

1/2021



page 2

COPING WITH THE COUP AND CHANGED MANDATE

Brigadier General František Ridzák reviews the performance of our service members in EUTM Mali

Since 21 January 2021, CBRN defence specialists from Liberec have been on 24/7 standby readiness to perform missions as part of a multinational battalion
page 13

With the new Director of the Special Forces Directorate Colonel Ladislav Rebilas we talked about the development and specifics of this type of force
page 16

Soldiers of the 14th Logistics Support Regiment help in hospitals and social facilities
page 28



INTERVIEW

Brigadier General František Ridzák reviews the performance of our service members in EUTM Mali

Coping with the coup and changed mandate

In mid-January this year, Brigadier General František Ridzák returned to the Czech Republic from Africa, after having served a tour as the EU Training Mission Mali Force Commander.



Grand opening of the renovated communications training centre in Kati.
The project was funded by the Czech Ministry of Defence

You are through a six months' deployment in Mali. What were your achievements during that time and how do you evaluate your tour of duty?

I would like to make clear that I did not spend neither six nor seven but rather eight months in Mali. Of that, I served seven months as a commander of the multinational mission. It is not easy to review everything we achieved, so let me focus on the major accomplishments. In April last year, the mission was hibernated, so our first task was to get it up and running. It was also important that we were able to successfully cope with the coup d'état. We significantly contributed to the resumption of the mission after the MPCC suspended all activities. At the same time, we did not slack on the training activities in remote regions of Mali. For the first time as EUTM, we were able to enter the NCO school in Banankoro, where we renovated the local school and commenced the training of instructors. We also managed the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic, which broke out in full in autumn 2020. I should also mention the seamless return of all personnel forming the Czech deployment back to homeland.

You mentioned the coronavirus crisis. How difficult was it for you to cope?

My predecessor, General Ribeiro of Portugal, was faced with first wave, which represented a completely new phenomenon for all of us. Although he did not have any practical experience in this regard and did not know what he was up to, he managed to create the conditions for the mission to carry on functioning. He tasked the development of relevant standard operating

CONTENTS

Coping with the coup and changed mandate	2
Breaching – violent entries to buildings	9
Ready to respond anywhere	13
Work smart, then fast	16
Authority matters	23
Future army tough guys	26
They exchanged camouflage suits for protective ones	28
Behind the wheel of the Pandur	33
Verification of the Staff and Movement	36
They have found the courage and do not regret it	38
The sun always rises after a storm	44
Two generations of veterans	47
Our soldiers were relentless	50

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

Identification number: 60162694

Address: Rooseveltova 23,
161 05 Praha 6, Czech Republic
Phone: +420 973 215 648, +420 973 215 786

Editor-in-chief: Vladimír Marek
Layout: Milan Syrový

Translation: Jaroslav Furmánek, Jan Jindra

Cover photo: EUTM Mali

Distributed by MHI Prague, Production Section
Rooseveltova 23, 161 05 Praha 6, Czech Republic
Ol'ga Endlová, tel. +420 973 215 563

Printed by: Czech Print Center, a. s.

ISSN 1804-9672
Registration number: MK ČR E 18227

Published in May 2021

procedures. We were able to follow on what he achieved, and made use and specified the lessons his staff learnt in the practical way. Antigen rapid tests played an important role in that regard, as they helped us to create a sort of biosafety firewall. We did not have to send the service members for PCR tests that are more time consuming in essence. We did antigen testing in waves and we had results in 30 minutes. In case the personnel tested positive, we automatically sent them for PCR tests. So we knew well in advance whom we had to isolate and whom to quarantine. Thanks to that, we managed to get the coronavirus spreading under control and do away with it in the matter of three or four weeks.

In Mali, you were also faced with the coup d'état. How did you have to react?

That was naturally one of the most demanding periods. It was the first time for me to be in a country going through a coup d'état. The very coup was preceded by a highly complex political situation. Protest demonstrations against the regime of the former President took place virtually on daily basis and the situation escalated. The coup nevertheless came as a surprise for everyone. An embarrassed reaction by the French, who historically had a very good insight in the goings-on in this country, testified to that. We had to bring all forces and assets to the highest alert. We monitored the situation continuously and were ready to respond. In the end, I was glad it developed the way it did. Throughout that period of uncertainty, there was not a single incident involving

either the international community or our mission specifically. On the very next day following the coup d'état, the chief plotter called upon the international community and organisations in his declaration to support the interim government that would lead the society to an early election.

Along with you, some forty Czech Armed Forces service members took over various responsibilities in the EUTM Mali Mission Headquarters. It was a premiere tour in such a multinational staff for many of them. How did they manage to get down to work and how did they perform?

Let me underscore that I was in the same position – it was a premiere operational tour

for me as well. I served a staff tour in the Czech permanent mission in Brussels in the past. Working in a multinational environment did not come as a surprise to me, but to exercise control over a multinational staff is something completely different. So, it was new for many Czech service personnel on our staff and for me too. But I have to admit we coped it well. Our servicemembers got embedded in the multinational environment and eventually were among exemplary members of the staff, which applies both to the individuals serving close to me and those in remote locations. In this regard, I would like to highly appreciate the job done by my Chief of Staff Colonel Vlček and the commander of the Educational and Training Task Force at KTC, Colonel Botík, to name just a few.



factsheet

Brigadier General František Ridzák was born on October 14th, 1966, in Čeladná, Czech Republic. In 1985-1990, he studied the Military Technical College in Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia. He served in various command, specialist and logistic assignments in the radio communication service. In 1999 through 2003, he served in the Czech Armed Forces representation in international staffs of NATO and the WEU in Brussels. Then he served in the Czech Armed Forces General Staff in various senior assignments in the General Staff Command and Control Division and the MoD Communication and Information Systems Division. In 2009, he completed advanced French course in Canada studied at the Collège Interarmées de Défense, today the École de Guerre in Paris in 2010-11.

In 2011, BG Ridzák was appointed the commander of the 34th Communication and Information Systems Base in Prague Ruzyně. Then he served as Deputy Director and Director of the MoD Communication and Information Systems Agency. At the end of 2020, BG Ridzák was appointed the Director of the newly formed MoD Communication and Information Systems Division.



Colonel Vlček directs the staff during the training of the defence of the headquarters



Brigadier General Ridzak watches the training of Malian soldiers at the Tanabougou shooting range



Walking patrol

Colonel Botík was in command of the Koulikoro base. What did it entail for him?

That is rather a question Colonel Botík should be asked. The Koulikoro Training Centre belongs to Malians and his role was crucial in this regard. He served in the front line so to say and performed excellently both in planning and in adjusting swiftly to changes in the situation. What I as the Mission Force Commander decided, the Chief

of Staff pushed forward and Colonel Botík implemented. In addition to the Koulikoro Training Centre, I was also in command of a team of francophone advisors, who were involved in training and the support of training courses. This francophone pillar of the multinational staff was led by a French Colonel. His mission was to provide a close link with the Malian Armed Forces and, upon the authorisation of the new mandate, also with the G5 Sahel Joint Force. This pillar worked

as a door-opener for us to link up with our partners for whom the mission is designed. The advisors provided inputs for our staff to elaborate into the tasking for Colonel Botík.

Our service personnel managed to build a shooting range and communications training centre for the Malian Armed Forces, and they were also involved in renovating the NCO School in Banankoro. How did those activities resounded with Malian officials and military commanders?

Let me just make it clear that we did not renovate the NCO school in Banankoro, because it was very difficult to achieve a sustained presence in that area. But we eventually managed to get some footprint there thanks to the cooperation between EUTM and the Malian Armed Forces High Command. What we did was that we only developed a pilot project designed for the European Union to invest into. We joined that effort particularly because we consider NCOs to be the backbone of the Malian Armed Forces. If we succeed in training the NCOs the right way, that could significantly change the way the Malian Armed Forces conduct operations and naturally enhance their training standards. Now the point is that the European Union would take up the project and invest into it, because the camp is in a very decrepit condition at this time.

The Czech Armed Forces indeed invested into the shooting range and brought it to completely different level, which largely helped simplify and improve the quality of training. We also managed to get the locals from the Tanabougou community involved in building this facility and gave them employment, which came as a bonus.

That way, we fully realised the idea of quick impact projects. I was personally involved both in the inauguration of the range and of the communications training centre in Kati. As the Chief of the Czech Armed Forces Signal Service, that was something I have a great familiarity with. The location nevertheless represented a challenge for some time. Kati was the insurgents' primary strongpoint and it was impossible to get access there, but we eventually succeeded. I am confident that this Czech project will very much improve the way the Malian Armed Forces conduct their operations, because the European Union also invested into the C2OPS information system.

The EUTM mission mandate changed during your tenure, and the training activities got closer to the locations where the Malian Armed Forces operate. How did you perform on that assignment?

That was the flagship of our presence, of the Czech command. We managed to accomplish that on the ground. We concurrently delivered training or were present in Ménaka, which is located in the easternmost part of the country, in Gao, Mopti, through Sévaré to the NCO school in Banankoru. We set a sort of precedent that way through changing the nature of the mission from let us say static to a dynamic one. Considering the distances over which we operated, that truly came as a big surprise for our partners. I went for an inspection trip into Gao and Sévaré and I was quite satisfied with what I could see there. These EUTM activities were highly valued, including the Malians.

Didn't the work of mentors in such remote areas cause some technical, logistical or security problems?

Certainly yes, the distances are simply extreme in the Czech perspective. We travelled by air to reach the most remote ones. Our deployment was preceded by a threat and risk assessment. But I would like to underscore that we always moved in safe and secure areas in the facilities our partners, be it Barkhane or MINUSMA, we were at somebody's home all the time. It was not that the Czechs would set off somewhere into the open desert, and sought to realise some training there. In terms of logistics, we reached out and linked up with our partners, including to procure services.

Until then, we only trained to platoon level. The aim of the project we developed was to organise a more demanding training on company level. That would naturally claim the presence of a much higher number of our service



Practicing the evacuation of a wounded person



Headquarters defence training



Field training



The practicing of picking up an isolated person

members in the more remote areas. In that regard, we however did not enjoy support by our partners. We concluded with the Barkhane and MINUSMA force commanders that something like this was not possible for them at that time. Their resources were limited. That was why we developed the initial version of the deployable camps project. We sent the package into Brussels and Director General of the EUMS Admiral Hervé Bléjean responded very positively. I am confident the Spanish EUTM Mali Command will now follow upon this idea and go ahead with this project. Achieving those capabilities will enable us to meet the new mandate you alluded to, the reason being that it does not apply only to the territory of Mali, but it also refers to the other four G5 Sahel countries.

Do you imply that the change of mandate moved your priorities in this direction?

We primarily concentrate on Burkina Faso and Niger. We will be able to operate anywhere in those countries thanks to the mobile capabilities we are creating.

Security incidents have recently taken place primarily in the north of Mali. Does it mean the security situation has been aggravating in the country, and did you have to respond in any way?

EUTM Mali does not have the primary responsibility and is not primarily involved in providing a safe and secure environment. We are training the Malian Armed Forces. In my perspective, the security situation is roughly the same as when the Czech Command was taking over. It is rather affected by climatic conditions. In the winter season, i.e. rain

season, terrorist activities tend to weaken. Regarding the north region, yes, it shows the highest occurrence of IED incidents. Shortly before the end of the Czech command, five French service members of the Barkhane mission were killed in a single week. It was very unfortunate. But attacks also regularly occur in the central part of Mali, where the situation is perhaps even worse. In response to that, the core task of Operation Barkhane changed and partially also its operating locations. All of that are naturally events that largely shape the future development in this country.

What sort of experience was it for you to exercise command on such international level?

