

2/2013



**Sustained
area defence**

General Pavel acknowledged long-standing cooperation by Jana Hierschová



Ms. Jana Hierschová has a record of skilfully managing International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds at U.S. Embassy in Prague over the last 15 years. She arranged for the best terms and conditions for training Czech service personnel who have performed missions should-to-shoulder with U.S. armed forces servicemembers.

Wednesday 4 December 2013, the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel acknowledged the efforts by the U.S. Office of Defense Cooperation. He particularly recognised Ms. Jana Hierschová of the ODC for the tireless effort she dedicated to the U.S.-Czech security cooperation partnership program and awarded her the Czech Armed Forces Medal of Merit, 3rd class.

“Over the fifteen years you were in charge of the IMET funds, almost 2,000 Czech military personnel completed military training courses in foreign countries. Czech graduates from U.S. programs and military schools have assumed senior leadership roles within the Czech Armed Forces“, LTG Petr Pavel underscored.

Almost 300 Czech soldiers underwent Hummer and MRAP driving courses at coalition bases in the course of the Czech engagement in Afghanistan, over 400 hundred had improvised explosive device awareness course and additional 150 personnel were trained in a combat life saver course as part of IMET. Ms. Jana Hierschová also largely contributed to assigning an operational planning course to the Training Command – Military Academy at Vyškov, and to training Czech Land Forces servicemembers on fire support and in Forward Observer occupational specialty. U.S. mobile training team instructors train Czech soldiers and airmen both abroad and at their home bases. The Czech instructor in the U.S. Air Forces in Europe Air Ground Operations School (USAFE AGOS) in Germany has best proven the fact that the “train the trainer” principle works fine.

Staff Sergeant Michal Novotný is also one of the graduates of a series of specialist combat medicine courses held in the U.S. In November 2011, he saved the life of an American soldier, who had activated an improvised explosive device and lost both legs and one hand. SFC Novotný was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, the fourth-highest U.S. military individual award, by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In that act, Sergeant First Class Novotný made a full use of lessons and knowledge he gained in an IMET combat medicine training course.

by MAJ Jolana Fedorková



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Address: Rooseveltova 23, 161 05 Praha 6, Czech Republic
Phone: +420 973 215 553, +420 973 215 786

Editor-in-chief: Jan Procházka
Layout: Andrea Bělohávková
Translation: Jan Jindra
Cover photo: Vladimír Marek

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Editor's point of contact

Editor-in-chief

Jan Procházka
telephone: +420 973 215 553
mobile: +420 724 033 407
e-mail: jan_prochazka@klitkni.cz

Graphics designer

Andrea Bělohávková
telephone: +420 973 215 786
e-mail: andrea.belohlavkova@seznam.cz



The Czech Armed Forces was also involved in the largest NATO exercise in the last seven years, Steadfast Jazz 2013

SUSTAINED area defence

The earth has been quaking for some time already as Leopard 2A4 tanks of the 10th (Polish) Armoured Brigade were on the move. Heavy howitzers supported their fire from the back. Bangs occurred all around and hundreds of military vehicles and tanks mixed up. BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers of the Feodosiya Ukrainian Marines were just attacking on the horizon. Europe has not seen such a large-scale exercise with heavy equipment in many years.

The scenario of Exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013 in the Drawsko Pomorskie military training area in Poland was nevertheless quite simple in nature. A fictional country attacked Estonia and other NATO nations came to assist based on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Yet the exercise marked a crucial milestone. After long years of practising for asymmetric warfare, NATO and coalition forces are being drawn down in Afghanistan and the focus therefore shifts to combined defence of the NATO territory. Six thousand service personnel from twenty nations were directly involved in what was one of the largest field training / live exercises NATO held in the past decade. In the land operations, the Czech Republic was represented by a chemical, radiological and nuclear defence company, forward air controllers from Náměšť airbase and a bio lab. Czech Armed Forces servicemembers also performed assignments in staffs of Allied commands in Lithuania, Poland and Norway.

A part of NRF

Czech CBRN specialists took part in the exercise as part of the NATO Response Force (NRF) Multinational Chemical, Biologic, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Battalion under the French command. The battalion also comprised Slovak, Polish and Romanian CBRN defence experts.

The Czech contingent started to prepare for assignment to NRF standby already at the beginning of 2013, first with a standard all-arms training in the Boletice and Hradiště Military Training Areas followed by specialist training in Tisá MTA and coming to a head in exercise Steadfast Jazz, which was the certification exercise for the NATO Response Force units on standby next year.

The Czech CBRN personnel transported their equipment into Poland on rail. They loaded the vehicles on railway carriages at Liberec and had

it transferred into Jankov in Poland, approximately ten kilometres away from the Drawsko Pomorskie training area. The vehicles covered the final portion on road.

"One of the objectives of this exercise is to enhance cohesion of the multinational chemical, biologic, radiological and nuclear defence battalion and finally achieve its certification. We operate under the French command, which involves certain specificities. The French have a different decision-making process and different way of communicating information top-down. As a company commander, I got a French armoured vehicle with in-built command and control system for me to receive all information and combat orders. I feed all the data I gather up to my superior echelon in the same way. So, it does not work the way we are used back home, that the chief of staff or operations officer give orders orally. I have to ask for any information using this system. It is more demanding in that respect," describes First Lieutenant Rostislav Havelka, the commander of the Czech chemical, radiological and nuclear defence company.

Waiting for EOD team

The Czech radiological and chemical reconnaissance team received coordinates of the location they are to perform foot radiological and chemical reconnaissance of a greater extent. First of all, they needed to find the concrete bunker in a forest, which had to be reconnoitred. In stand-off position from the location, the Czech



CBRN personnel put on their FOP-96 protective suits that work on a similar principle as filters in the gas masks. The suit comprises active charcoal that is air permeable. The suits both provide certain comfort and enable twenty-four hour operation, which even protective suits with breathing apparatus do not offer.

The team started to search the bunker foot by foot. They immediately analysed the samples they took. A lab was discovered in one of the side corridors, but there was an unknown oval object with wires at the entry. The Czech soldiers immediately suspended recce efforts and closed the whole area.

"The French prepare for us a play that is based on the scenario of exercise Steadfast Jazz. This is already the sixth or seventh task we are completing. We have provided several decontaminations of personnel and equipment, now we are finalising chemical and radiological reconnaissance of the area," First Lieutenant Havelka points out.

In the meantime, leader of the radiological and chemical recon team Sergeant First Class Tomáš Janků contacted the superior echelon and reported finding a suspicious object. He was ordered to suspend the activity until the whole area is cleared by a French EOD team. "They gave us coordinates of a location to perform a larger foot radiological and chemical reconnaissance. We were told it was a concrete bunker. We found out the area was clear using the CHP-71 chemical detector, and we verified the results with PP3 detection papers. Measurements were negative. If there would be slightest suspicion of presence of radiological or chemical agents, we would need to take several additional measurements. We could not check the lab in the rear part of the bunker anymore. There was an object in one of the corridors that way too far resembled of an improvised explosive device. Disposing the IED is already up to French EOD service," the radiological and chemical recon team leader, SFC Tomáš Janků, described.

"Now we are waiting for French EOD guys. We cannot continue until they check the whole matter. Only then we would analyse samples from the lab. When we are done here, we still have to go the decontamination site."

Decon for marines

A couple of kilometres on, a Czech platoon performs decontamination of a heavy company of the Ukrainian Marines Feodosiya equipped with BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers. They have just come back from operations in an area contaminated by radiological agents and are directly heading for the decontamination frames.

"We had an agreed it would be like ten to twelve vehicles and we set up the decon line for that purpose. There is definitely a difference in decontaminating Czech vehicles and foreign ones. First, there is a sort of language barrier, and we do not know the size of the vehicles and its specificities. Using some compounds may also prove problematic," decontamination platoon leader Lieutenant Vilém Čejka points out. "All of that can nevertheless be settled beforehand through communication and coordination. I requested the superior echelon for allocating me a frequency for communication with the



Ukrainian unit. Although I got the frequencies, I nevertheless lacked the call sign and we did not know whether they were using some crypto limiters or not. So, we did not have communication with them at the end. We had no choice then to wait until they arrived and then control everything using standard signals. One has to be ready for everything. We will always cope somehow in the end."

Ukrainian BTRs took turns to go through the model 82 decon line. Individual frames may deliver various decontamination compounds. The key is always the agent that contaminated the vehicle and this time around it was radioactive fallout. Czech CBRN specialists used a compound of detergents binding the contaminant. Everything is then washed. The first frame provides rough wash, the second applies the

detergent compound and the third one washes the compound. It is a mass decontamination.

"Participating in this training exercise is a great experience for me. There are twenty militaries involved. Everyone should try working in such a multinational environment. It is primarily about communication. There are various approaches; individual armed forces have somewhat different procedures. Getting to know all of this benefits us greatly," Lieutenant Čejka adds.

Bio lab in NRF

The Czech biologic laboratory was busy. A French sampling and identification team had just brought in some biologic samples. But there is no explanation provided, which significantly hampers efforts by the lab. It is necessary to know both where and when those samples were taken but also lots of additional related data. Lab specialist Major Jiří Presler grumbled for a while as he was putting the protective suit on and readying for the analysis.

