I was one of them," says Boček. "Sorties were flown almost non-stop, so we were working without a break. However, my eyes at that time had already been focused on pilot's training, but the hangar commander did not want to give me up. And you know what did it? My prison term," he adds with a smile.

During a farewell party thrown for one of his pals who was going to a pilot's training course, the inn where the party was taking place saw first a verbal clash and later a "manual" brawl with a British Flight Sergeant. "I recall it as if it were yesterday. He threw something like "bloody Czechs" in our direction and the harm was done," the pilot laughs. "I grabbed his lapels and shouted what that was supposed to mean. I did not wait for an answer; I slapped him once on each cheek. I received six days in prison from the provost court. When I was released, I told my hangar commander that if he did not send me to a pilot's training course, he could put me in the slammer for the rest of the war for all I cared, but I would not come back to the hangar. I only came to collect my pay, so there was a real threat of imprisonment, but I did not budge and finally made it."

He had loved airplanes and everything around them since his childhood and the pilot's training course was a dream come true for him. He was twenty when he became a fighter pilot. He earned fame as a member of the 310th Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron. He was assigned to the unit, then based in North Weald, on October 20, 1944, and he flew his first combat sortie a week later.

The principal mission of fighter pilots was to escort and protect bombers. With 26 sorties amounting to 73 hours and 50 minutes of flight time, he is one of the best. "We also flew raids, individual missions against specific ground targets, such as buildings or locomotives, for example," he recalls. "My biggest sortie was escorting some 800 bombers against Helgoland in the North Sea. The largest enemy submarine base was situated there, and it was completely destroyed in two days of bombing. And what

sorties were the most successful? Well, naturally all that I came back from."

From fighter planes to bikes

When the war was over, Emil Boček and other fighter pilots landed at the Ruzyně Airport on August 13, 1945. In spite of all bans, he went AWOL to visit his family in Brno. "I literally stunned my mom," Emil Boček smiles mischievously. "She had had no information about me for six years and now I was standing right in front of her. The meeting with my brother and other family members was also great. But I had to return to Prague after two days.

He was then assigned to the Air Regiment in Praha – Kbely. However, at that time he had already refocused his attention to another love – motorcycles. He thus left the Air Force in March 1946. He and his friend opened a repair garage which they operated for five years, with motorcycles being their core business. Since February 1948, however, their workshop was closely watched and, threatened by imprisonment, they finally had to give it up and start working for Mototechna as employees. Emil Boček then also worked at the Research Institute of Instruments of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and later at Druk. "Flying was replaced by motorcycle races as a source of adrenaline. I was simply crazy about them. I even flew from time to time, with a friend's airplane, at the Brno – Tuřany airfield. But my wife was not supposed to know – she would have given me a proper dressing."

Emil Boček is full of élan even now, although he celebrated his 91st birthday on February 25. He travels around the country, sharing his recollections and debating with people. And, looking back, he says: You know, only the lucky ones survive the war. The unlucky ones die. I was lucky and that's why I am here now."

by Jana Deckerová
Photos by Jan Černo and archives
of Brigadier-General (ret) Emil Boček



Pilots of the 310th Squadron – E. Boček, J. Svoboda and M. Kratochvíl



Brigadier-General (ret) Emil Boček

Date of birth: **February 25, 1923**
– Brno-Tuřany

- member of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance 1939–1945
- member of the Czechoslovak air force in the United Kingdom

Decorations:

- Czechoslovak War Cross 1939 (twice)
- Czechoslovak Medal "For bravery before the enemy"
- Czechoslovak Distinguished Service Medal, 2nd degree
- Czechoslovak Military Memorial Medal F-UK
- Distinguished Military Flyer

British decorations:

- The 1939–1945 Star
- Air Crew Europe Star
- The France and Germany Star
- Defence Medal
- War Medal

On May 8, 2014, President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman commissioned Colonel Boček into the rank of Brigadier-General.

Seventy years since the formation of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the Soviet Union

THE LARGE foreign army

During WW2, Czechoslovak political representatives in exile led by Edvard Beneš did not make any secret of their ambitions to create a large military formation. The first Czechoslovak unit formed in the Soviet Union was a battalion, which was later fleshed out into an independent brigade. However, there were not enough human resources to build a larger formation.