Certainly a vast experience. The mission is a multidimensional endeavour. I had opportunities to act in a diplomatic role, being involved in weekly meetings led the Head of Mission of the European Union Delegation with other Ambassadors of EU Member States in Bamako. I also participated in ad hoc meetings with the Ambassadors of the United States and some other countries. Then it was the supreme coordination meetings with the mission force commanders to coordinate military activities in the territory of Mali. Those were attended, besides my humble self, by the Barkhane and MINUSMA force commanders as well as Malian Armed Forces and G5 Sahel Joint Force representatives. Using this occasion, I would especially like to appreciate the role of Operation Barkhane, which is a sort of a motivator. During my tenure, Operation Barkhane strived to achieve a highly efficient coordination especially towards the Malian Armed Forces. I had an

excellent cooperation with all of them. The Chief of General Staff of the Malian Armed Forces was replaced during my tenure. I also enjoyed a very good cooperation with the Air Force Commander General Doucouré, who became Deputy Minister after the takeover. That enabled me to be in a closer contact with the Ministry of Defence, the outcome of which was the embedding of a part of EUTM Mali advisors directly in the MAF. That is what I regard a key factor for day-to-day realisation of our activities. Another great lesson for me was to run and be a part of an international staff. In that case, I specifically learned how international staffs are shaped and how references work in international management. But Africa and the very country of Mali also played their role, having enriched me with an entirely new dimension. It was the first time for me to be in Africa.

You handed the mission command over to your successor, but our service members continue to serve in that mission. What specific posts are they assigned to and what primary responsibilities do they have?

We are staying in Mali. We will primarily perform the force protection role there. In addition, we will fill other posts we already manned before the Czech command, including our contributions into the international staff or instructor posts in Koulikoro and in the medical community. Our footprint will therefore be similar as before the Czech command.



Soldiers of the Czech Army exchanged experiences from the so-called breaching, which will be included in training next year

Breaching

– violent entries to buildings

Levering the door, blasting the lock or breaking into the building with the help of a bomb – all this was the content of the intense training of course leaders who are in charge of schooling in violent entries into buildings or more simply, the so-called "breaching". During 14 days, soldiers of the 15th Bechyně Engineer Regiment, the 601st Special Forces Group Prostějov and the 43rd Airborne Regiment Chrudim exchanged experiences from foreign courses and operations and harmonized ways and procedures how to best introduce this innovation into the training of Czech Army units.



"It is one of the key capabilities, not only for special forces and paratroopers, but cross-sectionally for all conventional units, because there is a high presumption of fighting in built-up areas," said General Aleš Opat, Chief of the General Staff of the ACR, during his rolling reviews.

The task of introducing a new course of the so-called breaching was given to the 15th Engineer Regiment in May this year. "The assignment of this intensive training is to prepare a managerial staff, i.e. persons who will lead the individual parts of the course in violent entries to the buildings," described the key point of the entire training deputy commander of the 15th Engineer Regiment Colonel František Richter. Breaching is simply the aggressive entry into a building through a weakened place, usually a door, and serves to

get an attack team inside. According to one of the course leaders, Captain Jan Hanudel, this is a complex ability that was lacking in the ACR for a long time. "First I practiced breaching in 2014 as part of the USMC CEO course in the USA. Dozens of other soldiers from foreign operations with coalition partners have a similar experience. For years, this training was not introduced into our battle drill, until the intensity of contemporary conflicts in built-up areas arose that the introduction of breaching could no longer be postponed." Violent entries to buildings can be made in three different ways – mechanically, ballistically and explosively. The mechanical procedure is the most basic. We can also find it in history, when the castle gates were broken through with a battering ram. "We have now made progress in using crowbars to break out doors. In general, we can compare it

to a situation where a thief is trying to get into your apartment," added Captain Hanudel.

The ballistic method is closely linked to shooting training. Using a firearm, the locking mechanisms (for example locks or hinges) are simply blasted.

The last method is an explosive intrusion into a building, which is used when the obstacle is highly resistant or when previous procedures failed. "As far as the most basic level is concerned, an ordinary detonating cord is enough. Depending on the construction and material of the target, we pick out the most suitable charge, which could be used to open, for example, a door. If the door construction is more durable, we are talking here, for example, about the use of iron elements, so there is a special charge, which has no



Initiation of a slider charge during explosive breaching



Ongoing inspection by the Chief of General Staff of Army General Aleš Opatá

push function, but a cutting one," explained the use of the charge instructor from the Combat Training Centre of the 43rd Airborne Regiment at Chrudim. The safety of individuals and the whole group is and always will come first. The biggest risk is related to the explosive part of the action. "Breaching is similar to training using live explosives. The fundamental difference is that even though the breaching team stands at the charge in the MSD (minimum safe distance), the team must be protected primarily against shock wave and splinters. These are two basic areas that have a critical impact on human health," said Captain Hanudel. Besides, he added that to ensure the safety of all soldiers in the team, a man called breacher learns the correct placing of the charge, the principles of its location and setting the team's position. "There are four main options possible. The

ideal position is the team in another room, around the corner or in a place where the team cannot see the charge, and last but not least, behind an obstacle that reduces the pressure wave. For this, for example, a breacher blanket is used, behind which the team hides." What is important for the future leaders of courses teaching the methods of violent entries to the objects, is above all to teach the soldiers to observe security measures. "Among other things, we want to show them that they don't have to be afraid of it. We want to train them in the creation and placement of charges and all the tactics that are necessary for this," added the instructor from Chrudim. "During the training, we will focus mostly on individuality, so that the soldiers could be able to work independently without superiors or more experienced fellow soldiers. We want to focus directly on the individual," the

engineer training instructor from the 601st Special Forces Group Prostějov explained his ideas about future training.

"I'm glad it worked out well. That a bunch of people, who understand things, came together, and in a short time they managed to get it to its final form. Now it is necessary to buy the appropriate materiel for this and standardize it," said Army General Aleš Opatá at the end of his rolling review. The first course will take place in mid-February at Prostějov and the second in late March at Bechyně. Each course will be attended by a maximum of 15 soldiers.

By CAPT Zuzana Králová





Since 21 January 2021, CBRN defence specialists from Liberec have been on 24/7 standby readiness to perform missions as part of a multinational battalion

Ready to respond anywhere

An illicit lab and possible occurrence of hazardous agents with subsequent incident involving an explosion. That is the moment when the field CBRN lab activates and a sampling team sets off. Their task is to take samples from the incident site and transfer them into a field laboratory for analysis and possible confirmation of the presence of hazardous agents. That was just one of several dozen scenarios in various training incidents tackled by the unit the Liberec-based 31st Chemical, Radiological, Biologic and Nuclear Defence Regiment has assigned for the NATO Response Force (NRF).



At the end of the event, the equipment must be decontaminated

"In the moment when our SICRA team reports an incident involving an illicit laboratory, a warning alert is issued to the forces. With the support of combat elements, a sampling team is scrambled to take samples and transfer them into the field lab for analysis and possible confirmation of hazardous agents," CBRN Capabilities Task Force commander Lieutenant Colonel Jiří Kapitán describes one of the scenarios. "In case affirmative, the lab informs the superior echelon to decide on the next course of action. The forces and assets that could be contaminated with the hazardous agents in the area have to be decontaminated." Nearly three hundreds of Czech Armed Forces CBRN defence specialists will be ready to deploy anywhere on the globe as part of the NATO Response Force (NRF). In the next year, the CBRN Defence Regiment based in Liberec assigns a Multifunctional Company (MF Coy) for the multinational battalion. The MF Coy involves a radiation and chemical surveillances company, a decontamination platoon plus additional two hundred service members and a hundred of vehicles and trailers. Along with the Czech Republic, Germany, Bulgaria, Belgium, Slovenia, Spain and the United States provide their contributions to the NRF.

Sampling and analysis

The NRF Task Force also includes a field lab that comprises a radiometric and a chemical section, which is where the obtained samples proceed for follow-on analysis. "From the time when our unit arrives the area of deployment, we are able to prep the container in about an hour. The full operation depends on how long the transport is, because the instruments demand some time to prepare for their activation. We may operate for an indefinite period of time pending the supply of input materials necessary for analysis," explains First Lieutenant Michal Kokeš, deputy commander of the lab component in the NRF Task Force. "Once we receive the information about an incident, our sampling teams drive directly for the site. They take samples



in the location and transport them into the field laboratory, or other designated labs for analysis."

Every lab comprises a team of five personnel: two commissioned officers, two senior non-commissioned officers and a junior NCO as a driver. The lab divides into two sections: analytical, where the very results are processed and the so-called preparatory section, where the samples are prepared for analysis.

Identification of the substance depends on many factors. If the sample is pure, we can have the result almost instantly. But when we take samples for example from the soil contaminated with a hazardous agent, the preparation for analysis claims up to several hours. For the radiometric lab, the sample needs to be dried first, and that takes some time. It always depends on the type of sample, but in general we are able to analyse them from sixty minutes through 24 hours," 1LT Kokeš states. "Once the sample is analysed, the lab reports the information to the commander into the collection centre, where it is gathered to inform the command post's decision-making."

Certified for deployment

"As part of exercise Yellow Cross, we honed and verified our skills for multinational operations in performance of response to a wide variety of CBRN events," describes the commander of CBRN Capabilities Task Force LTC Kapitán, and adds the unit was required, as part of its combat readiness, to prove all capabilities the Czech CBRN specialists would provide in potential international operations. Exercise Yellow Cross 2020 certified the task force units assigned to the NRF 2021 (CJ CBRN Def TF) on national level and verified the Task Force's readiness for Allied operations. The exercise saw the attendance of service members from the 31st Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Regiment, 14th Logistic Support Regiment, 15th Engineer Regiment, 44th Light Motorised Battalion and other components of the Czech Armed Forces.

Because of the lasting counter pandemic measures, the Multinational Chemical, Biologic and Radiological Defence Battalion's certification exercise Yellow Cross 2020 saw the participation of only two hundred and fifty trainees, which is half the overall strength of the task

force. Because the exercise had started before the sanitary regulations were tightened and extraordinary measures activated, the terms of exercise were adjusted according to current situation.

"The exercise proved its high value for training the forces for international operations. The adopted sanitary measures were very strict and the epidemic situation was meticulously monitored and evaluated throughout the exercise. The service members were under medical supervision," LTC Kapitán underscored. "I am happy that despite all challenges facing us as we built and developed the unit and in the course of the exercise itself, our unit has been successfully certified. That way we achieved one of several milestones on the way to possible deployment of the Task Force for a foreign operation next year."

Acknowledgement by a British General

The 31st Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Regiment based in Liberec includes the Czech-British Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) CBRN Defence Brigade Headquarters. The Headquarters was formed in 2008 and is home stationed in Liberec. Its mission is to integrate the ARRC CBRN defence concept and provide command to assigned forces in operations. It is a component of the ARRC, which is a multinational corps under British command headquartered in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom.

During the Yellow Cross certification exercise, the Czech-British CBRN Brigade Headquarters hosted Commander ARRC General Sir Edward Smyth-Osbourne on a visit. The core of the Task Force is manned by the 311th Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defence Battalion. The exercise was also attended by service members of the 44th Light Motorised Battalion in Jindřichův Hradec, logistic support specialists from Pardubice, signallers from Lipník nad Bečvou and engineers from Bechyně. Although in limited numbers owing to sanitary restrictions, other participants were CBRN defence specialists from Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovenia and Spain, which was one of the reasons for General Smyth-Osbourne to attend.

"I highly value mutual cooperation between the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. I am confident that common endeavour by the Czech-British Headquarters greatly benefits both countries in the domain of protection against weapons of mass destruction," General Smyth-Osbourne concluded.

By Jana Deckerová



Radiation and chemical reconnaissance team in the field



A INTERVIEW

With the new Director of the Special Forces Directorate Colonel Ladislav Rebilas we talked about the development and specifics of this type of force

Work smart, then fast

In the autumn last year, Colonel Ladislav Rebilas became the new Director of the Special Forces Directorate of the Ministry of Defence. And that's why we asked him for the following interview.