"Our bio lab performs tasks continuously; we get several samples every day, which are predominantly training ones coming outside any scenario. But we received samples on two occasions that were a part of a specific play. For instance, that involved a secret lab that

was discovered. A French sampling team took samples and the transport team took them to our place," commanding officer of bio detachment Colonel Libor Piša explains. "I had an opportunity to work in such a combined unit some five or six years ago when Poland was the lead nation. So I had some experience and looked forward to the French taking the lead. Obviously, they are experienced in the subject matter. There is a slight problem with English. Not that the French would not be able to speak the language; they rather have a peculiar accent. Oftentimes we have to make sure what we heard is what they meant. But they are doing a great job – it is definitely an experienced nation. I would especially like to commend their logistic support."

The team running the bio lab was mounted for the needs of the NATO Response Force multinational chemical, biologic, radiological and nuclear defence battalion by the Military Medical Institute of the Czech Armed Forces Military Medicine Agency. The Czech Republic has a primacy of having the only bio lab in the NRF. Besides the lab, the Czech bio detachment also operates the BAWs (Biological Aerosol Warning System) that has the capability of monitoring and detecting bioaerosols in the field. The system is used for securing major military installations and areas against possible attacks with bio agents. The detection system comprises a base and several stand-off sensors providing early warning.

Matter of the heart

"There are just twelve of us here, but we have quite an extensive expertise. If they would arrive with samples taken from a human body, that would be the domain for me to tackle. I have a medical doctor's background. In case they would bring in samples from animals, it is no problem either – we also have a vet with us here," says the lab commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Zbyněk Valenta. When we are trying to figure out what makes people quit doing medicine and start serving as biologist, he is just smiling. He says working with that team is a matter of heart. It is only

a pity that the top officials do not realise that biological defence must be done on a nationwide scale, it is not an issue just for the military. The most visible is the fact that no one on the top level is willing to take the responsibility for the Biological Defence Centre in Těchonín. Running the center is not really cheap, but it is just a small fraction of the costs the Czech Republic would incur in case bio agents were really used. And those are very affordable for various terrorist groups. A strike costing one thousand USD with conventional weapons would cost one hundred with nuclear weapons, ten dollars with chemical agents and one dollar for biological agents.

The NATO Response Force Multinational Chemical, Biologic, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Battalion will be on standby throughout the next year. Although Colonel Piša does not expect NRF activation in the next twelve months, his subordinates would not have a problem with that should such situation occur. "We moved into the training exercise area using our own vehicles. We covered some seven hundred kilometres to get here from the Czech Republic and managed without slightest difficulties. We have here everything we need for our operations and are fully self-sufficient except for messing and billeting, which is provided by France. A live operational deployment is conceivable for me. The French would be able to provide excellent logistic support and we would be able to do the transport on our own and perform our mission on the ground," the detachment commander adds.

Lab in a suitcase

Czech biologists do not think we would lag behind other countries much. As to bio weapons, there are not many options. All fast diagnostic methods work on polyphase chain reaction. No one has come up with something better so far. "On the other hand, it would definitely be worthwhile to make progress in fast deployability. Today, it is not enough to be mobile. That is where German Bundeswehr and French Armed Forces focus their intensive efforts. Those two armed forces are able to pack

a bio lab with certain limited use into several suitcases, load them into a plane as cabin luggage and depart for their assigned area," Colonel Piša explains. "That is a trend we follow at the moment. I am confident this will be the direction for us down the road. It will not be the full lab capability that we brought over here for the exercise. It is rather about complementing and expanding scalable capabilities. Indeed, there may be situations in which we would do with just several pieces of luggage, and we would contrarily need a full-scale lab capability in other instances. The Czech Air Force has CASA and Airbus aircraft that would transport such reduced lab without problems. But the full lab on Tatra truck will however not fit into the aircraft. Some sort of miniaturisation would therefore be expedient for us from the perspective of highly operative transportation."

The scope and form of exercise Steadfast Jazz kicked off a new phase in training NATO nations' forces. The word on the street is there will be a much larger NATO exercise in Spain and Portugal in 2015, probably to involve as many as forty thousand soldiers and airmen. "As NATO forces progressively withdraw from Afghanistan, our armed forces' training changes accordingly. Much more than asymmetric operations, we will concentrate on training defence of our territory. The contents of this exercise is exactly what we should pursue in the years ahead. The resources freed by the less intensive foreign engagement will be directed at the domain we have somewhat neglected in recent years," Czech Chief of Defence LTG Petr Pavel evaluated the exercise.

"As to Poland, I particularly value their close and active cooperation with us. I trust we will also have opportunities to participate with the Republic of Poland in some armaments programs. Scheduled for standby in 2016, the EU Battle Group formed by the Visegrad Four countries is also an excellent example of our cooperation. That is meant to be the first swallow marking for us the new stage of working together," Czech Defence Minister Vlastimil Píček added.

by Vladimír Marek

Military pilots from the Čáslav tactical airbase also took part in the joint air missions and support to ground forces in NATO exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013

Combined Air Effort

For six days in November, the 31st tactical airbase Poznan-Krzesiny in Poland became the home for the flight and technical personnel of the Čáslav 212th tactical squadron. Czech L-159 ALCA (Advanced Light Combat Aircraft) were taking off the Poznan runway to fly into the Drawsko Pomorskie training area to perform close air support missions there. Representing the Czech Air Force, NATO exercise named Steadfast Jazz 2013 (SFJZ 2013) also involved the JAS-39C Gripen fighters that operated from the Čáslav airbase. The formation of thirty-nine aircraft from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland provided a considerable contribution to meeting the goals of the largest NATO exercise in 2013.



"The most effective solution to accomplish the assignments of exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013 was to have available six L-159 ALCA subsonic combat aircraft. That quantity both supported operational requirements in individual phases of the exercise scenario, but also provided an optimal reserve for possible extraordinary missions," Lieutenant-Colonel Ladislav Stolárik of the MoD Capability Development and Planning Division says in reference to the Czech Armed Forces contingent stationed at Poznan-Krzesiny airbase. He also points out the four JAS-39C Gripen aircraft that joined air operations above the territory of Poland, for which they refuelled in flight from a French KC-135FR tanker. Flight missions for Gripens, whose primary task was to defend the airspace over and above NATO forces against enemy aircraft (DCA—defensive counter-air) lasted up to four hours and in fact represented a premiere air-to-air refuelling for pilots of the 211th Tactical Squadron during their operational employment in an operation. After accomplishing their missions, the airmen from Čáslav again headed for the French "kay-see" and then returned back to their home station in the Czech Republic.

LTC Stolárik explains the reasons for deploying the modernised ALCAs in the M4 variant for SFJZ 2013 as follows: "The demanding international operating environment will undoubtedly prove their comprehensive skills for potential deployments and realistically test their interoperability in performance of operational missions in composite air operations involving various types of air assets from several NATO Air Forces."

LTC Stolárik is interrupted by the noise a pair of one-five-niners produce getting ready for take-off. There are not suitable weather conditions in the area of operations for Close Air Support (CAS), but the flight effort as a part of the composite air operation (COMAO) provides an ideal opportunity to obtain additional tactical experience and indeed represents another professional challenge for the 212th Squadron flight personnel.

It should be mentioned in this respect that JAS-39C Gripen multirole supersonic aircraft took off the runway at Čáslav airbase. As opposed to the ALCAs that fly roughly 70 nautical miles to reach the Drawsko Pomorskie training area, the Gripens must refuel in flight before arriving there. Then the aircraft in required configurations join the exercise scenario. "In general, they are tasked to provide defensive counter-air as well as air superiority to enable L-159 subsonics to support ground operations," says Lieutenant-Colonel Jakub Štefánek of the Czech Air Force Command, who was the commanding officer of the Czech contingent for exercise SFJZ 2013 at Krzesiny airbase.

On the radar chainlet

Tasked with the order to perform close air support, a pair of Czech Air Force L-159s are rolling to the threshold of runway two-nine. Their today's configuration comprises practice AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles, so-called CATMs (Captive Air Training Missile), GBU-12 laser-guided bombs and podded 20 millimetre PL-20 Plamen double-barrel cannon. L-159 pilots, 1LT Pavel Švec and 1LT Michal Veleba put the Honeywell F124-GA-100 engines with 28 kN thrust at full throttle and the one-fifty-niners start off fast on the runway at twenty-second interval. Several hundred metres on, they get airborne and climb to their assigned flight level at altitude of approximately five and half kilometres. "We were on so-called radar chain. That is a situation after take-off when the wingman searches the leader on the radar and maintains a constant distance behind him," describes 1LT Švec, the leader of the two light combat aircraft.

Roughly in fifteen minutes, they arrived the Drawsko Pomorskie training area and started mandatory procedures. The key is to coordinate with a French forward air controller who will guide them onto an opposing force's mortar firing post. "Adverse weather conditions hid the earth beneath clouds. That was why we needed



to climb above them. When the FAC gave us exact position of the target, we focused on dropping precision guided ammunition," the experienced L-159 ALCA pilot from Čáslav states and adds that CAS missions are a standard part of their flight training. "Completing the assignment is contingent on many aspects. You do get necessary information from the forward air controller, but the pilot has to evaluate the current situation in the battlefield – and its solution – from a much more comprehensive perspective. For example, besides spatial and time picture of the situation, pilots must respond to enemy air defences or have to take into account coordination of ground forces' fire. When everything finally comes together in an optimal way, the mission is effectively accomplished. Close air support always requires a precision planning." First-Lieutenant Švec points out and underscores that not using live munitions in SFJZ 2013 did not represented a handicap for him.