The Carpathian Mountains – Autumn 1944



The situation changed when the Red Army advanced far to the west and managed to liberate the Ukrainian region of Volyn. In March 1944, the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade in the USSR was moved to Rovno, the centre of the Czech population in the Volyn region. A recruitment campaign was launched and more than 12,000 volunteers enrolled. Even women were interested in serving in our army. Their number gradually grew to more than six hundred.

"With so many fresh recruits joining our unit, problems began. In particular, we were short of lower-echelon commanders. We thus immediately started training courses for platoon leaders and other courses. Just like on previous occasions, the Soviet command helped us again. Step by step, we began receiving weapons and equipment; we dispatched our most capable soldiers who had distinguished themselves on the battlefield to Soviet training centres, and experienced Soviet officers came to our unit as instructors," is how Ludvík Svoboda remembered those days in his book "From Buzuluk to Prague".

The Memorandum of the People's Commissariat of Defence of the Soviet Union and the General Staff of the Red Army on the constitution of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR was issued on April 10, 1944. In the end of April, the brigade with the volunteers was moved to the region of Chernovtsy, when an intensive training programme started. A few months earlier, in the beginning of January 1944, the formation of the 2nd Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade started in Evreevo (an article on the formation was published in the fourth issue of A-Report). The unit was composed mainly of Slovak soldiers, members of the Slovak 1st Division, who had gone over to the Russian side at Melitopol in the end of October 1943. The brigade's commanders were mainly Czechoslovak officers not assigned to any unit, who had been transferred to the Soviet Union from the United Kingdom. By mid-April 1944, the brigade's units had completed their parachute training and were subsequently moved to Proskurovo, a town located in the frontline zone.

Step by step, additional brigades and units were being formed. As early as on May 20, a tank regiment was established around the core of the tank battalion, and later expanded into a brigade. It comprised an HQ company plus three tank battalions, each having two tank companies. There were also a battalion of submachine gunners, as well as auxiliary and support units. The Czechoslovak aviation unit, 128th Czechoslovak Independent Fighter Squadron, was also organizationally attached to the brigade. It was formed on the Kubinka airfield near Moscow in May 1944. In mid-June, it was restructured into the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Fighter Regiment in the Soviet Union.

"The initial agreement with the Soviet Union stipulated that our units would consist only of volunteers having Czechoslovak citizenship.

However, that source proved to be insufficient. With Moscow's consent, the recruitment was therefore expanded to include Soviet citizens as well. The latter included mainly so-called Volynian Czechs. It was their mass induction into the Czechoslovak Army that made the formation of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps possible," Jozef Bystrický of the Military Historical Institute in Bratislava explains. "The recruitment spectrum, however, was ultimately much broader. It included not only Ruthenians, but also some ex-members of enemy armies, namely Slovak, Hungarian and German. Some Czechs got to the territory of the Soviet Union as members of the Wehrmacht and got captured. However, many more got there as members of the Todt labour organization units. The Hungarians who had lived in the ter-



The Carpathian-Duklja Operation. Officers at the Observation Posts, left to right: Černý, Procházka, Svoboda, Soviet Artillery Advisor Savitskiy