Today, there is already great interest in studying reconnaissance branch at the University of Defence. What led you years ago to choose such a specialization?

I started my military career at the age of 14 at the Military Grammar School at Opava. And that was based on the recommendation of the primary school teacher, who decided that I had a personal disposition for it. During my studies, which also included the basic elements of military training, my opinion on the future focus was also formed. As I grew up, I began to long for a more active form

of development. My decision to continue studies at the Military University of Ground Forces at Vyškov, with main field of study Unit Commander, was also supported by the recommendation of my commander of a school company. Subsequently, I passed the entrance exams, on the basis of which, and probably also due to other factors, I was selected to study the branch of Commander of Reconnaissance Units. So, to sum it up in retrospect, I was lucky to have people who gave me direction and supported my decisions. And I certainly do not regret any of my decisions.

factsheet

Ladislav Rebilas was born on July 9, 1976, at Cheb. He graduated from the Vyškov Military University of the Ground Forces, reconnaissance branch. Immediately after his graduation, he joined the 6th Special Brigade, where he held positions from team commander to brigade deputy commander. In 2017, he moved to the newly created Special Forces Directorate, first as the head of the management and training section and then as a deputy Director. In October 2020, he became the Director of the Special Forces Directorate.

How much did your ideas about this specialization differ from what you later encountered with troops?

Today I know that no school will prepare you for the reality of life. On the other hand, I must admit that the study gave me a good foundation, which I attribute mainly to the fact that it included a lot of practical training and last but not least also several professional short-term attachments. We had teachers with experience in combat units. Here I would like to mention Mr. Milan Podhorec (now a retired Lieutenant Colonel), which was a great role model for me and in fact led us to



Training high altitudes OXY jumps,
using oxygen masks

the very sense of studying. At that time, the Internet, mobile phones and other technical equipment were not available, so access to information was very limited. You could build your ideas on the stories of classmates and acquaintances, or teacher lectures, and perhaps newspaper articles. With that in mind, the best choice, from the point of view of the reconnaissance specialization, was the service with the 6th Special Brigade, today's 601st Special Forces Group (601 SFG), which however was purely selective. It was again a bit of luck when I joined the unit in 1997. Each unit has its own specifics. It was no different here, but there was no major surprise, even though I expected it. If I omit, of course, the fact that this unit was not equipped with a combat reconnaissance vehicle Svatava and most of the tasks were performed on foot.

What is your personal life credo?

Work smart, then fast.

You have been serving with the Special Forces since graduating in 1997. You have held a number of positions, starting with a team commander. This must be a great advantage for the commander of the Special Forces...

I am of the opinion that this top position requires more than being a good manager. I would say that such a function already requires a combination of pragmatism and vision. In addition to personal prerequisites and education, this requires a good practical basis and experience. We are already talking about a position where you are expected to be able not only to think comprehensively and make decisions for the benefit of the organization, but also by your actions to support the unity of efforts of a superior, who is the Chief of General Staff. At the same time, the Director acts as an advisor for Special Forces or operations, which only emphasizes the need for the required

experience and deep internal knowledge of the organization.

But you're right, I grew up most of my career in today's 601 SFG. I was able to follow its gradual evolution and the related development of Special Forces to this day. It's not just about that I held positions in this unit at all levels of command. I consider it much more important that I was present at all the turning points in its modern history. Whether it was the transformation into a professional unit, or the allocation of a Special Forces company to NATO, the first appointment under NATO's mandate in Kosovo in 1999, the reorganization of 601 SFG in 2003, and the subsequent deployment in combat operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2004. Also important was the gradual development in the field of materiel, technology and operational procedures in accordance with NATO standards, support for the construction of the Airborne Detachment

of Special Operations, or the transition from Military Intelligence to the ACR in 2015 and the associated establishment of the Directorate of Special Forces and the Special Operations Support Centre.

It is a long 23 years of experience, associated with pride in this kind of forces, pride for the homeland, humility and respect for the work of all the commanders of my generation. Those are Generals Ondřej Páleník, Milan Kovanda, Karel Řehka or Colonel David Franta, under whose leadership I and Special Forces grew up.

Can you explain the role and position of your subordinate Special Forces?

The Directorate is a specific element of the ACR not only in terms of name, but also in terms of the scope of my authority and responsibilities. In my own words, I would

describe it as a service headquarters with extended and all-level (strategic, operational, tactical) powers. In practice, this means that I am responsible for managing and building the capabilities of Special Forces and their readiness. At the same time, however, I have authorities in the area of personnel, development, concepts, acquisitions and, in the case of the assignment of the Chief of General Staff, also in the area of command and control of operations. The Directorate is part of the General Staff and I am directly subordinate to its Chief. By combining above mentioned roles, the Directorate forms a hybrid organization, from the point of view of systematization. However, from the point of view of maintaining Special Forces as a specific tool and its correct use, I consider this necessary, I dare say even critical.

What ideas have you taken up in office, what are you going to focus on?

I do not consider myself a career-ambitious person. I always filled each position with respect and tried to perform it responsibly without waiting for what would follow. As a result, I had sufficiently advanced executive combat and staff positions at the tactical and strategic levels in the environment of Special Forces. And that allowed me to take up the position of Director with a degree of confidence, but also humility and sober expectations. Thanks to previous experience, I took over the function with a relatively clear idea of my future work. However, I must admit that the need for greater personal commitment is caused by the fact that now it is I who holds the helm and sets the direction, who is responsible for the future of Special Forces, who should participate in the



development of the ACR which at the same time strengthens the security of the republic and its citizens.

As for professional goals, I acquainted the army command in detail with my intention. In general, I can say that I will proceed in accordance with the Development and Construction Concept of Special Forces until 2030. My constant task is to ensure that the ACR, i.e. the Czech Republic, could have relevant military capabilities with a high level of preparedness, supporting our strategic interests abroad, the defence of the republic and the protection of our fellow citizens, with regard to the development of the security environment. They are precisely the abilities that the Special Forces undoubtedly provide.

Your predecessor, Brigadier General Kolář, took up the position of Deputy Commander of the Ground Forces. Doesn't this indicate a much larger personnel connection between the Special Forces and the Army of the Czech Republic?

The Special Forces have been already, or perhaps only the fifth year in the structure of the ACR. The reason why I mention this is the fact that naturally there is not only a personnel connection, but also a systemic and procedural interconnection in all areas of management and building the forces. As far as the staff is concerned, the new designation of Brigadier General Kolář is, of course, a visible and perceived connection, but certainly not the only one. If I could talk only about the period since the transfer to the ACR, then the generally known personnel changes in the field of Special Forces are the occupation of the function of Senior Enlisted Leader ACR,

the creation of the Command of Cyber Forces and Information Warfare, which was built with the help of members of Special Forces, or filling the position of Deputy Director of the Logistics Agency. Other persons also moved to the positions in the Command for Operations and other organizational units of the ACR. The personal connections undoubtedly benefit the whole system. However, such connections must be controllable and allow for the timely replenishment of the required quality of Special Forces personnel. Special forces must maintain the position of a selective organization with a lower rate of staff turnover, compared to other parts of the military. Breaking this principle would undoubtedly affect their future quality.

So how do you perceive the current position of Special Forces in the organizational structure of our army?

In military jargon, I would say that we are still looking for our place in the muster parade. I don't mean it dramatically, I would even say that it is the nature of Special Forces even in the context of the international environment. dramatically Special forces have always been and will undoubtedly be a specific component that will seek its justification in comparison with other types of forces, the designation of which is clear from the name. By their very nature, Special Forces do not fit anywhere and at the same time they fit everywhere. They are destined to perform specific, and in many cases sensitive tasks, usually associated with a high level of physical or political risk, that other types of forces are unable to perform. It is this boundary that is very difficult to define and depends strongly on the experience, skills and courage of the personnel who decide to use them. To sum it up, the position of the Special Forces will always be as strong as the interest in using this tool. From this point of view, we are lucky, especially thanks to the approach of the current Chief of General Staff, who at least in my opinion understands the principles of the use of Special Forces and their specifics. It is thanks to his support that the Special Forces are not only successfully integrated into the structure of the ACR, but also succeed in educating the army leadership in this area. I consider this as a necessity from the perspective of our future existence. A good start is to understand that Special Forces do not compete with other army components, but complement the overall capabilities of our military.

So, what do you think Special Forces are, so to speak, special?

Here I would like to avoid doctrinal concepts and phrases such as training, structure, equipment. I would rather explain the key specifics from the point of view of my own observation. I think that the basic specificity is conditional selection for all members of the Special Forces, regardless of the position held and organizational integration.



Shooting training, fire support
from a 12.7 mm machine gun

Selection is a determining factor not only for acceptance, but especially for determining individual potential. Personal development and appropriate integration into the structure of the whole unit are related to this. Because selection is the key to individual performance, organizational performance, and quality-based development.

I see another specificity in the culture of the organization by itself. It builds precisely on the basis of selection, which is, among other things, conditioned by the level of education. This is around 40% in the category of university students and almost 60% of secondary school graduates. Thanks to this, we can apply a higher level of informal management, including a certain freedom in the field of action, decision-making or expression of personal opinions. It is this level of relationships that can be perceived externally as a lack of order and discipline, but from an internal perspective, the essence is the creation of practical and moral values, ensuring the development and long-term sustainability of the organization, and the search for non-standard approaches and solutions. This informality and freedom of relationship or opinion requires a higher degree of trust and personal discipline than in organizations controlled centrally and directly.

However, such a form of management is probably not possible to apply always and everywhere, even with Special Forces...

Of course, there are many situations where this cannot be done and it is necessary to proceed with directive control. It is precisely the ability to naturally switch between the above approaches that I perceive not only as a specific feature, but also as a certain milestone in achieving the mental setting of a member of a special force.

I also perceive important specifics in the field of innovation and development. Personally, I look at Special Forces as a learning and constantly evolving organization, I dare say that in many cases even of an experimental nature across all levels. By this I do not mean only technological development, which is and will always be ultimately limited by conditions at a given time, regardless of the level of effort. I perceive innovation and development in Special Forces in a broader sense as a natural feature not to be satisfied with the current state of affairs, but to constantly optimize, seek and discover approaches in all areas of organization, it is a daily routine, processes, structures, projects, cooperation, skills, technology, etc. Historically, we have proven many times that the benefits in this area are also a significant benefit for the ACR. Hand in hand with this is also connected the specifics in the field of management, where the decisive factor is the willingness to include representatives from all levels of command or organizational units in solving problems. That is, if the situation or task allows it. Such

management is based on the principle of specifying what effect needs to be achieved and authorizing people or teams to design a way to fulfil it. If I had to summarize all the points, I would say that Special Forces are a user-driven organization, based on trust, but requiring instructions from above. This is undoubtedly a significant specificity in the hierarchical environment of the ACR, but all the more natural for us.

Has the position of 601 SFG changed in a way by the transition under the ACR and the creation of Special Forces?

The 601 remains the heart and core of Special Forces and the bearer of critical abilities. In fact, it is the only Special Forces organization whose position in terms of transition to the ACR has never been discussed. Which is, in my opinion, mainly due to its historical anchorage and the associated credit that the Special Forces have gained over the last decades. On the contrary, I would say with the support of General Opata, we are succeeding in continuing the development and evolution of this unit, which remains a priority in terms of achieving the ambitions of the Special Forces. The construction of the Special Forces Support Centre and the related takeover of some capabilities will allow us to reduce the burden on 601 SFG, as to requirements for training and preparation of individual personnel and teams are concerned. This will increase the level of profiling of existing capabilities and the building of new capabilities, and thus we also take into account the requirements of the current and future security environment. A significant shift is also in the positive perception among army commanders of various levels, regarding the

transition of their subordinate personnel to 601 SFG. It is important, at least in my opinion, that commanders have understood that even if they might lose quality and experienced people by transferring them to Special Forces, this will allow soldiers to further develop and make use of their potential. For that, I thank to all commanders in this way.