International premiere for M4 variant

Upgraded L-159A aircraft represent another professional progress for the tactical pilots

home-based at Čáslav – not only for coordinating flights in a diverse NATO "pack" of aircraft in COMAO, but also in joint operation with the FAC providing guidance onto the ground target.

As opposed to the M3 variant, the M4 offers even more sophisticated solutions. By the way, operating at Poznan-Krzesiny represented an international premiere for the M4 variant. Its detailed description would generate a dedicated article and so we will only offer the key data of the aircraft configuration that enables an enhanced tactical format. In a way, everything is centered on the bull's eye (point of reference) and all targets are declared in reference to it. The pilot does not get instructions anymore to point the airplane this or that way to get to the enemy, because the system provides a graphic representation that enables him to search the target on his own. "The airplane gets a declaration that its target is in a given position from the reference point. The pilot finds the target and may subsequently engage," says Captain Denis Dúbravčík, a pilot of the 212th Tactical Squadron and stresses that it is impossible to provide effective performance without the above configuration, particularly in COMAO operations on a single mission, where interoperability of multiple types of air assets from different

NATO air forces is of central importance. "The M4 configuration allows us to effectively operate in COMAO. Declaring the targets that way is a standard procedure in NATO," the ALCA pilot accentuates. It is not a secret that the M4 configuration enhances cooperation between the pilot and FAC in many respects. Besides the target coordinates in degrees and minutes, it is now also possible to use the format in which you put in the code of the square. Thanks to the millimetre scale, the guidance onto the target is with highest accuracy.

Another positive aspect is that the Czech Air Force professionals proved the performance of the M4 variant in operational employment while complying with the required safety parameters. Operating such type of equipment requires both the technology and relevant legislation. That completed another step towards a full-fledged involvement of the Czech Armed Forces' units in NATO composite air operations.

Technology progress was nevertheless not the only benefit for the 212th squadron in the NATO exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013. "We highly value our active involvement in planning processes for COMAO missions in particular. We do not have many opportunities like these back at home. Moreover, here it is done with assistance by an



experienced U.S. instructor, who guarantees we are observing both effective NATO standards and applying current observations from foreign operations," Captain Denis Dúbravčík elaborates and points out the other positive aspect - flight performance right afterwards.

"Adverse weather conditions did not permit the flight effort we had planned, but we are nevertheless satisfied with our participation in SFJZ 2013. Although it may make some wonder, the total number of flight hours was not the key factor for us. Likewise, the opportunity to work with the local Polish squadron operating F-16s taught us additional important lessons. No doubt we benefit from all exercises abroad," CAPT Dúbravčík argues and adds that Steadfast Jazz 2013 saw the participation of the 212th squadron's ten most experienced pilots, while some of them have already been qualified as "mission commanders" to lead a NATO aircraft formation in COMAO.

It should be mentioned in this context that the Czech formation of L-159s, together with Polish Air Force F-16s and Hungarian and Czech Gripen formed the blue team and led defensive counter-air operations against the reds played by Polish Su-22s, MiG-29s and other assets. To complete the picture, the exercise also involved

an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) airplane and the above-mentioned French KC-135FR tanker.

Two in one

It would definitely be unfair to omit the Czech Air Force service personnel who performed exercise assignments on the ground at the Poznan-Krzesiny. That particularly involves the members of the specialist air engineer service of the 212th Tactical Squadron, and the man of seven trades, Captain Václav Svoboda.

"As opposed to the phase 1 of the exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013, which took place in Lithuania (the Baltic Eye), the key change for us is operating six single-seat L-159s, moreover in a different configuration than at Shiauliai airport in Lithuania. Consequently, we had to increase the number of specialists, especially armourers, and necessary systems for them were brought over from Čáslav," says the deputy squadron commander for specialist ground support – the squadron chief engineer officer, Major Marek Pažúr. He points out the issue of safety, not only as concerns the works performed by his subordinates on the aircraft, but also during movement

on the airfield operating surfaces. "The airbase operates F-16s that may not suck in any dirt. That is what we had to have on mind any step we took on the aprons and taxi ways."

Another essential indicator was parking the sixsome of the Czech L-159s. Not that much for the weapon systems, but because of the classified devices onboard, including the Have Quick II secure communication system, Elcrodac 4-2 NATO-standard encryption device, or the Mode 4 IFF aircraft identification system. "The airplane is classified to "Secret" level and the host nation therefore provided us with relevant facilities. After flight operations, L-159 were parked in aircraft shelters and were provided security," Major Pažúr adds.

It is not usual for the Czech Armed Forces to see two major exercises combined, moreover in two countries. The more pleasing is the fact that in case of exercise Baltic Eye (Lithuania) and exercise Steadfast Jazz (Poland), they were successfully integrated together. Captain Václav Svoboda may rightly take credit for that. Although he is a genuine specialist engineer officer at the Čáslav tactical airbase, he repeatedly proved during the two-week deployment abroad that he even has familiarity with complex logistics. From billeting and messing for a fifty-strong Czech Armed Forces to arrival of tanker truck with F-34 to refuel the aircraft. His professional masterpiece was however transportation.

"Flights had to be planned not only from the Kbely and Čáslav airbase into Shiauliai, Lithuania, and then from Lithuania to Čáslav and Poznan. Ferry flights were organised in the opposite direction – from Čáslav to Poznan-Krzesiny. Similar transfers set underway on roads. Specifically, they involved drivers of a VW Caravelle van, a bus and Tatra T-810 medium support truck. The weather did not make life any easier for us. Failure of any link could affect this or that movement. That fortunately did not materialise – and everything worked out just fine," CAPT Svoboda smiles and does not hide that he would not be against possible other nomination to serve in an exercise abroad as part of a Czech Armed Forces' task force.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

Armed Forces of the Czech Republic terminated a three-year endeavour by military operational mentoring and liaison teams and military advisory teams in the Wardak and Logar provinces in Afghanistan



Fortune favoured the prepared

It was shortly after nine o'clock on 31 May 2011. A team assigned by the Czech Armed Forces 2nd deployment the OMLT in ISAF under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Michal Kucharský was just moving on a road in the Wardak province, Afghanistan. None of the Czech soldiers could know at that moment that a fifty-kilo explosive charge had been planted into a culvert near Salar community. The explosion played IVECO armoured vehicle like a matchbox.

Sergeant First Class Robert Vyrubal suffered fatal injuries. Afghan interpreter succumbed to the injuries the explosion inflicted on him shortly after the incident. Commanding officer the 2nd Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) Lieutenant-Colonel Michal Kucharský had a light injury. Sergeant First Class Ivan Vorel, the driver, ended up worse. His functions were successfully stabilised and he was transported via Logar and the Czech Field Surgical Team operating as part of the French military hospital at the Kabul International Airport to the Central Military Hospital in Prague. That was clearly one of the most difficult moments of the three year endeavour by six Czech deployments mounting the Operational Liaison and Mentoring Team in Wardak. Despite his injury, Lieutenant-Colonel Michal Kucharský decided to continue his tour, but 2nd OMLT was really destined to a large portion of bad luck. Just over four months later, on 9 October 2011, insurgents attacked combat outpost Salar and Sergeant First Class Adrian Werner was heavily injured in the firefight. After transfer into the Czech Republic, SFC Werner fought for his life over ninety-eight days in the Prague and Olomouc military hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries in the end.

"The loss of two Czech warfighters, who died during the 2nd deployment's tour of duty, was tragic for the Czech Armed Forces. Anytime the military loses its soldiers or airmen in performance of combat missions in foreign operations, it is a big misfortune," said Major-General Aleš Opata, Deputy Chief of General Staff – Director MoD Joint Operations Centre. "We dedicated a high attention to the deployment of our mentoring teams in Afghanistan, which occurred in September 2010. Both in terms of training and predeployment preparation, and equipping them with necessary materiel. The preparatory phase took one whole year. We reckoned it would not be easy. We knew it was a kinetic operation with everything it takes. That was why we paid maximum attention to it. With the exception of the second deployment, we were lucky with all the others. But it was not an easy job at all."

43rd airborne leading the way

The series of six Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams was started by 1st OMLT with commanding officer Ladislav Švejda. From 5



September 2010, the deployment was stationed together with the 6th Kandak the 4th Brigade of the 203rd Corps Afghan National Army at Camp Black Horse close to Kabul. In December 2010, they moved with five hundred Afghan soldiers and one hundred and twenty vehicles to FOB Carwile in Wardak province, where they operated until 2 May 2011. The Czech OMLT was fifty-four strong, fully equipped and capable of autonomous operation. The team comprised forward artillery observers and forward air controllers plus some additional specialists.