Members of the 2nd Parachute Brigade packing their parachutes



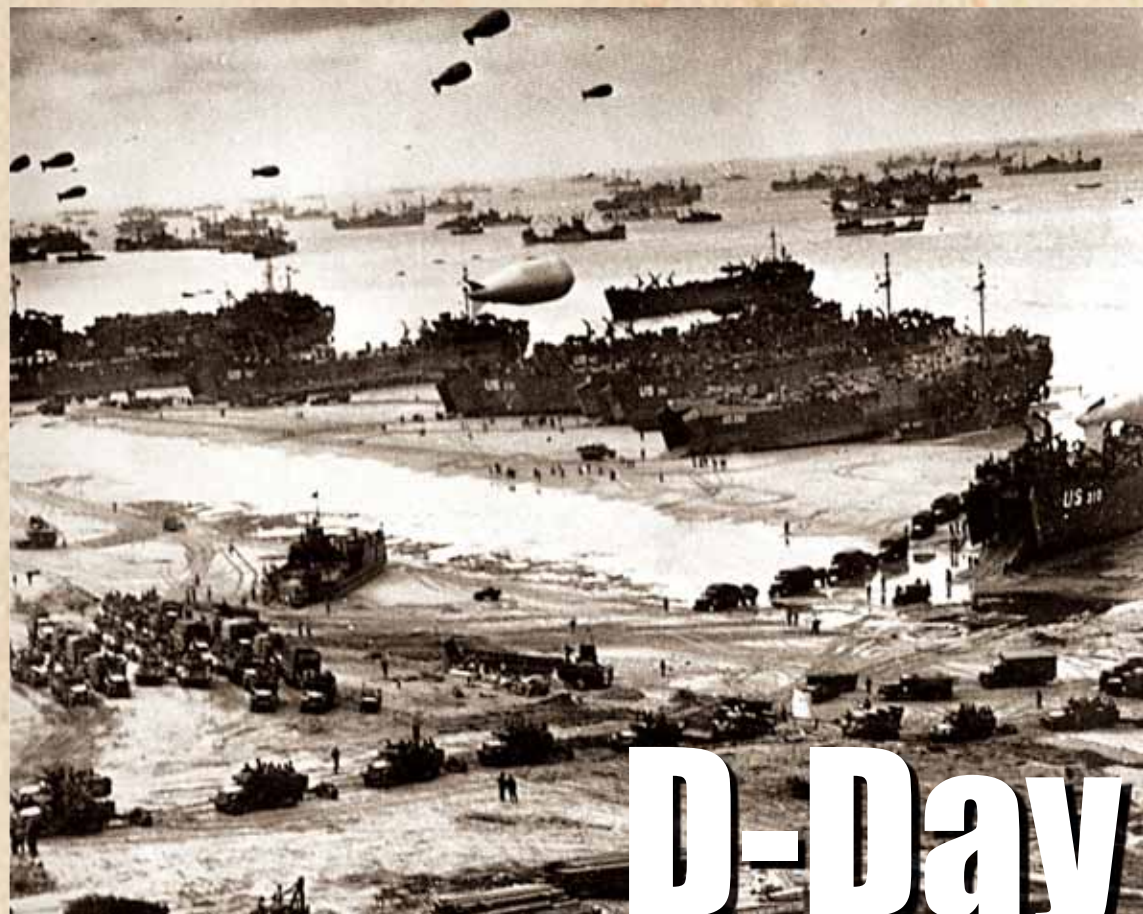
Tanks of the 2nd Tank Battalion of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Tank Brigade in the USSR in a parade in the liberated town of Moravská Ostrava

ritory of southern and eastern Slovakia were no exception as well."

In the end of July 1944, the building of the corps was essentially completed. At that time, the corps comprised a staff company, 1st and 3rd Infantry Brigades, 2nd Parachute Brigade, a tank brigade, an artillery regiment, an engineer battalion, a signal battalion, an MP company, a traffic control company and a special purpose company. In addition, there was also a rear echelon, consisting of the corps' supply train and armament train, a vehicle pool, an auxiliary company, medical and veterinary support services and depots. The corps included a reserve regiment as well. Brigadier General Jan Kratochvíl became the corps' commander. However, having spent just a few days at the front, he was replaced, at the insistence of the Soviet, by Brigadier General Ludvík Svoboda, until then the commander of the 1st Brigade.

"The three months of intensive training in Chernovtsy elapsed unbelievably fast. We hardly had the time to realize it, but then the time came when the Soviet Army command decided to give us an opportunity to test our combat skills and political maturity," Ludvík Svoboda, the Corps Commander, later wrote. "At the end of July of the penultimate war year, the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR started moving. Its units were heading west, closer to the border of our motherland. Developments along the Soviet-German frontline did not leave any doubts that the day of the ultimate defeat of Fascism was near."

The corps got involved in the fighting for the first time on September 8, 1944, around Krosno, being a part of the forces taking part in the Carpathian-Dukla operation. However, the initial plan, namely to take Prešov in five days by an unexpected and swift strike, failed. Awaiting the corps were stiff German resistance, bloody fighting for every hill and, in particular, huge losses. In fact, the highest the corps sustained during the war. Prešov was liberated only in January 1945.