In total, you have completed five foreign missions, two in Kosovo and three in Afghanistan. How important is foreign experience for members of the Special Forces?

Experience from abroad is as important to us as it is to anyone else in our armed forces. It is a valuable source of knowledge supporting the development, innovation and training individuals and organizations. Each mission is a test of personality and team, a test of unit spirit and mutual trust, character and discipline, as well as a test of readiness to face and respond to threats of various types. At the same time, it is an opportunity to improve these areas. In the case of foreign missions, from my point of view, it is true that no one enters the same river twice. Each mission is unique. A routine approach would jeopardize both the task and the unit. These experiences are non-transferable, everyone must experience them.

Sixty members of the Special Forces are deployed in the counter-terrorism operation Barkhane in Mali, Niger and Chad. What are the first experiences of this mission, how are our soldiers doing in it?

Here I would like to specify that we have a mandate approved by the government



Forward Air Controllers, Adriatic Strike exercise, Slovenia



Failed selection or quality has its price

and parliament to deploy up to 60 people. I do not want to mention the actual number of deployed persons for safety reasons, but it will vary according to the development of the situation at the place of performance of the operational task. It is still premature to assess the performance of our soldiers. However, I have no doubt about their efforts to represent the Czech Republic and be a valuable partner. They already proved this during cooperation exercises with a partner French unit. We will evaluate how they will actually perform and what experience they will bring, but the very concept of the operation raises a high level of expectations in me. After all, this is the first operation in a coalition operation led by a European state, in this case by France. In addition, in a geographically demanding environment, under the conditions of a minimum operating standard. In the environment for which the Special Forces should be, and I believe they are, properly prepared.

It is expected that our soldiers will serve in this mission until the end of 2022. Will the Special Forces be able to complete all rotations, or will other army units participate in them?

The Special Forces are ready to function in this operation beyond the horizon of 2022, if required by state officials. Certainly, we have our capacity limits, but these are already taken into account in the concept of the operation, so that we could guarantee longer-term sustainability. Supposing the fulfilment of the

mission's tasks requires it, a possible share of other components of our army cannot be ruled out.

What other missions are members of the Special Forces involved in, or what operational deployment is being considered for the future?

We are currently operating under the mandate of Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan and the aforementioned Operation Barkhane, under its auspices and within Task Force Takuba. Any reflections on future activities cannot be made public, but in essence we must be prepared for rapid deployment, according to the needs of the state, anywhere in the world. It is this commitment that requires a high level of preparedness and is reflected in the overview of available forces and resources.

What stage of construction is the Special Forces Support Centre (SFSC) in today? Is it already fully manned?

Its construction continues in accordance with the original plan, which is minimizing the impact on the ACR. In cooperation with the army, we are currently implementing investment projects in the field of infrastructure, weapons, communications and individual materiel. With regard to the newly built elements of the ACR, we are reviewing the capabilities of this unit, which is primarily intended for combat support of special operations, conducted by 601 SFG. We manage to fill the unit with personnel,

but the biggest gap is represented by unfilled battle positions, although the statistics of recruitment from the civilian sphere and the armed forces significantly improved in the last year. It is also optimistic that we already have the first persons that successfully completed the selection procedure for 601 SFG. It is the preparation of personnel for further careers at 601 SFG that is one of the tasks of the Special Forces Support Centre.

From a personnel point of view, does not complicate the situation that a paratrooper regiment is being built in parallel at Chrudim?

As far as recruitment statistics, we did not record any decline. The state of manning reflects the actual numbers of the ACR in the basic and command functions. Actually, the common goal of all key ACR officials, among whom I personally belong, is to maintain a balanced structure of forces and to gradually augment all elements

When should the Centre reach full operational capabilities?

In accordance with the Development and Construction Concept, the accomplishment of full operational capabilities is fixed for 2025. Our effort is to accelerate it, but the biggest limitation is the implementation of investment projects.



CQB training exercise
(Close Quarters Battle)

Part of this unit is also a dossier that deals with information operations. These are becoming increasingly important. Have you managed to get enough quality specialists for this area?

We have been relatively successful in building this capacity and getting experts. However, it was this ability that passed with the personnel to the newly established Command of Cyber Forces and Information Operations. I think this is a good example of how the Special Forces, with their specific and timeless approach, support the development of the ACR.

An Air Detachment works in favour of the Special Forces. But it is not part of them. Doesn't that complicate the situation a bit?

The Special Operations Air Detachment is in fact an Air Force capability, built in close cooperation with the Special Forces, primarily intended for air support to the operations of the 601st SFG. At the same time, it is the Czech Republic's commitment to NATO. Its possible organizational integration into the structure of the ACR Special Forces would undoubtedly be a nice idea, at least from my point of view. This would be too ambitious and probably an unfulfillable wish. It is important that there is currently no such need and according to the Development Concept of the ACR (KVACR),



no one even thinks about it. Cooperation with the Air Force is at an excellent level in this area, and not only there. We have set up together a functional system of preparation and training assistance.

What are the most important tasks the Special Forces will face next year?

Special forces belong to the category of high-preparedness units, because their added value in terms of use is most significant in dealing with security situations in peace or at the beginning of a crisis. The simple

answer would be that we will conduct special operations in accordance with the foreign priorities of the Czech Republic and that we will prepare ourselves to conduct operations to support the state defence and the protection of citizens.

Factually, we will continue ongoing operations, build new and maintain existing internal capabilities, replenish personnel and equipment, and thus increase the qualitative and quantitative levels of preparedness.

By Vladimír Marek, photo: Special Forces archives

Thirty commanding officers in for tutorial
on to persuade warriors to fight



Authority matters

Members of the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT), which has been involved in training Czech Armed Forces service members since 2000, visited the 71st Mechanised Battalion in Hranice this time around. They held a training course for commanders on lowest levels to familiarise the trainees with the issues of command, authority as well as the need for communication.



A total of thirty 30 commanding officers improved their leadership and command skills over subunits for four weeks. "They chiefly have to have a natural authority," the course organiser, Captain David Kremlička, singles out the key characteristics of an ideal leader and goes on to say: "They must also be able to decide quickly and issue orders. That is not everybody can do." Contrarily to a brigade commander, for instance, who exercises command through his subordinate commanders and has advisors – staffs at hand to assist on his decision-making, the team leader somewhat ironically has a more difficult job. A small subunit has from four to eight soldiers depending on the type of service and mission. That is why the one of them exercising control is so important. They are the persons intentionally sending soldiers in engagement into an extreme danger, which they naturally know and must be able to do so. And in peace, during training, they must be able to persuade their peers that it is necessary and they have to do that. That is the bottom line: in order for soldiers to obey their colleague-commander, the commander needs, besides a fast and effective decision-making, to have a perfect familiarity with all weapons and assets they have available.

The Brits stake on individual approach in training

The course was led by Captain Harry Mallalieu, who divided the trainees into three groups. Everybody had their own specialist British instructor. "That provides for a maximally individual approach, on which our procedures are based. Using a variety of methods and forms of preparation, building primarily on the need for students to cooperate, our instructors seek to make their ability to lead and control subordinates more effective so that they would be able to operate autonomously with their teams. After necessary academic training, soldiers had to prove the newly acquired observations





in practice,” Captain Mallalieu said. The course attendees first had to clarify the assignment they were given and discuss with fellow warriors how to accomplish the mission. The training was designed to practise searching the terrain, receiving structures, preparation of ambush and assault, organising tactical movements, assuming formations, using various types of signals through handling fatalities. The whole course was in English and everybody was continuously evaluated and monitored. So, the course attendees were offered a unique insight into the ways how command and mentoring is exercised in the United Kingdom, including the importance of giving a correct, but brief rationale behind the commander’s intention, not only a stringent issuance of orders.

By CAPT Radek Hampf



Selection procedures for Commando course is preceded by intense preparation

Future army tough guys

The Commando course is an elite combat course in the Czech Army intended for commanders of small units. Under mental and physical pressure, they must be able to handle tactical situations and activities close to real combat. The lives of other soldiers will depend on their decision. The enormous complexity of the course is evidenced by the low success rate of applicants. Only every tenth participant will pass the selection procedure and then the course itself.

In order to increase the success of applicants, the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade has been organizing intense training since 2016 before sending them to the Commando course, the so-called Pre Commando. Since last year, it has also offered this option to other units. This year, the training took place in the second half of February in the



Boletice Military Training Area. It was attended by 23 soldiers from units of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, as well as members of other military occupational specialties, such as artillery, engineers, logistics and chemists. The course is led by Major Jan Pařík from the 42nd Mechanized Battalion of St. Wenceslas from Tábor, with other instructors – former graduates of the Commando course. "We try to prepare soldiers to handle the selection procedure, to acquaint them with the disciplines that they must manage, so that they couldn't be ruled out by a trivial mistake. We pass on our experience to them," says Major Pařík, who is a graduate from the US Army Ranger course.

For example, soldiers had to overcome an eight-kilometre intensive movement with weapons and loads within one hour, run an obstacle course, practise combat drills, within a limit of four hours to go with a weapon and a load of 20 kg for distance of 20 km,

and to demonstrate flawless day and night navigation, during the so-called star march.

"In a basic training course, a citizen becomes a soldier, in advanced intensive training with a unit, a soldier becomes a fighter. In the Commando course, they transform a fighter into a warrior-commander, on whom his superiors and subordinates can always rely," Major Pařík assessed the meaning of this training schedule. Whoever successfully completes the course will be one of the real tough guys. The selection procedure will take place from 12 to 16 April, the course itself will take place from 21 May to 25 June.

The Commando course resumes in its tradition the Strike Course arranged during World War II by Captain Josef Otisk for members of the Czechoslovak Mixed Brigade in Great Britain. It was based on Commandos training, in which Otisk was the only Czechoslovak to participate. A similar Commandos-style course was the Assault Course, which took

place in Scotland. This course in Scotland was mastered also by Warrant Officers Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík.

The Commando course was established in 2005 and its founder is Army General Aleš Opat. It takes place under the administration of the Commando Training Section of the Training Command-Military Academy in the Březina Military Training Area. Since 2013, the passing-out parade of graduates has taken place in the historical area of the crypt of the National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror in Prague, Resslova Street.

*By LTC Vlastimila Cyprisová,
photos: CAPT Štěpán Malast and Stanislav Petera*

Soldiers of the 14th Logistics Support Regiment help in hospitals and social facilities

They exchanged camouflage suits for protective ones

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, logistics ensured the unloading of air cargos of medical supplies, which they then distributed throughout the Czech Republic. Last year, they transported hundreds of tons of materiel from the warehouses of the State Materiel Reserves Administration, regularly assigned their medics to testing teams, collecting samples from suspected infectees, and also sent soldiers to help hospitals and social facilities.



And even they didn't slow down at the beginning of the new year. Hospitals and hospices for the long-term sick at Domažlice, Jaroměř, Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Jičín, Trutnov or Karviná – there currently operate army logistics from Pardubice, Klatovy and Lipník nad Bečvou. And not only that, they are strengthening staffs in a number of other medical and social facilities across the country. They also detached medics from battalion medical aid stations to testing teams, where medics conduct blanket antigen testing of the population.

When for the first time, a group of logisticians of the command company of the 14th Regiment of Logistics Support entered the Luxor, nursing home for elderly people at Poděbrady, the soldiers faced a difficult task. They changed the steering wheel of their military Tatra vehicles for the care of sick fellow citizens. Most of them had no idea how the time spent in the nursing home would broaden their horizons and change their life priorities.