The command and staff (16 personnel) supported and planned activities for five mentoring teams. Four teams focused on delivering tactical training to ANA forces and the fifth one was in charge of the weapons company. The structure was complete with a combat support group including a medical team headed by a medical doctor. The mission focused on mentoring and training, which demanded extensive knowledge. Mentors should be good teachers and psychologists at the same time. They must be patient, tolerant and able to grasp cultural differences. Mentors should be able to compel Afghans to operate in what they think is inappropriate time of day and observe procedures they consider useless at the moment. "Such form of mentoring was not new to the Czech Armed Forces. Czech servicemen have already performed such assignments e.g. in SFOR, KFOR or in Iraq. They have however had a broader coverage in Afghanistan as military consultancy was expanded with accompanying Afghan forces in performance of their combat missions," General Aleš Opatá explains. "Over the decade we have engaged in Afghanistan, our capabilities have greatly grown. Czech military personnel won a considerable respect in terms of both preparation and the very approach to the conflict in the country. Afghans value the fact that Czech mentors do not push them to do something a specific way, that their job is to be of assistance to the ANA. All of that contributed to the fact that Czechs became quite popular with Afghans among advisory teams. At the same time, we won a reputation of a reliable mate to our coalition partners, especially the U.S. military. Americans had a chance to see that we do not stand back, but we act exactly where we are needed. There have been a number of so-called

green-on-blue attacks, but Czechs did not have a single case. That also bears a testament to the fact that we approached performance of the assignment quite responsibly."

Road of death

Other Czech teams then operated directly in the Wardak province, but they also faced frequent changes. The ANA kandaks they mentored changed and the area of operations partially as well. Some bases were closed; one had to be built newly. That involved quite extensive movements of materiel and personnel, which was rather challenging given the environment. Apart from mentoring, the role of Czech OMLTs was to increase the ANA kandak's operational capabilities and help ensure a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement in their area of responsibility. To that effect, hundreds of combined operations were performed to secure insurgents' weapons, explosives manufacturing plants and ensuring a safe environment. For example, one of the missions tasked to ANA soldiers was to eliminate an insurgency network in the Sayed Abad district.

Highway One (HW-1), the notorious backbone road leading from Kabul to Ghazni, also called the road of death, intersects the Sayed Abad district. It was very far from a real highway, full of holes produced by improvised explosive devices and lined with wrecked military vehicles. Czech and Afghan soldiers were also tasked to provide oversight of the most dangerous fifty-kilometre section of the road. Improvised explosive devices were activated there on daily basis.

It was not by coincidence that Lora, Haft Asiab, Soltan Kheyl, Salar, Akhakel, Sayed Abad bases and camp ANA 6 located along that road were where Czech soldiers were stationed. "Both Logar and particularly Wardak are one of the most difficult in Afghanistan. As part of Regional Command East, those were provinces with the most challenging security situation. Our service personnel had to operate in high-threat areas and did an excellent job there," General Opatá underscores. "I personally regard operations associated with military advisory activities as one of the most complex missions the Czech Armed Forces engaged in its modern



history. Our forces operated shoulder to shoulder with Afghan and coalition forces directly in combat operations and tackled issues of security and training of Afghan National Army directly on spot."

PM bringing good luck

The three years of Czech advisory teams in Wardak were literally packed with events. It is not easy to select the most significant ones. One day is nevertheless worth mentioning: 1 September 2012. On that day, Captain Martin V. woke up very soon at the Sayed Abad forward operating base. Eleven colleagues from the unit departed on the previous day to the main operating base Soltan Kheyl. They were scheduled to meet then Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Nečas during his very first visit in Afghanistan. CAPT M.V. also got dressed and set off for a nearby heliport. All of sudden, there was a bang of explosion. Before CAPT M.V. managed to recover, there was another detonation, much stronger this time. A fierce blast knocked him and the other waiting soldiers to the ground.

"We got up fast and ran for the shelter to take firing positions. We did not know whether it was a complex strike, whether the explosion would be followed an insurgency attack on our camp or not," CAPT M.V. told us shortly after the incident. "We also immediately joined efforts to help the wounded, seeking to do maximum to stabilise their life functions. Later on, we carried them away and loaded them into the arriving helicopters that took them into the military



field hospital in Bagram. We also carried away Afghan soldiers who could not be helped anymore; they were dead."

A suicide bomber carrying explosives on his body detonated himself in front of Camp Sayed Abad. A truck loaded with explosives detonated shortly after that. The consequence was tragic. The marketplace in proximity of the base was practically razed. Fifteen Afghans were killed, dozens of other service personnel suffered injuries. They also included quite a lot of Americans. The Czech accommodation facility, where twelve men slept just a day ago, was practically razed to the ground.

MAT replacing OMLT

The 5th OMLT deployment ended their operational assignment in April 2013. It was the last Czech Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team and the 1st Military Advisory Team (MAT) Wardak replaced them. "Both cases involved a military advisory and training system. OMLT units were responsible for training an Afghan National Army kandak and then mentoring and training the kandak personnel directly in combat operations. Afghan kandaks reached quite high standards of readiness after some, meeting the criteria for them to operate on their own. From then on, we only provided military advisory activities. And the 1st deployment MAT only worked on the level of battalion command," General Opatá explains. "Our teams definitely completed their assignments in September 2013. Training standards of Afghans reached the required level, so there was no reason to continue. In line with ISAF plans, ANA kandaks in Wardak and Logar reached the desired standards. So, the strategy applied toward Afghanistan was successfully accomplished. That was based on the philosophy of transition and handing over the responsibility for the country to the local government and Afghan National Security Forces." Already during the tour of the 5th OMLT and 1st MAT, Afghan and Czech soldiers were progressively withdrawn from outposts to COP Soltan Kheyl. It is no secret that the first and the last contingent are always in the most difficult position.

The first one has to build everything and set up certain processes. The last contingent is then responsible for ensuring the withdrawal of a huge volume of materiel and possibly closing down and disposing camps, which was this case. "As to withdrawing large volumes of materiel and equipment from Afghanistan, we build on the experience we gained in operations in the Balkans. That we withdraw a unit from a foreign deployed operation after some years is nothing new to us. We accomplished something like that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Kuwait and Iraq. In performance of those tasks, we gathered many lessons. We learned how to do these things right and effectively. It goes without saying that Afghanistan is somewhat more demanding. Given the geographical conditions, both naval and railway transportation are quite difficult and therefore all transfers must be done by air. We formed working team Naurus to that effect comprising representatives of the Joint Operations Centre and logistic support service," General Opatá explains. "We intend to complete withdrawal of all planned materiel in several phases. We are currently fully self-sufficient in this area and do not need any assistance from our coalition partners, which is particularly valued by the U.S. military. Of course, it is naturally not just us to withdraw from Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of personnel and hundreds of thousands tons of materiel and equipment are redeployed back home. If we are self-sufficient in this respect, it is only good for us. I should knock on wood, but all those matters have worked fine in my perspective. By now, we have transferred already roughly sixty-five percent of materiel into the Czech Republic."

Not over yet

Mentoring Afghan National Army by Czech instructors ended; only the Czech Air Advisor Team is kept in Afghanistan. We are through an important stage in the history of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic; at the same time, it does not preclude Czech soldiers from still being able to get back to Afghan kandaks as advisors sometime in the future. "End Operation



1st OMLT

Deployed: 5 Sept 2010 – 2 May 2011
Personnel: 52
Commanding officer: LTC Ladislav Švejda
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 11

2nd OMLT

Deployed: 29 Mar 2011 – 11 Oct 2011
Personnel: 54
Commanding officer: LTC Michal Kucharský
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 44

3rd OMLT

Deployed: 12 Sept 2011 – 30 Apr 2012
Personnel: 54
Commanding officer: LTC Zdeněk Míkulka
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 15

4th OMLT

Deployed: 31 Mar 2012 – 11 Nov 2012
Personnel: 54
Commanding Officer: LTC Martin Botík
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 38

5th OMLT

Deployed: 12 Oct 2012 – 29 Apr 2013
Personnel: 54
Commanding officer: MAJ Igor Jašek
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 15

1st MAT Wardak

Deployed: 28 May 2013 – 5 Oct 2013
Personnel: 59
Commanding officer: LTC Jan Zezula
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 31

1st MAT Logar

Deployed: Mar – Oct 2013
Personnel: 64
Commanding officer: MAJ Přemysl Tuček
Combat Contact Badges awarded: 31

ISAF draws nearer – it is scheduled at the end of 2014. Operations in the territory of Afghanistan beyond that timeframe are currently in the process of planning. Therefore, it may happen we will carry on our military advisory efforts. It is definitely in the interest of the Czech Armed Forces, but everything depends on the authorisation of the mandate for foreign deployments. We have our mandate endorsed till the end of 2014 with outlook till 2015, which authorises our ambition to keep roughly one hundred advisors in the country, especially for mentoring the Afghan Air Force in relation with the Flight Training Centre in Pardubice. Likewise, we do not refuse to carry on supporting the Afghan National Army in the field of military assistance," General Opatá concludes.

by Vladimír Marek
photos by Vladimír Marek and MHI

THE SONG of steel

Sounding heavenly for the hearts of soldiers, an avalanche of steel poured into the open from the woods, headed by Czech T-72M4 CZ tanks followed by almost twenty BMP 2 infantry fighting vehicles. In a couple of minutes, they managed to break the opponent's defences and stormed past the Ravensdorf training village.