D-Day

(with the Czechoslovak participation)

Originally, the landing was to take place on June 5, 1944. However, the operation was cancelled due to bad weather over the Channel. There were discussions as to whether the units should be withdrawn to their camps; the final decision, however, was to carry on with the operation, unfavourable weather forecasts notwithstanding. Operation Overlord was thus postponed by mere 24 hours, which ultimately proved to be an indisputable advantage. As a matter of fact, the Germans did not expect the landing under such bad weather conditions. Many commanders thus took leave and went home to their families. The Allies therefore managed to take the German units by surprise.

Hitler deceived

The Allies landed on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword Beaches in the early morning hours of June 6, 1944. They made use of new weapons and special landing equipment, including DUKW amphibious vehicles and DD amphibious tanks, armoured ramp carriers, special mine-clearing vehicles, such as Crabs, and Crocodiles, which were modified Churchill tanks with a flame-thrower installed instead of the hull machine gun. The AVRE was again a modified Churchill tank the gun of which was replaced by a heavy mortar, designed to destroy concrete structures.

The heaviest fighting took place on Omaha Beach, where US troops landed. In spite of tough resistance of the defenders and heavy casualties, the beach was taken by the evening.

The landing itself was preceded by massive artillery and aerial bombardment. In particular, however, the largest airborne operation in history had been launched shortly before midnight, June 5. It involved paratroopers of the US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and the British 6th Airborne Division. Their task was to secure important bridges, enemy batteries of heavy guns and other strategic objects. The paratroopers jumped out or were landed in their gliders behind the enemy's first line of defence and were expected to prevent the arrival of German reinforcements for a certain limited period of time. The French resistance, organized by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), also contributed to the above task. The Allies enjoyed the absolute air supremacy as well. Marshal Leigh Mallory commanding the expeditionary air force had 11,500 aircraft of various categories at his disposal.

In spite of all the preparations, the Allies' advance inland was very slow. Normandy's landscape, segmented by a dense network of hedges, played into the hands of the Germans. Fortunately, Hitler trusted the deception staged by allied intelligence services, believing that the Normandy operation was just a secondary

The Allied landing in Normandy during WW2, codenamed Operation Overlord, took many months to prepare. To this end, huge numbers of troops and quantities of equipment were concentrated in the United Kingdom, not just from the United States or Britain, but also from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Norway, Belgium and Czechoslovakia.

attack and that the actual landing would take place elsewhere. Following his presumption, he kept strong armoured units in reserve, deploying them only when it was too late.

The Brigade not strong enough to meet wartime TOEs

Czechoslovak forces abroad also contributed to the allied landing and in particular to subsequent combat operations on the second front. On September 1, 1943, the Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group was established in the United Kingdom. Its formation was made possible thanks to Czechoslovak soldiers transferred from the African theatre in July 1943. Even so, it lacked manpower – it had only two thirds of what it should have according to TOEs. Moreover, it had to be equipped with tanks and other armoured vehicles and trained. In May 1944, it moved to southern Scotland, where it was supposed to complete its training.

And this was also where it was when the Allies landed in Normandy. On the eve of D-Day, an order announcing field mobilization arrived. That meant not only an inspection of the brigade's personnel and equipment, but above all fleshing



the unit out to wartime TOEs and replacing all its equipment. As early as on June 18, our soldiers received new Cromwell tanks for training. In just a few weeks, a thousand vehicles and dozens of tons of military materiel were replaced. In the beginning of July, the intensity of combat training was stepped up as well. It peaked in a large brigade-size exercise followed by live-fire tank gunnery practice. The brigade's personnel morale was high. The soldiers wanted to join the fighting in Normandy as soon as possible. Their turn finally came. On July 24, the brigade's commander, General Alois Liška, received an order to depart to France. During the days that followed, the brigade was assembled around Bridlington, some 300 km from London. Another exercise, codenamed Oder-Elbe, took place there. On August 18, when it was over, the soldiers received directives on Operation Overlord. The equipment had to be checked once again. In the last moments, reinforcements were coming from the personnel sourcing unit. They were mainly soldiers recruited among German POWs coming from the region of Cieszyn Silesia. Even so, the brigade was not at its full TOE strength.

Beneš came to say goodbye

On August 21, the brigade was visited by President Edvard Beneš, who came to say goodbye to its members before their departure for France. A few days later, our units started moving to assembly areas near London and Southampton. The brigade was issued its operational tanks, Cromwells and Shermans, there. All the vehicles bore the allied sign, a white five-pointed star in a circle. The soldiers received French francs instead of British pounds. Each also got a life jacket and a combat ration. Their port of embarkation was Gosport.