What is important in life

"All the time when I was moving among the sick clients of this nursing home, I realized how we don't value ordinary things. I mean seemingly obvious things, like walking, our head is working, we have both legs and arms. We don't appreciate having family and friends around us. I also realized how a man can easily get to the other side, to a situation where he needs help. Nothing is obvious," describes his feelings and experiences Master Sergeant Tomáš S.

"Everyone who does this work here deserves great admiration and respect. Whether in hospitals, nursing homes and other social facilities. It requires a huge effort and commitment beyond normal work duties. As you work here, you realize what is really important in life. One thing really surprised me – how little is enough to make someone happy," adds Master Sergeant Tomáš S.

"It is at least admirable how our soldiers do not hesitate to sacrifice their time, their comfort and want to help other people. Whether they are in hospitals or homes for the elderly, they find themselves in situations for which, in many cases, they are not prepared. From the point of view of a soldier, who is neither a medic nor a doctor, he is a little over 18 years old, this is definitely an experience that will change his outlook on life. Soldiers who decided to help sick and infirm people saw how thin the line between life and death can be. Working in such an environment is very difficult not only physically but also mentally. When I talk to the soldiers after their return, I feel that they are satisfied how they managed it and that were able to help. Many thanks to everyone for that. We are glad that such people serve in our regiment," praises the soldiers who helped Warrant Officer Robert Švejda, Senior Enlisted Leader of the 141st Supply Battalion.



Psyche is getting hit from all sides

Master Sergeant Tomáš M. also worked at the Zlín Regional Hospital. He also tells what he experienced during this service. "We have only positive experiences. Above all, it expanded our knowledge and professional skills. During my attachment, I was with a patient who had cardiac arrest. The doctor revived him thanks to resuscitation. It was an unreal and unrepeatable experience. I can still see him in front of my eyes. Unfortunately, the old man died anyway, in three days. When I think about it, I'm sad. It was obvious that for the older people, in connection with another disease, disability, overweight, it is final for them. At first, I still saw my dad there. After a while you get used to it, you get numb, you don't want to take it personally, but your psyche is getting hit from all sides," explains Master Sergeant. "I was in charge of an old wisp that had JAWA tattooed on his arm. He couldn't talk at all, as he had a pipe in his throat. But he wanted to talk, so he wrote on paper. Really, a big motorcycle fan. I'm afraid to listen to their life stories... It hurts when they leave."

On behalf of all the soldiers who helped in the hospital, he wants to thank to the hospital staff for the great patience, especially to the



doctors and nurses, who initially had to explain everything to them. "I am very happy that we left a good feeling there, whether through our work, attitude, behaviour, help. Or by the fact that we were able to support the hospital staff, at least a little, keep them in a good mood in the difficult moments they experience every day. It was obvious that the personnel have worries over their heads, they go from shift to shift, day and night, at home they study with their children, they take care of the families. Simultaneously, both they and their loved ones at home were also threatened by Covid.

Help is educating soldiers

The unfavourable development of the epidemiological situation still requires to detach of Czech Army soldiers in favour of various facilities. They help in hospitals, nursing homes and other social services facilities. The activities of our soldiers differ with regard to their professional orientation. Our medics from the battalion aid station often work for the missing staff in hospitals. Similarly, the soldiers who completed the military medical course CLS (Combat Life Saver), are assigned to medical personnel and help with assistance and nursing care," describes the doings of soldiers from Lipník nad Bečvou commander of the 143rd Supply Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Chronek.

"In these facilities, soldiers are trying to familiarize with new tasks as soon as possible, to be full members of the team. For exhausted, physically and mentally destroyed medical staff, the help of soldiers is certainly an interesting reinforcement and psychological boost. But it also benefits soldiers. It enriches them not only professionally, but especially humanly. Most of the soldiers want to continue to deepen their acquired experience and knowledge."

Many soldiers have even volunteered for help in hospitals and are helping repeatedly. Despite their young age, they often reconsider their current view of life and perceptions of the hierarchy of values. In helping others, some of them find meaning in life and even think about working in the field of health care after completing their military career. They talk with great respect about the work and dedication of health professionals, who wage a real fight against this disease in the first line.



Introducing Military Occupational Specialties: Pandur Driver

Behind the wheel of the Pandur

Enough! – That was what Ms. Barbora Kysilková told herself three years ago, realising she had been fed up with her office work in a bank. That was a job too mundane for her and she wanted to replace that calm with some adrenaline. She met her partner who had served in the military, and she told herself – why not? Her path into the Armed Forces was a little more complicated, but now she has been a Pandur driver in the Signals Company of the 41st Mechanised Battalion based in Žatec for three years already.

After filling in and sending an electronic application form at kariera.army.cz she was not even registered. She had economic educational background, which was why the answer to her phone enquiry was that the military had no vacancy for her at the moment.

First rejection did not dishearten

“Well, it was another challenge for me, because I had decided to join the Armed Forces, and thought that

negative reply would not stop me,” Corporal Barbora Kysilková smiles. “I called to the recruitment centre and asked what occupations the military was looking for. They told me the highest demand was for truck drivers at that time. I did not hesitate a second and applied for a commercial driver’s license on the very same day. Holding a fresh driving licence in my hands, I went in for it again. I told myself, when you decide for something and it is your dream, you have to do something to achieve that.”



Twenty tons of iron under the control of Corporal Barbora Kysilková

She knew from the very start that she wanted to be and would be a driver, but she did not have a clue where she would serve and what vehicles she would drive. Barbora Kysilková naturally had to meet all requirements mandatory for service in the Czech Armed Forces, from medical, physical and mental tests through the completion of basic training in Vyškov. She passed everything with As and suddenly there she was standing on the gate of the 41st Mechanised Battalion at Žatec. "When I recall that day, I still had a lump in my throat when I reported there on the gate. But I shook that off quickly. Half the platoon was deployed at that time, so I did not meet all of them then. But the lads took me in their midst and I have been extremely grateful to them for that ever since. True to say that I saw here and there what was on their mind – they really wondered how this gal can make it. And I managed. Including thanks to them – they did not leave me alone in this," the charming lady driver recalls.

A dream come true

Corporal Kysilková always enjoyed driving cars – that was no issue for her. To drive a Pandur has been her dream from the outset and the dream has now come true. She only did not realise what it entailed what she was in for. Before she could jump into the seat behind the wheel of the twenty-ton beast, she still had a lot to do. Although I had group B and C driving licences, I still had to obtain the military licences. Type training on the Pandur Wheeled Infantry Fighting Vehicle followed. At the beginning, she sought adrenalin and to have some fun. When difficulties came, she recalled that clean desk in the bank, and it gave her another kick.

"To obtain the licence for driving the Pandur – frankly – was a pretty tough job. I had to embrace the theory, put all the technical data inside my head. The training also included tutorials on how to do some minor troubleshooting and what to do with a damaged wheel. The course took place in Vyškov, and I have to admit it was a big school for me. They are truly dedicated professionals there. And naturally if I am at my wits' end with something here in Žatec, I am not afraid to ask my colleagues. They never left in the lurch and always helped to get around everything. Sergeant Jan Sedlák, who is in charge of us, is my initial point of reference, and he never lets anybody down. But on the other hand, I seek to figure out everything on my own not to bother the others. Only when I get to the end of my tether, I ask the lads," Corporal Kysilková says.





Not to get stuck behind the first curve

The driver's job is not only to get the crew from point A to point B, but it also includes the vehicle maintenance. The driver has to take care of the vehicle before the drive, because during the vehicle operation proper everything has to work 100 percent. That involves an inspection check before the drive, specifically a check of operating liquids, equipment fastening check, check of tyres and additional mandatory checks. The same comes after the operation, when maintenance has to be done to ready the vehicle for next use.

"As a driver I may not afford to get stuck behind the first bend," Corporal Kysilková underscores. "And the same comes after the drive is over. Before I leave the parked vehicle, I have to refuel it, check it for possible leakages of liquids and naturally clean everything on the outside as well as the inside. Perhaps the most difficult part for me is to remove wheels, clean them and put them back. Considering that the wheel weighs about 150 kilos, that is pretty hard job. Coping with the weight of the components on the twenty-ton beast, that is when I really clench my teeth."

Corporal Kysilková's common day starts with her morning arrival to the motorpool. When the days are calm, drivers and technicians work on the vehicles they are responsible for in their platoon or company. It is not just about one vehicle, everybody works here and help each other.

"The lads helped me more at the start, and now I seek to cope with everything on my own. When I come across something unfamiliar, I ask questions. I do not want

hinder or make extra work for anyone. But besides our primary specialty we have to complete other training too. Those are lead-in trainings or for instance training in terrain, and shooting practice. Every day is really different and stereotype does not come into question at all," the driver smiles. "For example, with these two new variants of the Pandur – Command/Control and Communications – we again had to go for training. We received a very detailed tutorial and it surely pays off. That rather applied to the operators, but we were included too, although the differences for drivers are not so remarkable compared to the Pandurs we are driving on regular basis. But these weigh a couple of tons more, due to additional armour and the communication technology, so their manoeuvrability is also somewhat different."

Physical fitness is a must

Twenty-nine year old Barbora Kysilková has enjoyed serving in the military for three years and she does not regret her decision at all. The only thing she had to work hard on is everyday sport activity. Physical fitness is one of the key attributes of a military professional, but in a combat unit it is simply a must.

"Although it may not necessarily seem so, the driver's job is about being fit and I cannot do without it. I seek to sport in my free time. I have a dog, so extended everyday walks are commonplace. I also enjoy jogging, but you will not see me in a gym, I am not keen on that," Barbora says. "But it is a job that fulfils me. Every day is different here and you never know what you are up to. Which is lovely.

I have to admit I enjoy this type of adrenaline. And it is also great that you are actually in the nature breathing a fresh air during your duty hours. MTA Doupov is simply a beauty in every season. Every day with colleagues who are my friends at the same time. There is no place for solo players, here it is about teamwork. And it is a perfect feeling for me, that when I run into trouble, these lads will help me out. And that is something money cannot buy these days."

Red pilot light flashing

If Corporal Barbora Kysilková would be to decide again whether to join the military or not, she would do it again. She does not regret her decision at all and the profession of driver would be her choice number one again. "I am glad that I went for it and replaced the desk in the bank with this amazing job with good buddies and with much armour on wheels," Corporal Kysilková points out. "My message to future drivers would be that they should know it is not just about driving the vehicles, but mainly about the maintenance. They have to be able to do minor repairs themselves and embrace a lot of theory. It is also important to work autonomously and be willing to learn. In the critical moments, one has to be self-reliant, there is no time behind the wheel to consult anyone and engage in discussions. All the responsibility is on your shoulders and lives of the people onboard depend on you. And that actually always flashes a big red pilot light inside my head."

VJTF activated in exercise Brilliant Jump

Verification of the Staff and Movement

The service members of the 71st Mechanised Battalion were assigned to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) in 2020. In case needed, NATO may order them into action anytime, which was what happened. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Curtis Scaparotti, sent them to Lithuania in connection with exercise Brilliant Jump 2020.



"The Supreme Commander Allied Powers Europe (SACEUR) is vested with the authority to call those response forces up for an exercise in the NATO territory anytime at his discretion. No one ever knows when, where and with what participation the exercises involving the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force would take place," Deputy Battalion Commander and the deployment Commanding Officer Major Martin Krč explains. "The exercise objective was to test the ability of the units both to plan and perform a quick movement. We received activation orders via national commanders and had five days to get moving

with all vehicles and equipment," Major Krč adds. The soldiers were to move into the training areas of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The exercise was designed at the same time to demonstrate readiness for defence of the NATO nations.

200 soldiers and 50 vehicles

All prepping took place within five days for two trains carrying 200 service personnel and 50 vehicles to depart Hranice rail stations at the beginning of November. According to Major Krč, the assignment perfectly verified the Battalion staff's abilities in terms of

all-round preparation, planning, coordination and support of real-world deployment, and the performance of information flows between the battalion and the VJTF Brigade. The units had the opportunity to rehearse procedures for loading tracked and wheeled vehicles, containers and additional materiel onto rail cars several times.