That was how international exercise Saber Junction II came to a head on 21 November 2013, during which the Czech forces transitioned from manoeuvre defence into a counterattack. Held from 8 to 25 November 2013, the exercise saw the participation of ten NATO nations and Partnership for Peace countries. Held in the U.S. Joint Multinational Readiness Centre at Hohenfels, Germany, it involved nearly 590 service personnel, and 120 tanks and vehicles from the Czech Republic. All weapon systems from small infantry arms to tanks and artillery howitzers were fitted with the MILES laser system. That enabled making the training as realistic as possible. The MILES system was used on the largest scale ever in the history of the Czech Armed Forces.

by Vladimír Marek



One thousand airmen and soldiers, thirty one fixed and rotary wing assets, one hundred eighty six forward air controllers and one thousand and fifty live controls onto ground targets – that was NATO exercise Ramstein Rover 2013

Target NEUTRALIZED!

It is not an exaggeration to say that NATO exercise Ramstein Rover (RARO) has become a prestigious affair for the Czech Republic, representing its most important activity with foreign participation in 2013. The exercise was nevertheless not designed just to harmonise operations of tactical fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircrews with forward air controllers in delivering close air support to land forces. This time around, NATO expanded the requirement for preparing service personnel for upcoming deployments ISAF with a comprehensive training for a broad spectrum of operations.

Exercise Ramstein Rover 2013 was the third in a row. After the United States of America, the Czech Republic became the host nation for the second time already (2012, 2013). The training exercise was primarily organised and held at the 22nd Airbase Sedlec, Václavské náměstí nad Oslavou. The training exercise is named after city where the RARO control component – NATO Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) – is located and the acronym used for the Remotely Operated Video Enhanced Receiver (ROVER),

a device Forward Air Controllers (or Joint Terminal Attack Controllers – JTAC) use to provide precision guidance for air assets onto the target.

“The contents of this year’s exercise Ramstein Rover has already exceeded the frame for predeployment training ahead of tours in ISAF in many respects. NATO needs to maintain and develop its capabilities both for asymmetric warfare in Afghanistan as well as for any future engagements. Such live training exercises bear a huge importance for NATO and therefore have

a good potential for the future,” Colonel Harry H. Schnell of German Air Force, the RARO 2012 and 2013 Exercise Director, said exclusively for A Review. No doubt providing a host nation support (HNS) to such a large-scale exercise for three weeks is a highly challenging task. Colonel Zdeněk Bauer, co-exercise director for the Czech Armed Forces has something to say to it: “It takes almost a year to complete all the preparations. We had intensive efforts underway from November 2012,” he underscores and goes on to say that NATO does not address the invitation to participate only to the nations but also Partners from the Partnership for Peace program. Colonel Bauer highly values the fact

that the Czech Republic was repeatedly given the assignment to host NATO exercise Ramstein Rover. There were multiple candidates to host RARO 2013, but positive indications in the final evaluation of the last year’s issue again decided in favour of us. In the end, it was not the favourable location of the country in the heart of Europe, but optimal facilities on and off base and a perfect organisation that turned the tide for the Czech Republic.

Czechs managed to fully convince the organisers from AIRCOM Ramstein that hosting RARO was in the right hands. Planning for the exercise was informed by lessons learnt and intensity of training last year. The resulting product was a tactical play with a fine level of sophistication orchestrated into a comprehensive scenario. Following the motto “train as you operate”, Forward Air Controllers were faced with near real-world situations to rehearse missions they would be up to on current deployed operations. Variability of the scenario enabled evaluators to check on preparedness of FACs in various situations, from attack by opposing forces in a built-up area to vehicle convoy in contact in the open.

Colonel Bauer shared some of his observations from exercise scenarios: “The progress is that we have even more focused on developing the contents of individual scenarios. Individual incidents were undoubtedly more sophisticated. Episodes involved a higher number of land forces to make the situation ever more realistic and complex as there were multiple air assets operating concurrently in the mission training areas at various altitudes and with various types

of weapons. At any given moment, FACs had to prove their professional skills across the full spectrum of day and night operations.”

To give some stats, there were over one thousand servicemembers including 450 foreign armed forces’ personnel participating in exercise RARO 2013. The most closely followed were naturally FACs; there were 186 of them from eighteen nations, forming 39 FAC teams; the most numerous nations were Italians, Germans, Brits and Czechs. The primary focus with FACs was currency training for those who would deploy downrange before the end of 2014 to perform missions in support of coalition forces in the territory of Afghanistan.

Air support was delivered by the following assets: L-39 Albatros (Czech Republic, Slovakia), F-16 (Turkey), L-159 ALCA (CZE), JAS-39 Gripen (CZE, Hungary), Pilatus PC-9 (Slovenia, GER), Learjet L-35 (GER), Su-22 (Poland) and helicopters including Mi-24/35 (CZE), Mi-171-Sh (CZE) and Mi-17 (Slovakia).

The restricted operating zones for training were located at the Libavá and Boletice Military Training Areas, where live munitions were fired (HOT range), plus observation points at airfields in Bechyně, Písek and in barracks at Václavské náměstí nad Oslavou for so-called dry missions.

Two live attacks on opposing formations

A coalition convoy carries materiel into designated location. Several kilometres off the

base, the NATO transport is suddenly attacked by an insurgency. The unit gets under heavy enemy fire. The ground commander orders the forward air controller to request Close Air Support (CAS). Another simulated episode of the Ramstein Rover 2013 escalates, this time in the Boletice MTA. A Norwegian FAC team embedded with the ground unit immediately responds to the escalation. In a couple of minutes, a Czech Air Force L-39ZA light combat aircraft arrives the incident area. The aircrew comprising Captain Kamil Bok and First Lieutenant Petr Záparka start performing mandatory procedures. First, they need to make sure it is the right “friend” on the ground. A briefing follows for the FAC to be able to communicate necessary data on the target to be eliminated to the pilots. The key players continue to coordinate in order to be mutually sure about precise identification of the opposing force’s position and fire assets. The FAC leads the machine into the area of interest. The pilot receives the final instruction into his headset: “Cleared hot!” In no time, he evaluates the situation and as everything is the way it should be, he starts the attack. “During my first attack on the enemy antiaircraft cannon I fired fifty rounds from the GSh-23 twin gun,” CAPT Kamil Bok says shortly after landing at the Náměšť airbase and elaborates that he went for the attack with twenty degrees pitch and at speed of 550 kilometres per hour. The second assault targeted a mortar post. He used rocket weapons, specifically thirty-two S-5 rockets fired from UB-16 pods. Close air support was effective and helped the coalition forces on the ground to achieve superiority over the enemy.





Libavá MTA. For your idea – roughly forty minutes to get here and forty minutes back. The helicopters primarily perform operational missions at Velká Střelná and Milovany not far from here,” MAJ Kubálek explains and adds that using from FARP has already become a routine activity for the helo guys from Náměšť. Using local infrastructure, a facility was built there for ground specialist personnel plus a mobile system for controlling helicopter take-offs and landings in field, the BASA III system. Armourers approach two Mi-35 with numbers 7357 and 3368 that landed just a couple of minutes ago to replenish live munitions. The requirement for upcoming mission is two hundred .50 rounds from 9A624 quad gun that is mounted in the electrically controlled USPU-24 nose gun mount. Then a grenade option is prepared on each helicopter, specifically involving one hundred thirty-millimetre rounds loaded into standard grenade launcher pod. The field heliport however does

That was soon confirmed by the FAC who told the Albatross: “Target neutralised. The ground commander’s intention accomplished. Time one two zero five.” Both pilots and FACs proved their professional readiness this time as well. There is a very difficult way leading to every successful outcome. “At one moment, in the magnitude of seconds, seven key parameters have to come together in a optimal way: the right angle of attack, speed of the aircraft, altitude, accurately set sight in the cockpit, time, wind and weapon systems settings,” the experienced L-39ZA pilot from Náměšť explains.

Barely an hour passes from the incident in Boletice MTA and another of the scenarios is played there, again featuring the forward air controller and the pilot of the thirty-niner. More specifically, it will be an Italian-Slovak cooperation in support of a Czech reinforced squad mounting a foot patrol that got under fierce enemy fire from a DShK fifty calibre machinegun.

That incident also receives air support from Náměšť airbase. Shortly after eleven hours, a Slovak Air Force Albatros airplane rolls from the apron towards the runway, makes a stop at the threshold of runway three one and gets rolling fast once cleared by the tower. The plane gets airborne in a couple of seconds and turns to the first departure point Alpha. Then it proceeds to the Boletice Military Training Area via the designated corridor and reaches the range after twenty two minutes of flight. He hears the first instruction by the Italian FAC in his headset. The mission is clear: Eliminate the enemy by a joint effort! Now it is only up to two of them. Everything depends on their correct understanding and target identification. L-39 aircraft does not rank among the newest machines and does not have state-of-the-art targeting equipment.