The first soldiers of the brigade to set their foot on the territory of France on August 31, 1944, near the village of Graye-sur-Mer, were members of the quartermaster's detachment. Having passed through a transit camp and the battle-ravaged town of Caen, they moved to a forested area roughly 2 km NE of Falaise, where the camp of our brigade was to be built. The work started immediately. However, the disembarkation of the brigade had to be suspended on September 3 because of a sea storm, and was completed only on September 8.

Early in October, the brigade received an order to move to the port of Dunkirk, which units of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division were getting close to. Its 5th Brigade took Bourbourg on September 5, and had the port within sight. However, German defenders of Dunkirk were putting up stiff resistance and soon managed to stop the advance of the 5th Brigade – and with it the whole division. Main forces of the Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group left Falaise in the morning of October 4, 1944, and reached Dunkirk in the early morning of October 6. The seven-month siege of the French port began. The German garrison defending Dunkirk had more men than the attacking Czechoslovak brigade and well fortified. Moreover, the Germans opened lock gates and flooded the whole area around Dunkirk. They surrendered only in the end of the war.

Czechoslovak aviators took part in Operation Overlord practically from its very beginning. On D-Day, the 134th Czechoslovak Fighter Wing RAF was alerted as early as on 4.30 AM. On 7.20 AM, the Czechoslovak fighters took off Appledram for their first combat sortie. Thirty-six Spitfires of the 310th Squadron headed for the French coast. Their task

was to fly as low as possible; apart from inflicting losses on the enemy, they were to demonstrate the allied air superiority and give a moral boost to infantrymen fighting their way through the landing beaches. On that morning, there were practically no Luftwaffe airplanes in the air, and our pilots thus focused on patrolling and destroying targets on the ground. On June 6, they took off three times, each sortie lasting roughly two hours. Unlike other air formations, we had no casualties on D-Day, in spite of bad weather conditions.

The 311th Czechoslovak Bomber Squadron RAF was also involved in D-Day operations. The first of its Liberators took off shortly after 5 AM. The squadron's tank was to patrol over the Channel and look for enemy U-boats. However, none appeared.

The Czechoslovak pilots had to wait for a real dogfight until the next day, June 7. The day started with a tragic event. F/Sgt Miroslav Moravec crashed shortly after taking off. The second patrol sortie had more luck. At about 2.30 PM, two formations of enemy aircraft were sighted roughly 30 km north of Caen. Their sixteen airplanes were clearly heading for the beaches. Our pilots immediately attacked the first eight-strong group, which turned and tried to escape. W/O Jindřich Konvička left the formation and started pursuing one of the fleeing enemy airplanes. The Focke Wulf ahead quickly dropped its bombs and tried to escape toward Rouen. In spite of repeated attempts, Konvička did not manage to drop his auxiliary tank. Using the WEP (War Emergency Power) engine mode, which he could use for up to five minutes, he finally caught up and fired five bursts at the Focke Wulf. He hit its left wing, from which an unidentified object was reportedly detached, while F/O Vladimír Kopeček damaged another Focke Wulf. The most successful battle of the Czechoslovak pilots took place on the next day. Their second patrol sortie of the day took them over Caen. The enemy was nowhere in sight. Our 312th Squadron was protecting the flank of two other squadrons. At 13.35 PM, the fighter pilots spotted twelve Focke Wulfs. They saw them leaving the cloud cover and attacking the narrow strip of Sword Beach. The 312th Squadron's Spitfires jumped at the enemy and the chase began in earnest. The first Focke Wulf was shot down by S/Ldr Jan Čermák. Shortly thereafter, he damaged another with a burst fired from the distance of 400 m. The Czechoslovak pilots could celebrate their triumph. Three enemy airplanes were shot down and five others damaged, without any own losses. The skies over Caen were perfectly cleared of enemy aircraft in a matter of a few dozen minutes.

Our pilots continued to fly sorties in the following days as well, at a rate of up to five a day. In those hectic days, the fliers managed to catch only a few hours of sleep, having a nap on the grass among the airplanes that had just landed. Only to climb into the cockpit, strap in and take off again as soon as their aircraft were rearmed and refueled.

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