Three-minute transloading

"The journey on train covering almost 1,000 kilometres was spiced up on Lithuanian borders by the transloading from our carriages onto Lithuanian ones because of a different,



Loading equipment on wagons at Hranice na Moravě



broader rail gauge," Captain Petr Bláha, commander of the 2nd Mechanised Company, expands on his task. "We cooperated on that one with the Lithuanian service personnel and they were obviously perfectly prepared for the task. For instance, transloading a single BMP using a heavy duty crane only took three minutes." After ten days, both transports returned back home. "Such a large NATO training exercise called for everybody to strictly observe the issued orders and time limits. Our warriors proved they were able to do so without any problems," the commander of the 71st Mechanised Battalion, Lieutenant

Colonel Libor Tesař, praised the service members.

No chance for COVID

That the soldiers were ready for everything was also proven by the fact that they managed to observe the strict sanitary measures against the COVID-19 disease. Prior to departure, everybody repeatedly tested; no one with the slightest symptoms could depart. Everyone had their temperature measures several times a day and soldiers used gallons of disinfection. Including thanks to that, they returned without a single person

factsheet

The VJTF forces consist of a brigade of approximately 5,000 soldiers, supported by air, naval and special forces. The VJTF is designed to provide a highly professional a very quick response in case needed to protect NATO's territorial integrity. The VJTF is able to perform a broad spectrum of missions including immediate reaction in Article 5 collective defence, crisis management operations, immediate deployment capability to pave the way for follow-on forces, peace support operations and assistance in emergencies and protection of critical infrastructure.

infected. The exercise verified the top logistic effort, command and control efficiency, but it also drilled sanitary procedures. Infected warfighters would be useless in the battle and that goes double the training exercise that took place in Lithuania.

*By CAPT Radek Hampl,
photos by the 71st Mechanised Battalion*

For the first time in history, the Military Band Olomouc has four women in the ensemble

They have found the courage and do not regret it

The history of the Military Band Olomouc dates back to the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It must be added that this military brass band used to be always a purely male affair. However, this has not been the case in Olomouc for several years. For the first time in the history of this military ensemble, there are four women musicians. French horns, clarinets and saxophone. These are musical instruments which fit not only into the male community, but also into the military. And do women have any relief or benefits from this? Not at all...



"It's true that for the first time we have women in the orchestra. However, it is not true that we would announce an audition only for male musicians, it was always an audition for a specific musical instrument. I see it this way that the women finally found the courage to apply for the audition," says the commander of the Military Band Olomouc and its chief conductor Major Gustav Foret. "The only prerequisite for the audition is at least the graduation from the music conservatory. Women won the audition, so there was nothing to deal with. From the human point of view, however, it was a change for our male team, I do not deny it. I say that I have the same standard for everyone, but I, as a commander, also have to learn. From the age of fifteen, I lived in a military music school, where only boys studied. And now, almost at the end of my career, the girls have come. I'm laughing about it today, but it wasn't easy for me. For example, during the rehearsal, I automatically say – like this, guys, no! And suddenly I realize that there are not only men there," says the chief conductor with a smile.

But he immediately adds that he very much welcomes the fact that women are in the ensemble, and musicians also acknowledge it. "They probably won't admit it out loud, but it was clear from the beginning that they were trying to be gallant and help them. But at the same time, they let them know that they do not forgive them anything, they don't give them anything for free," adds the commander.

Curiosity turned into reality

"In the final year of the conservatory, by chance I encounter the audition of the military wind orchestra in Olomouc. There was no one in my surroundings who had experience with such an audition. The knowledge zero, experience from others also zero, there was no one at the conservatory in Brno who would ever go to such an audition. While studying, you may help in theatres or philharmonic orchestras, but you can't go to a military orchestra. I thought I had nothing to lose, so I went for it. Especially when my friends told me, please, don't go there, they'll never take woman among the soldiers. It motivated me even more," recalls Master Sergeant Kristýna Kočtářová, horn player, about the very beginning of her musical and military career.

This experience is also confirmed by another member of the ensemble, Sergeant First Class Žaneta Grygarová. "I went to the audition purely out of curiosity, and especially with the fact that



Camouflage clothing suits women musicians as well as a ceremonial uniform





if I don't succeed, nothing will happen. I had no idea what awaited me there. I went there just for practice. And when it all came out, even now I have to laugh a little. But with a uniform, I gradually began to realize that I have also responsibility for my actions and behaviour."

Master Sergeant Eva Bínová had a slightly more complicated journey. When she finished the conservatory, she broke her arm more than twice. This ended her dream of becoming a professional clarinetist. It was a disappointment. She went to study Czech at university. Another blow came when her mother died before Christmas. While studying, Eva Bínová ran a triathlon, and in addition to it, she taught at an elementary art school and played in many amateur ensembles. She needed to draw a thick line after her past life. The audition into a military orchestra seemed to be the right thing she just needed. "I thought that if I run triathlons, the army could be for me. Shooting and weapons were not a problem. My team mates from the amateur ensemble supported me, so I had a motivation to prepare properly. The audition was a success. I never believed that I would have a professional career and also a military one," the clarinetist laughs. She is currently on maternity leave, where she plans to stay for three years. "I'm really looking forward to my new maternity role, but at the same time I'll be sad.



I know that I will miss everything, and I am definitely determined to return to my music and uniform."

Sergeant First Class Nela Neduchalová, who plays clarinet and saxophone, in time of audition had a two-year-old girl already. "I've been around folklore all my life. And many of my mates played in military orchestras or became professional soldiers. At that time, I was teaching at an elementary art school, I had a family, so I wasn't really looking for anything at all. I went to the audition purely for experience. And strangely, it worked. I had it a little harder than younger girls. Even before training at Vyškov, I had to give notice at school, and if I didn't succeed, I would be unemployed. Even now I can still hear the blow when this stone fell to the ground. I do not regret that I went there then," said Sergeant First Class Nela Neduchalová.

It wasn't a rose garden

All women successfully passed the audition. But it was only the first step. A classic wheel awaited them, like anyone interested in serving in the army. Health, psychological and physical tests. They passed through the sieve without any problems. And the last test that awaited them was training at Vyškov.

"I was a little scared of that. But my physical condition was quite decent, thanks to volleyball. In addition, there were almost twenty musicians. There must have been some bitter moments, blisters in the shoes, which is probably a classic. It was definitely not a walk through the rose garden, but it is probably still true that when a bunch of musicians gather somewhere, there is always fun," recalls the military training nice Master Sergeant and horn player Kristýna Kočtářová. Clarinettist Master Sergeant Eva Bínová was at Vyškov together with Kristýna. Already at the audition, when the members of the commission asked her what she thought she would have to undergo demanding training. "I said I was really looking forward to it. That probably surprised them. But the training was pretty good. You have to try very hard, but I have to say that I started to appreciate myself even more. And when I first put on my camouflage suit, it might sound like a cliché now, but I was really proud to wear it. Today, more or less, I take it as a fact that I'm going to work, but at the beginning it was a good feeling for me," Eva recalls, adding that she always remembered her mother. She led her to scouting from an early age, she would have been happy with her and very proud.

Sergeant First Class Žaneta Grygar lived with her parents and, as she says that in fact she was a domestic type. "I realized that I was flying out of the nest and my life would change completely. Nevertheless, I thought that if I successfully pass the audition, I would pass all tests, I might also go through training at Vyškov. I had it a little harder, because the training at Vyškov took place during the period when all participants had to live first fourteen days in quarantine, due to the Covid.



That was probably the hardest thing for me. Isolation, when it was not possible to go out, there was no one to talk to. Alone in the room. Then, when the physical activities started and we could go out, it was possible to endure it," says musician Žaneta.

"I came to Vyškov last year, on January 1st. It was quite cruel. But in retrospect, I'm glad I went through the training at this time, because if I got to the date when the quarantine was ordered, I would probably give it up, as of my daughter and husband, because I couldn't see them," recalls Sergeant First Class Nela Neduchalová. "Separation from the family was probably the most difficult for me. Other things could be successfully accomplished, probably also because we were three girls in a group and with us about twenty boys who helped us a lot."

Anthem and Hussite chorale

All four women musicians agree that they do not regret their decision to strengthen a purely male military ensemble and take the uniform for granted today. But right at the beginning, they had to learn what the equipment components were for, or how to adjust their hairstyle.

"When I remember our first day, Eva and I did not know what awaited us there," recalls Kristýna Kočtářová, who joined the ensemble at the same time as Eva Bínová. "There never be a woman in the service, so it was such a mutual examination. We got used to the military regime, we absorbed all information, which of course we immediately forgot. It was something new even for the boys. They did not know who would come among them, what they could expect from us, and especially how they were to treat us. They were so careful, accustomed to the traditional regime, to their men's club. And suddenly, two women."

"I remember they were all very nice, they told us the information we needed and they helped. At the same time, they made it clear that we would not have any favourite position, and that perhaps we could be five minutes late in the rehearsal? Well, it couldn't happen, even by chance," laughs Master Sergeant Bínová.

"They make fun of us, they say for example that when we go on a tour, because of us, they have to take two buses," all women laugh. "Compared to their one hanger, we have four. For the reason that we could agree with the commander only on the spot what to wear for the concert. It depends mainly on the weather when we play outside. In winter, the uniform includes a coat, we decide whether to wear trousers or a skirt, so we must have all the clothes with us. That is why we will never get rid of their jokes," all women agree.

One of favourite songs of Master Sergeant Kristýna Kočtářová is a welcome march. "Apart from it, I also really like our national anthem. When I play it, I get a chill running down my spine and I have a festive feeling," says Master Sergeant Eva Bínová.

"I love the Hussite chorale. Marches are not so rare for me, because I usually play them in our amateur brass band. But I really like chorales. And I also admit that my next favourite is our anthem. And I am very happy when we can play our anthem and also the Slovak one. After playing only a Czech part, I simply miss the second half there," sadly adds Sergeant First Class Nela Neduchalová. On the contrary, the Military Band Olomouc was supplemented now by the second half. As they have four women soldiers among them – excellent musicians.