In such cases pilots follow the rule of the thumb: what they cannot not see they cannot hit. As a matter of fact, the forward air controller is not the guarantor of target’s elimination. The final element is strictly the pilot and the FAC only guides his eyes on the ground. One cannot do without the other. It is always a complex activity. The flight effort at the Boletice MTA gets ever more intensive. For example, various types of aircraft with guns or rockets today rotate in nine flight windows. Same as



at the Libavá range they fired live munitions. At Přerov, Bechyně and Náměšť, they do dry runs. The exercise staff’s intention gets realised progressively. Forward Air Controllers have already performed hundreds of controls as part of exercise Ramstein Rover 2013.

Taking off an airstrip

FARP at Bores does not mean anything mysterious. Wrong would be those guessing it may be an alien on unknown planet. Particularly helo guys from Náměšť airbase know very well what it is about. The first word stands for a Forward Arming and Refuelling Point and the second one specifies the location in the Libavá MTA. “Forward airstrip is where a helicopter task force has been deployed for exercise Ramstein Rover. In the course of two weeks, Mi-24/35 gunships, Czech Air Force Mi-171Sh helicopters and Slovak Mi-17 transport helicopters flew sorties from here were also refuelled and rearmed,” says Major Václav Kubálek, deputy commander of the support battalion the 22nd Airbase Náměšť.

Operating from an airstrip has its pros and cons. The greatest benefit is that we save time and money. “Because they do not need to transfer from the home-base at Náměšť into the

not stay calm for long. Mi-24/35 (no. 3366) and Mi-171Sh (9799) are just returning from a mission. Those machines also need to be speedily prepped for new missions. They are slated for take-off within less than sixty minutes ...

Shortly after landing from a mission, Mi-24/35 captain CAPT Miroslav Šajban and pilot operator 1LT Beno Ge agree to give a short interview. “Above all, every CAS is about precision. There can be no underestimation. Preflight prep is the basis. The better preparation I do on the ground, the easier it is for me in the air,” says the helicopter Captain and expands on the flight mission: “It was an hour’s mission, during which we performed several attacks on the opposing force’s positions. We eliminated enemy equipment using machine gun and grenade launcher. Delivering direct air support to ground units, we closely worked with five FACs from various nations,” CAPT Šajban explains and underscores that it is essential to keep it simple for CAS. It is about maximum effectiveness. “Procedures leading to identifying and elimination of the target must be as simple and as fast as possible. The helicopter may not operate in the area longer than necessary.” Final instruction “Cleared hot!” reaches the cockpit of Mi-24/35 gunship in the order of minutes. Importantly, the

forward air controller and the helicopter captain were quick to make sure they were speaking about the same target. First-Lieutenant Beno Ge repeatedly helped NATO forces to manage the situation in the battlefield and continue their movement.

“A convoy unexpectedly got under small arms fire. We provided close air support based on the forward air controller’s request. I fired at the target from the quad rotating machinegun. It was in one attack, long burst, not several short ones. I fired all two hundred rounds. A new experience for me personally, as normally you do not shoot that many rounds in one go,” says pilot-operator of the 221st “tiger” helicopter squadron and specifies that they flew in cooperation with a Czech L-39ZA Albatros to eliminate opposing forces’ positions at Velká Střelná. He performed so-called dry mission at the Přerov airfield. Exercise planners again prepared a scenario full of action. The leader of a mechanised



squad received information there was a bunker full of arms and ammunition nearby to be secured. Coalition forces’ forward movement was nevertheless complicated by activation of an improvised explosive device. One of the warriors was sadly seriously wounded and the FAC requests MEDEVAC. An Mi-35 gunship was on guard overhead. Shortly after the Mi-17 touched down to take the casualty onboard, the opponent mounted a counterattack. A Forward Air Controller requests immediate air support from Mi-24/35. The aircrew answers the requirement by sending repeated 50 calibre bursts onto insurgents – naturally firing blanks.

FAC combat experience

Cooperation with ground manoeuvre units and an effective management of the close air support in joint operations – that is in nutshell the key responsibility of FACs. His activities must be supported by an in-depth knowledge of procedures and lessons from English speaking environment. No doubt forward air controllers are in position to significantly influence the situation on the battlefield. In reality, they must be in control of the air traffic in his area of interest. No way could FACs authorise the use of

weapon systems onboard a fixed or rotary wing asset without ensuring safety of both the pilot and people on the ground. At the same time, collateral damage on civilian property may not occur. Despite the threat of being close to the opponent and under time pressure, the action he takes must always be concise and goal-directed.

An FAC is hidden in proximity of the target, where a mock-up village with several cars was set up. The situation in his area allows a flash interview. He nevertheless may not answer three questions out of four. Notwithstanding that, a few brusque sentences he shoots off are very interesting. “Who takes a greater credit in eliminating the opponent? Neither me, nor the pilot. It is the ground commander, because the air effort is coordinated through him. The commander assigns priority to targets. He is the final authority for close air support. The commander wants some effect on the target and we choose

Evrin, Deputy Chief of Staff Plans AIRCOM Ramstein visited the trainees at the Náměšť airbase on Tuesday September 17, 2013.

Following introductory briefings by Exercise Director Colonel (GS) Harry H. Schnell and the Co-Exercise Director for the Czech Republic Colonel Zdeněk Bauer, the distinguished visitors were offered to watch a demonstration of FAC training in a tactical scenario in built-up area. In reality, that involved reaching a structure reported as having contained a major quantity of arms and ammunition. The coalition ground forces came under attack by the opponent and got pinned down by heavy fire. They requested air support by an Mi-24/35 gunship. The machine ran three assaults on the opposing formation and fired the quad machine gun and cannon to disengage them from contact and advance farther.

The next part of the program invited the guests to attend a static demonstration of the



RBS-70 air defence system and took them to the flight line to watch preflight preparation including live ammunition loaded for upcoming missions. At the end, they were introduced to the procedures guiding coordination between pilots and forward air controllers in guidance onto the target on a simulation system.

“We strived to host exercise Ramstein Rover in the Czech Republic again. It is both a matter of prestige and an excellent example of cooperation among NATO nations’ armed forces at the same time,” First Deputy Minister of Defence Daniel Košťoval said. Chief of Defence Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel highlighted the outcome of the exercise for the Czech military as follows: “Such large-scale military exercises provide additional valuable experience for the Czech Armed Forces service personnel. Participation of twenty nations and particularly working closely with them give us opportunities at very affordable cost to train activities we could not do alone. There is a multiple benefit on our side we will therefore continue to assign a high priority to the Ramstein Rover training exercise.”

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

Czech Armed Forces Review managed to visit the Joint Air Power Competence Centre in Kalkar, Germany, and it was not by a magic wand that this premiere was born.

CENTER reshaping the air power

The visit required that a specific administrative procedure be completed first. The efforts all involved parties exerted however paid off generously – the outcome is an exclusive report on a unique NATO facility that tackles strategic issues of transforming and building NATO's air power.

After a nine hours' drive, we are entering North Rhine-Westphalia. Close to the border on the Netherlands, there is a town named Kalkar. The local von Seydlitz barracks houses our destination – the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC), a multinational installation, which is not a part of NATO structures, but its analyses and proposals for airpower and military use of the outer space are central for NATO. The Czech Republic enjoys the privilege of having its representation at the JAPCC from the very inception of this unique NATO facility, from January 2005. At the moment, the Czech senior national representative in the JAPCC is Lieutenant-Colonel Tibor Benetin. He was assigned to Kalkar for a three-year tour – from August 2012 till July 2015 and he is already the fourth Czech to have served with the Joint Air Power Competence Centre.

The Joint Air Power Competence Centre is a sort of a Centre of Excellence (COE), but

it can also be described as a center of scholarship that creates vision for more or less farther future. There are currently sixteen COE centers formally accredited in NATO covering individual speciality areas. The Czech public is naturally most familiar with the Joint Chemical Biological Radiation & Nuclear Defence COE (JCBRN COE) that is based at Vyškov, Czech Republic. While air power issues are also the subject for the Analysis and Simulation Centre for Air Operations (CASPOA) based in France, the breadth of the subject and its complexity in particular put JAPCC Kalkar into an exclusive position in this subject-matter area. That is recognised by the two NATO strategic command headquarters, Allied Command Transformation (ACT) Norfolk and Allied Command Operations (ACO) Mons that receive most of the JAPCC products, analyses and proposals informing their decision-making processes, naturally in relevant quality standards and at quite a short notice, normally within six months. In 2013, JAPCC has an assigned capacity and allocated funding for twelve projects, including Joint Force Protection Capability Development, Optimising NATO Air Surveillance, Command & Control – Leadership Improvement, NATO Air Advisor and Joint Personnel Recovery.

With all due respect for the above endeavours, let us shortly entertain two essential projects for 2013. The key event for JAPCC was the 2013 air and space power conference with focus on Air Power Post Afghanistan held in Kleve on 8-10 October 2013. Obviously, discourse covered air power development as operations in Afghanistan are brought to an end and the response to challenges arising from the drawdown of coalition forces from Afghanistan. In addition, experts discussed future development of air and space power as well as joint



projects in that area. The conference comprised four panels (NATO's air strategy after Afghanistan; Unmanned technology: key to success or limiting factor; Air power: independent action and independent effect; Education and training after Afghanistan: dawn of real joint efforts?) and saw the attendance of many officials and leading experts of NATO nations' armed forces.

Some four dozen personalities were invited to represent the Czech Republic. The organisers declared it would have been a missed opportunity not to participate in the conference with a very new discussion format.

Another key task facing the JAPCC professional community is the project called NATO Air Power – The New Vector, which NATO tasked directly to the directorate of Joint Air Power Competence Centre Kalkar. The desired product is essentially a vision for NATO air power till 2050. As a matter of fact, efforts to develop such a key strategic document involve senior leading experts from all around the world, including considerable number of external collaborators. The analytical part of the project was just completed and the final version is scheduled for delivery at the end of the year. The breadth of the specialist work is reflected in the allocated funding that totals EUR 100,000.00 of which twenty percent will be paid by the JAPCC and the remaining eighty thousand EUR will be covered by Allied Command Transformation.

Behind the scenes

The backstage of any military installation is undoubtedly intriguing and the more it holds true for facilities housing international community. A Review was granted such an opportunity. By the way of introduction, first the word comprising JAPCC needs to be explained. Joint, meaning "all services", in reality comprises 85 percent air officers and NCOs, eight percent land, five percent naval service personnel and two percent civilians. In other words, blue is the colour most frequently worn at the JAPCC. Next, multinational representation should be elaborated on: there are professionals from seventeen NATO nations assigned to work there at the moment, while Germans, Americans, Italians and Dutch have the largest representation. The Czech Republic has bid one post, which ranks it among Canada, Hungary, Norway or Romania in terms of personnel strength. According to current information, the Czech Republic is likely to maintain its current personnel strength in the future.

As a matter of fact, JAPCC is stepping up its outreach efforts to the effect of increasing the number of signatory nations to accede to the JAPCC Kalkar. National armed forces possess specific professional knowledge and therefore all national expert in various occupational specialism and background are welcome. There has been a variety of activities recently underway to expand participation in JAPCC, both in NATO and the European Union and beyond. In particular, there were contacts with the Russian Federation, specifically at the Lipetsk airbase, which Lieutenant-Colonel Benetin also took part in. It goes without saying that close cooperation with the industry is a must. A high professionalism shown by the top management provides an effective operation of any institution.

In case of JAPCC Kalkar, the new director – three-star General Frank Gorenc of the U.S. Air Force – provides that sort of guarantee. After official appointment, the position of Director of the JAPCC will be added to his standing portfolio (Commander U.S. Air Forces Europe, U.S. Air Forces Africa, Allied Air Command and Ramstein Air Base). Additional top-level flag officer posts (Executive Director, Assistant Director Transformation, Assistant Director Capabilities) are presently held by the representatives of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands and Italy. LTC Tibor Benetin is posted in the Policy & Doctrines branch the Defence Planning section, and is responsible for input to the NATO defence planning process. His boss is Colonel Francesco Turrissi of Italy. To complete the picture, JAPCC Kalkar reports to the Steering Committee (SC) that comprises NATO Air Chiefs or their deputies from signatory nations, plus the Senior Resource Committee (SRC), which also approves and oversees an effective spending of funds allocated for the operations of this top-level NATO centre. To describe the JAPCC personnel's engagement in all NATO and non-NATO committees and subcommittees would undoubtedly make a dedicated article. Nevertheless, the following two facts should be mentioned at least: the first is that they are currently involved in roughly sixty activities, and the second one is that the Czech representative is not left aside either.

Since the beginning of May earlier this year, LTC Benetin has served as secretary of a multinational team of pilots and ground personnel consulting professional lessons learnt in flight personnel training. Obviously, the boom of reorganisation efforts affected JAPCC Kalkar too. By the time this article gets published, the new

organisational structure of the centre will most probably have been approved. It is designed to make the JAPCC leaner and more effective, including costs. Speaking about money, another "sensitive" piece of information may be mentioned: the authorised JAPCC budget for 2013 totals EUR 927,900. A collective effort of the signatory nations however drove it down by about EUR 120,000. By the way, the Czech Republic also has to contribute its proportionate part, which amounts to exactly EUR 14,289.22 and serves to cover the expenditures associated with the employment of the Czech air officer at JAPCC.

A military professional's career

Some may think LTC Benetin's service career lacked action, but the contrary is true. After graduation from the Air College in Košice, the air traffic management program, he joined a state air defence division in Brno in 1987. He served there for nine years as an air navigation officer-operator. Then he was assigned to serve a tour in IFOR in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was deployed in Arapuša, from where he controlled NATO aircraft onto ground targets. As a Forward Air Controller or FAC in short, he provided terminal guidance operations primarily for NATO F-16 and F-15 supersonic fighters taking off from Aviano airbase, Italy. "In addition to training missions, we were also involved in direct support to land forces," LTC Benetin says and describes a composite air raid on a single target.

A year passed like nothing, and when he came back he was transferred from the air defence to the air force. The essential thing was however that he stayed with the blue guys. The Náměšť airbase became his new home. The tower at the Náměšť airbase was where he served in several service assignments associated with air traffic management. Another test for him was the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). As a military observer, his task was to work to stabilise the situation. First five months in the north of the country, where he monitored movement by Liberian forces and then seven months in the central part of Sierra Leone as an operations duty officer. Although he is unwilling to share the details, he nevertheless shortly remembered his service with so-called blue helmets. "To describe the reality on the ground there would mean to go several centuries back

in time. No wonder more than a half of my colleagues caught malaria there. But that was not the only threat present. Much worse were ten-to-fourteen year old boys recruited by the Liberian army. They were on narcotics most of the time, but armed with assault rifles at the same time. You never knew whether they would attack or not," Lieutenant-Colonel Benetin adds.

His next assignment took him to the ATC training centre at Prague Ruzyně, where he passed his rich professional experience on to the students of the Defence University. Then he was reassigned to the Joint Force Command in Olomouc to serve there for years as deputy chief of the air navigation, radio and air traffic control service section. He began working at the flight safety inspectorate in 2009. From February till September 2010, he was sent for a tour in KFOR and posted as the director of tactical operations centre Multinational Brigade Center. From 1 August 2012, he was assigned to JAPCC Kalkar in the Federal Republic of Germany. "The Joint Air Power Competence Centre is a huge professional leap ahead for me," LTC Tibor Benetin concludes and elaborates: "The better your English is the smoother you start here. They would offer a helping hand, but not lead you by yours. You are required to show a maximum professionalism in all respects," the Czech Armed Forces representative in the JAPCC says and emphasises the standards of professional conduct in the multinational community. "First you need get oriented in the flags so to say. There are differences among individual nations, which must reflect in your knowledge of this or that national specificity.

Of course, personal restraint and team spirit needs to be showed," the Czech professional states. "I feel here like in the Czech Republic. It does compare, leaving aside the twelve hundred kilometres separating us from our home back in the city of Olomouc.

My wife has been here with me from the outset; she quitted her job in this respect. It is not about much time off here. My working hours at JAPCC are from eight till 5 pm. From time to time, a document is required to be completed in free time as well," LTC Benetin states and adds that their current homework to learn German intensively. Lieutenant-Colonel Benetin has already been through the first third of his tour abroad. Much like him, his superior also gave a positive appraisal in the contrary direction.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



Feldkirchen, Germany, was the venue to a prestigious exercise of NATO and Partner military medical services; the members of the Czech Armed Forces Military Medical Service were involved.

Vigorous Warrior 2013



It is a couple of minutes past twelve o'clock as a U.S. Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk touches down on one of the helipads, carrying two wounded Italian soldiers onboard. The pilot prompts a French/Dutch medical team to take both patients on stretchers into ambulances. Then they transport them into a NATO field medical facility nearby. The Black Hawk is shortly replaced by German Bell UH-1 helos as the rescue mission of the NATO exercise Vigorous Warrior 2013 continues ...

followed current requirements of the signatories to exercise Vigorous Warrior 2013 for rehearsing interoperability among individual teams in multinational modular system of medical support to an imaginary military operation.

"The key factor of this exercise is to test the ability to cooperate among individual modules. Each module contributes to the field medical facility as well as other components of the medical support system, but everything must fit into an effective and efficient operation of the whole. The Czech Armed Forces service personnel

"If we want to maintain the current high level of professional abilities possessed by the members of the Czech Armed Forces' Military Medical Service, we need to take part in such NATO training exercises," COL Májovský underscores. The Czech Republic and the Czech Armed Forces also had a representative in the exercise control component: Colonel Petr Král, the chief of medical services department of the Czech Armed Forces Military Medicine Agency, who led the HICON team in exercise VW 2013.



Training exercise for servicemembers of NATO nations' military medical services named Vigorous Warrior and organised by the Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE) continued with the second act. After a premiere run in Hungary (2011), the next edition took place at Feldkirchen, Germany, on September 16-27, 2013. The primary venue was the Gäuboden Kaserne barracks that is the station for one of Bundeswehr's key medical training institutions – the Medical Instruction Regiment.

Scenarios of exercise Vigorous Warrior saw an active involvement of over six hundred specialists from eleven armed forces of both NATO and Partnership for Peace nations. Medical units were faced with various simulated situations, ranging from trivial diseases to heavy traumas demanding immediate medical aid. Everything

participating in the exercise have a rich experience in foreign operations so they did not have to have any dedicated preparation for the Vigorous Warrior. They joined the exercise in full from the outset," says Colonel Peter Májovský, Deputy Director of the Military Medical Department of the MoD Support Division, who was assigned as deputy head of the medical evaluators team (MEDEVAC Team) at Ex VW.