The sun always rises after a storm

"I gain valuable experience from hospitals even outside the pandemic," says military medic Master Sergeant Vojtěch Vacenovský



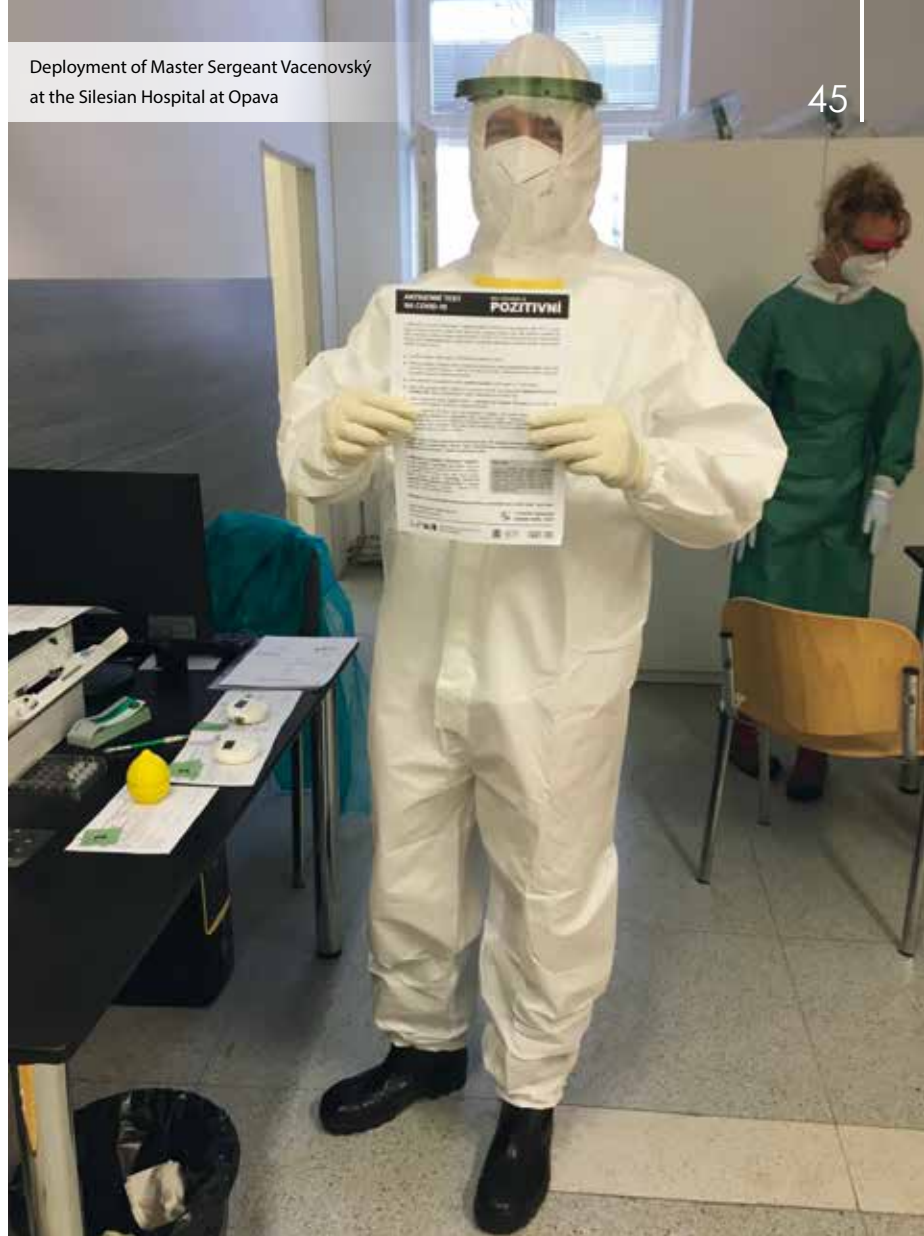
Master Sergeant Vojtěch Vacenovský, 30-year-old military medic, graduated from the Secondary Medical School at Opava. Then the next steps led him to the Ostrava University, where he completed a bachelor's degree in advanced emergency medical care (paramedical course). For some time, he worked as a paramedic at the Ostrava City Hospital. He enjoyed the work of a paramedic, but he told himself that he could do such work everywhere, at any time, during his life.

Actually, he didn't want to go from work to work. He wanted to experience new challenges and regularly work on himself professionally and physically. That's why he signed up for an agency that was looking for paramedics for the United Arab Emirates. In fact, it was only a back door for him, because at the same time he was also trying to join the army. At the end, the second variant came out, he became a professional soldier and his big dream came true. He took up the position of medic with a medical aid station of the 53rd Regiment of Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare at Opava, where he has been working for six years now.



Master Sergeant Vojtěch Vacenovský at work in Afghanistan

Deployment of Master Sergeant Vacenovský at the Silesian Hospital at Opava



Practical demonstration for teachers in the Moravian-Silesian region – providing first aid



Vojta, how difficult is it to hold the position of a military medic and what does it all mean?

My occupational position is very interesting and diverse. Half of it consists of regular short-term attachments at the Medical Rescue Service of the Moravian-Silesian Region, where I go together with paramedics to various accidents, traffic accidents, and many other situations threatening human health. I do this mainly to maintain my

medical proficiency. From the second half, I provide medical support during troop training – I go shooting, throwing grenades, parachuting, rock climbing, moving with a load in the field, movements on snow and ice, training on rough water. An integral part of my work are lectures to pupils in primary schools. I also give lectures to primary and secondary school teachers in the Moravian-Silesian Region on the issue of "providing first aid in schools", the concept of POKOS (Czech

abbreviation for "citizen preparation for defence of the Czech Republic"), organized by the Regional Military Headquarters in Ostrava. I also often give lectures and medical training in the army, namely those soldiers who go to foreign missions.

Due to the pandemic, new tasks have come, how do you assess your current commitment?

Nowadays, the scope of my work has changed. Due to the covid pandemic and the lack of medical staff in hospitals, the military was asked to help with testing. In the first wave, my fellows and I worked for three months in the Havířov hospital, where we performed antigen PCR tests to determine the positivity or negativity of the COVID-19 disease. At the same place, we also participated in a comprehensive test of the public. In the second wave, we perform antigen testing of the public at the Silesian Hospital at Opava. From my point of view, this is a very valuable experience. We got to places where we would never go, and we met many interesting people who, despite the huge workload, were always helpful to us. We worked with all components of the integrated system and were able to see for ourselves how the whole system was working, when everyone was pulling on the same rope, so that the consequences of the pandemic would be as small as possible.

What are your other military goals?

In my work, I would like to continue to improve in my profession, attend a lot of interesting courses, go through several short-term attachments with the emergency medical service, and perhaps also complete another foreign operation, where I could make use of the gained knowledge.

Deploying troops in missions is certainly difficult, what are your foreign experiences?

In 2017, I completed a mission in Afghanistan at Bagram Air Base in Parvan Province. The contingent consisted of members of the 53rd Regiment and the 102nd Reconnaissance Battalion. Despite all the difficulties that foreign missions of this kind bring, I am glad that I was able to be on it. Most people perceive foreign military missions as an American film, where guys in uniform go to patrols, with smiles from ear to ear, and have the gift of immortality. But at the moment, when a soldier actually goes on a mission, gets to the base, puts on a ballistic vest, helmet, takes a Bren (assault rifle) and goes on foot for a "dismount" patrol around the base, he realizes that the reality is somewhere else. Suddenly, with the other boys, you find yourself in a place where you have to trust and rely on each other one hundred percent. You can never be there as an individual, but only as a team. In such a place, your priorities will change completely and after returning home you will begin to appreciate things that you used to take for granted. That we are lucky to live in such a beautiful and safe country as ours. Your work also brings certain risks and requires a lot of time, what does the family say about it? My work is sometimes time consuming, which unfortunately bothers the family. This year was one of the most difficult for us. I was often away from home due to



Master Sergeant Vacenovský performs Covid tests at the Silesian Hospital at Opava

the covid pandemic, we built a house, and our first daughter was born. I always came home late in the evening. However, I am lucky with my loved ones and I am very grateful to them for their tolerance and support in all circumstances. Without them, I would never be where I am today.

Can you share some interesting experiences from your practice?

I have many of them, both smiling and sad, which inevitably belong to life as well. I finally rejected the sad ones, because they are in the media and nowadays it is necessary to think mainly positively. In the end, I chose the one that probably would never happen under normal circumstances. Everything took place in the Havířov hospital. Because it was a difficult time in the spring of 2020, and because the medical staff was physically

and mentally exhausted, the hospital director decided to support his subordinates, he decided to come to the front line to help testing people for COVID-19. I was lucky to be a shift leader that day. The director was helpful to me all the time and fulfilled the tasks I gave him. He called people to be taken, went for test substances and materiel, did surface disinfection and many other tasks that he had never encountered before, due to his position. He was very human about everything, and with exaggeration, I can boast that I was the boss of the hospital director.

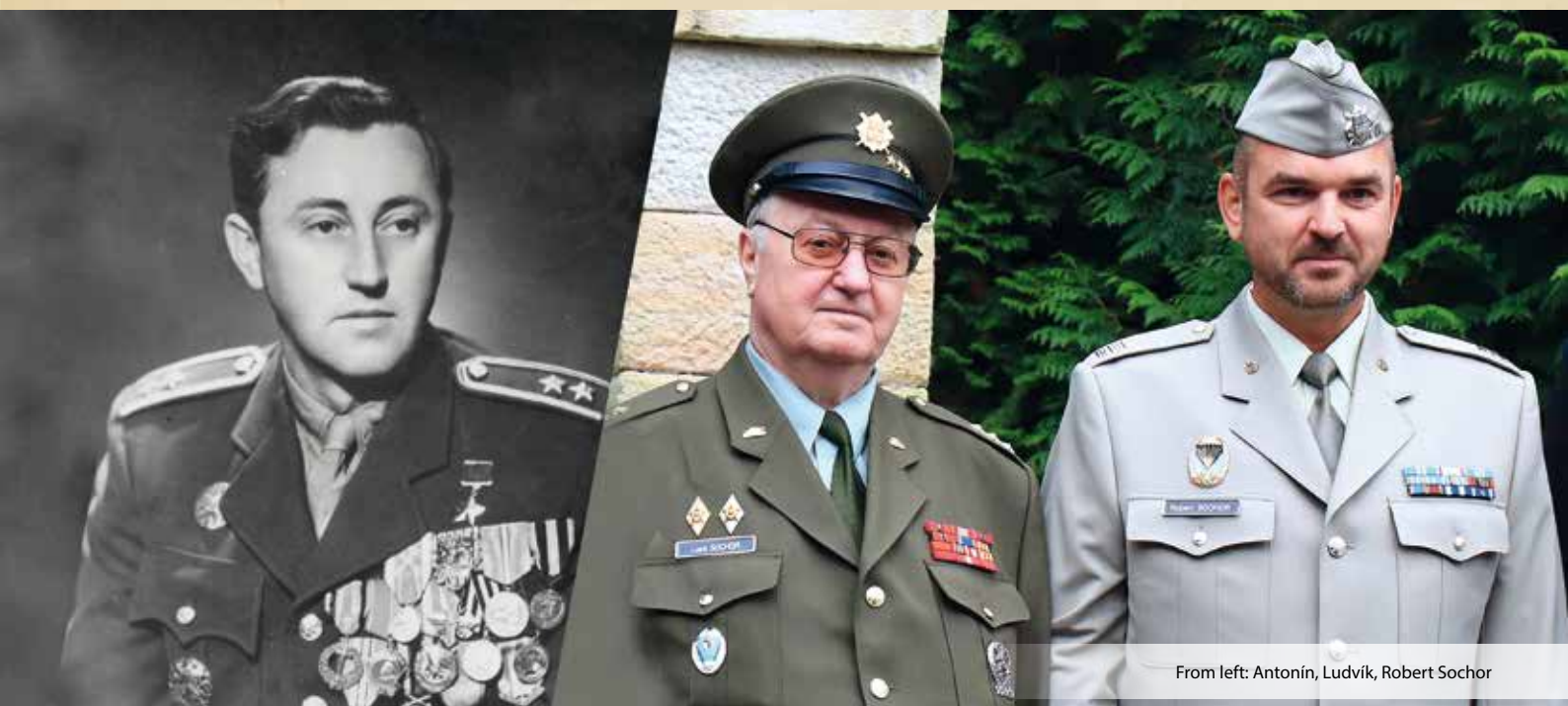
And what is your motto?

When something doesn't work well and I don't succeed, I always say this: The sun always rises after a storm.

*The interview was prepared
by CAPT Martin Ogořalek, Regional Military HQ Ostrava*

Senior Warrant Officer Robert Sochor, Enlisted Leader of the 15th Engineer Regiment, is a grandson of the legendary World War II hero Antonín Sochor

Two generations of veterans



From left: Antonín, Ludvík, Robert Sochor

During World War II, he served in the units of General Ludvík Svoboda. His combat deployment started at the Ukrainian village of Sokolovo. He performed a number of heroic deeds, for which he received two dozen awards, including the Golden Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union. Major General Antonín Sochor is a World War II veteran and now a legend.

On the other hand, his grandson, Enlisted Leader of the 15th Senior Warrant Officer, Robert Sochor, is a modern war veteran. He participated in three foreign missions – two were in the former Yugoslavia and one in Afghanistan. "The main difference between me and my grandfather is, in my opinion, that during the world wars, soldiers were actively deployed directly into combat. While, at present, foreign operations have a slightly different meaning. They ensure the security of the European area, strengthen foreign policy influence, and fulfil a commitment to solidarity. The main intention is to prevent war conflicts from entering our republic," Senior Warrant Officer Sochor described the differences of the military generations.

The military profession has accompanied the Sochor family for more than 100 years. Antonín Sochor's father already fought during the First World War on the Italian front. "I don't remember my dad very much because he died when I was 7 years old. The day he died, he came home and told my mother

ISAF 2005: Presentation of medals



not to ride my bike outside that there were open hatches to the canals. That got stuck in my head," remembered his father Antonín Colonel Ludvík Sochor, former commander of the 9th Tank Division Tábor.

Not only his son, but also the general public in this period commemorates his memory at the Antonín Sochor Memorial, which is held annually at Stráž pod Ralskem. There is also a statue built and the local school bears the name of this war hero. The cause of Antonín's death is also always discussed during the act of reverence. "It happened in the military training area Mimoň, near the village Hamr na Jezeře. A military truck crashed into a passenger car in which my dad was sitting. I am convinced, on the basis of the evidence from the accident, that it was an assassination. It wasn't for the first time, something like this had happened several times to him. At that time, he did not suit the political officials," said Ludvík Sochor, who reminded that his father's life story is also described in two books.

Antonín Sochor was and always will be a lifelong role model for his grandson Robert. "Even though we didn't know each other, because he died too young, I can vividly imagine his figure from the story telling. His experience is certainly not comparable to mine. Although the mission in Afghanistan was already somewhat similar. Compared to previous foreign operations, the lives were really in danger there. In Yugoslavia, we

factsheet

SWO Robert Sochor: Enlisted Leader of the 15th Bechyně Engineer Regiment. He has been serving in the Army of the Czech Republic since 1994. He graduated from the Military Secondary Technical School at Prešov. He participated in three foreign missions – in the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan.

COL Ludvík Sochor: Born at Buzuluk, USSR. Both parents were members of the Czechoslovak units in the USSR. He served in our army from 1954 to 1998 (44 years). He studied in Moscow at the M. V. Frunze Military Academy and at the Military Academy of the General Staff of K. J. Voroshilov. He served in a number of military positions. He began his career as a tank platoon commander in the 13th Tank Division. He was also the commander of the 1st Tank Company, 103th Tank Regiment Mladá, and the commander of the 9th Tank Division Tábor. He is a holder of the Order of the Red Star.

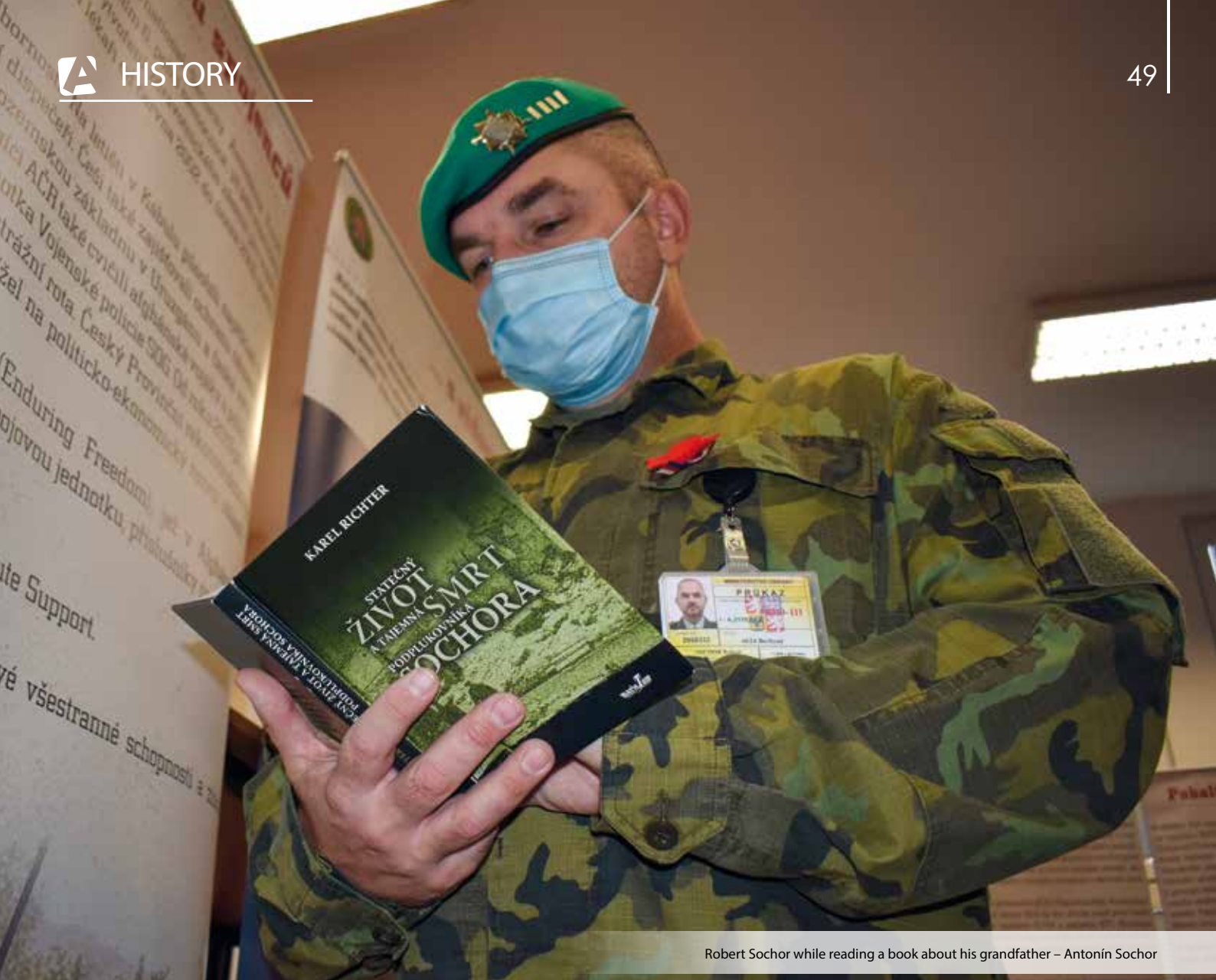
MG Antonín Sochor: Born in Lohberg, Westphalia, Germany. He commenced military service at Trenčín in October 1936. In summer 1939 he joined the Czechoslovak military group of Ludvík Svoboda, the so-called Czechoslovak Legion. After the outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939, the Czechoslovak Legion was interned in the Soviet Union.

After the establishment of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Field Battalion at the turn of 1941/42, Antonín Sochor was appointed commander of a training platoon, shortly afterwards he took over the command of a scout platoon. He took part in a number of important battles and performed brave deeds. For example, in January 1943, he went to the front with a battalion and it was him who on March 6, 1943, was ordered to perform the first combat action of the 1st Field Battalion – a reconnaissance of the surroundings of the village Sokolovo. Two days later, he actively fought there, in the battle of Sokolovo. On November 5, 1943, the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade launched an attack on Kiev and LT Sochor led his men into battle again. In these moments, critical for the brigade, Antonín Sochor clearly demonstrated his commanding skills, determination, courage and bravery.

He took part in the Carpathian-Dukla operation, where he fought for Hill 534 with his battalion for several days. He was seriously wounded in one of the attacks on September 14, 1944. He managed to be evacuated to a hospital at Odrzykon, where 218 fragments and splinters were removed from his body. He became the holder of the Order of the White Lion, the holder of the Order of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and seven other orders and fourteen decorations of a total of five different countries.

Elementary School of General Antonín Sochor,
Stráž pod Ralskem, 2017





Robert Sochor while reading a book about his grandfather – Antonín Sochor



focused primarily on the engineer support to SFOR units and assisting local residents in repairing bridges and roads," added Enlisted Leader.

The 15th Engineer Regiment is currently participating in four foreign missions – in Afghanistan, Mali, Sinai and Iraq.

By CAPT Zuzana Králová

Ludvík Sochor, decorations of Antonín Sochor



Twenty-five years from the deployment
of the Czech Armed Forces for IFOR in
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Our soldiers were relentless

At the end of 1995, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation received a go-ahead by the UN Security Council to perform Operation Joint Endeavour in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and took over the operational assignment. At the beginning of the following year, Czech service members arrived into region, specifically our 850-strong contingent with the 6th Mechanised Battalion as the core.

Upon their arrival into the area of responsibility, the Czech service members started to build a total of five camps. The Czech Battalion was headquartered in the Donja Ljubija community, the 1st Mechanised Company was stationed in the Stari Majdan community, the 2nd Mechanised Company had their camp directly in the Zone of Separation in the Arapuša community, the 3rd Mechanised Company was based in the Brezičani community close to the town of Prijedor and the logistic base was located in Bosanska Krupa. Concurrently with building the bases, the unit was taking over the area of responsibility, whose size fluctuated from 3,200 to 3,600 square kilometres in the course of the operation. The length of the zone of separation, an area dividing the belligerent parties, amounted to 62 kilometres.

The mechanised battalion was equipped with the BMP-2 Infantry Fighting Vehicles, BPzV combat reconnaissance vehicles, OT-64 wheeled armoured personnel carriers, Land Rover LR 110ST vehicles, Praga V3S and Tatra 815 trucks, AGS-17 grenade launchers, RPG-7 and RPG-75 antitank weapons. The inventory was complemented with infantry weapons and additional special equipment.

Border moved

On January 22nd, 1996, the commander of the 3rd Mechanised Company Captain Aleš Opata started the taking over of the area of responsibility from A Company of the British Light Armoured Division. On the next day, the members of his unit began to perform the operation assignment as they arrested a group of armed persons in the Zone of Separation in the Otoka area. The Czech military progressively apprehended and disarmed a total of twenty persons and seized various types of weapons in the second half of January 1996. A lengthy and demanding disarmament of the locals began. That did not involve only infantry weapons; our service members later sized a calibre 105 mm howitzer and a variety of other heavy weapons.

One of the tensest situations occurred in proximity of the Ivanska village, on the boundary between Croatia and the Moslem part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The border was wilfully moved by Croats into the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Captain Opata with his paras and with an assigned British infantry fighting vehicle performed an assault at night, disarmed the members of the Croatian special police and enforced the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accord in the assigned Zone of Separation. Not only Croats were quick to realise the border and separation zones were no longer protected by the weak and poorly armed UN forces.

Shooting into the air

The largest conflict took place at the small town of Bosanska Otoka, with about four thousand inhabitants, situated on the banks of the Una River. On Friday April 19th, 1996, some Moslem families decided in the



Our soldiers thoroughly controlled the movement of the local population



The headquarters of our battalion in the village of Donja Ljubija

morning to make use of the holiday to visit their relatives living behind the border line. Approximately 300 persons progressively crossed the bridge. Around 11 am, Moslems however gathered on the main line of communication connecting Bosanska Otoka with the town of Novi Grad and attacked the Serbian police station. Then they advanced under Moslem flags further on to Novi Grad until they came face to face with roughly the same number of Serbians. The situation escalated. Czech soldiers had to prevent both parties from clashing on one another. In those critical moments, the Czech unit was led by Captain Petr Miler. The first intervention was made around fourteen hundred as the members of the Czech battalion were forced

to use gunfire from assault rifles and machine guns with live munitions shot into the air to separate the belligerent parties. The crowd calmed down for a while. About an hour later, the Czechs were forced to apply the measure once again. In total, they fired some twelve hundred rounds.

At nine pm, Czech and Canadian liaison officers managed to arrange a meeting between the Serbian and Moslem parties. That thankfully helped calm down the overall situation. The event claimed putting all bases of the Czech Battalion on combat alert.

By Vladimír Marek,

photos by Vladimír Marek and Vladimír Palán