"The played situations were completely realistic and progressively escalated. Nothing was announced beforehand. Mass casualty situations were probably the most demanding. Those posed tough tests of functioning interoperability in the NATO field medical facility, moreover under time pressure and mental stress," COL Májovský says and speaks highly of the CZE Military Authorities' decision to take part in VW 13.

"In preparation for the exercise, every nation offered its professional know-how. The exercise control components then selected the modules they were interested in. The key goal of the exercise was to prove the multinational modular medical support system concept, the ability to operate jointly in tackling individual scenarios and identify possible shortfalls for further analysis and determining viable solutions. By the way, the modules tested both the way their equipment works together and professional qualifications of the medical personnel, which naturally included relevant language requirements. Their English had to be good enough for them to communicate seamlessly in the multinational environment, particularly in high-stress situations. Slightest misunderstanding could lead to fatal consequences for the patient," COL Král explains



and adds that VW was not about sending over a huge numbers of personnel of volumes of materiel into Feldkirchen. "Functioning of the whole medical support system always goes first. It is not acceptable that there would be too many modules of one kind and others would be lacking," COL Král says and points to the current NATO document Medical Evaluation Manual (AMedP-27), whose principles were proven practically at exercise Vigorous Warrior.

Czech contribution

Vigorous Warrior also saw the participation of Czech Armed Force's Military Medical Service personnel. Specifically, they were assigned to the primary care ward, an out-patient psychiatric unit, the PECC (Patient Evacuation Coordination Cell) that coordinates and controls transportation of the wounded and ill in the area of operations, and the so-called MEDEVAC (Medical Evacuation) team, whose mission was to transport the wounded and ill from incident areas to, Role 1 or Role 2LM into Role 2E for definitive treatment. To complete the picture, a Czech Land Rover Defender 130LD TD5 ambulance was also involved in VW 2013.

On the whole, nine military professionals and one vehicle represented the Czech Republic. "Our primary mission was to care for out-patients during the day. More accurately, we provided preventive and diagnostic medical care

vehicle. "It was important for us to have tested for example compatibility of radio communications or stretchers in near real-world situations. Details associated with equipment onboard vehicles often make the difference in striking success," Warrant Officer Martin Studecký points out. Grumps could point out the less numerous Czech representation in this training exercise of NATO medical services. "I do not hide that we had planned a higher participation of Czech servicemembers, but reorganisation and particularly the restricted funds allocated for exercises abroad were the limiting factors. But we nevertheless value the opportunity to send a team like this. The important thing is that we were an active element both among the trainees and in the VW control and evaluation staff," explains Colonel Zoltán Bubeník, Deputy Director of Czech Armed Forces Military Medicine Agency, and discusses future ambitions of the Czech Republic or the Czech Armed Forces. "The next run of this exercise will be held in two years' time. Year 2015 is an optimal timeframe to practise a broader cooperation, because the Czech Armed Forces Military Medical Service will then perform assignments in support of the Czech brigade task force and then for an EU Battle Group."

Colonel Bubeník outlines the intentions of the management of the Czech Military Medical Service. "We understand the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have already indicated their interest in hosting exercise Vigorous Warrior 2015.



for coalition soldiers and defence civilians according to the commander's decision," describes Major Bohuslav Doležal, who was involved together with two nurses in supporting the activity of the primary care unit in VW 2013.

A part of their team was a psychiatric care module led by First-Lieutenant Veronika Mikusová: "My clients were persons who had suffered acute stress. I worked with individuals in the in-patient ward in addition. In fact, it was a standard activity for me. The environment and international cooperation was the only difference to what I do at home. I value the opportunity to compare the performance of our profession with foreign colleagues. I have learnt new valuable lessons."

Exercise Vigorous Warrior 2013 also furnished new observations for the crew of the Land Rover Defender 130LD TD5 softskin ambulance

Our ambitions will now be subject to a thorough debate, including the economic aspect. The decision should be made by spring next year at latest. But we already have a vision how to modify this NATO/PIP military medical services exercise. Scenarios would include activities associated with biological defence and veterinary service. That is because those have been and most likely will be highly topical issues," Colonel Zoltán Bubeník states.

Fully comparable to foreign colleagues

VIP and media day was scheduled for the twenty-fifth day of September at Feldkirchen. After opening briefings by deputy director MILMED

COE Navy Captain Dr. Andreas Dierich and German Armed Forces Surgeon General LTG Dr. Ingo Patschke, the visitors had an opportunity to tour individual specialised facilities, including an in-patient ward of the NATO multinational field hospital. The guests included officials of the Czech Armed Forces Military Medical Agency and the MoD Military Medical Department led by Brigadier-General Božetěch Jurenka and Colonel Richard Kraus. "This NATO medical exercise is very important for Czech military medical professionals. They gained both new organisational experience and additional professional skills in working in multinational teams. Participation in such prestigious events is definitely a benefit," Brigadier-General Jurenka said and added that exercise Vigorous Warrior 2013 confirmed for him once again that the members of the Czech Armed Forces Military Medical Service are competitive and fully comparable to their colleagues in NATO. "When we were introduced to operations of individual modules comprising the multinational field hospital, we could compare where we lag behind and contrarily where our know-how is better than that of our NATO partners. We are truly doing well. Everything runs really fast in this branch and we have to respond adequately," Brigadier-General Jurenka said and emphasised that, besides funding, progress builds on cooperation with foreign armed forces' professionals, both on operational deployments and in training activities.



"Exercise Vigorous Warrior 2013 gave us an opportunity to eye-witness an effective way for military medical services to perform on multinational level. It is about mutual cooperation," explains Colonel Vladimír Lengvarský, the Surgeon General of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, and turns to cooperation with the Czech Armed Forces. "Slovak Parliamentarians already endorsed deployment of our medical doctors and medics to man the field surgical teams in the French hospital in Kabul along with their Czech colleagues. Starting next year, we will send our specialists into the FST. There will be three rotations lasting four months each. Maximum five-member medical teams will serve tours. We are very much looking forward to working with Czech professionals," COL Lengvarský adds.

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



Czech EOD team among the best in the world

Those awarded by the Defence Minister Vlastimil Pícek with high Czech defence decorations on May 8th earlier this year included the members of EOD company of the 151st Engineer Battalion the 15th Engineer Brigade. The Cross of Merit of the Minister of Defence 1st class was bestowed upon Captain Martin Turek, an EOD company commander. "This is a recognition of the effort by the whole unit that has operated in Afghanistan on a longterm basis," Captain Turek explained. An EOD team was a part each rotation posting the PRT Logar (ISAF) from 2008.

The history of major service achievements by Czech EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) Team nevertheless goes back to 2004–2007, when Czech EOD specialists were stationed at the Kabul International Airport. The EOD detachment provided support to forces in case there was an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) or an air accident. At the same time, they performed mine clearing at the airport. There were plenty of particularly Soviet munitions around, because there was a Soviet base located right in that spot. Several hundred items were disposed over the years. A 500-kg bomb was discovered right at the main runway in 2005. The disposal was complicated by the fact that it was an airport with regular traffic and no damage to the infrastructure was acceptable. "Explosive devices

were normally transferred to a disposal location several kilometres away. In case of apparent corrosion or possible mechanical damage, the disposal was performed on spot," recalls Warrent Officer Milan Vrzáň who was in command of the EOD team then. "The found bomb was so rusty that it was not possible to remove the fuze anymore." After two weeks of preparations involving over one hundred people from twenty nations, they separated the fuze from the main charge by a controlled explosion. They actually cut the bomb in half and the charge was taken away for a safe disposal. "The location had to be secured and cleared. Protective mounds were built too. In case of explosion, there was a threat of blast or dispersal of fragments up to one mile."

The Cross of Merit was not the only decoration those warriors received. On 28 February 2013, Deputy Chief of General Staff – Director MoD Joint Operations Centre Major-General Aleš Opata bestowed the Czech Armed Forces Combat Contact Badge on eleven members of the EOD company the 151st Engineer Battalion. The badge was established in 2011 by an order of the Minister of Defence and Director of MoD Joint Operations Centre awards it soldiers and airmen who got into contact with the enemy while under threat, wounded, or saved their comrades or performed other missions, under direct threat to life.

"On our joint responses to IED incidents and later also during Route Clearance Patrols (RCP), we were attacked by Taliban warriors," First-Lieutenant Robert Niesyt explained. "We were getting into real contact with the opposing forces; it was not just two shots fired in the air. Our warfighters have always proved to have been well trained; they often assisted coalition forces under fire and proved personal bravery. For example, a vehicle of the team led by Radek Mazúr hit an IED and simultaneously we got under a small arms fire, but the gunner from the vehicle that suffered the hit answered fire too. Some of our soldiers also received the U.S. Combat Action Badge," Captain Turek added. All decorated soldiers have a similar experience. They have been downrange several times already and performed missions together with U.S. Army EOD units.

One of the tasks was to increase security in the Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team's area



A warrior decorated with the Combat Contact Badge



Mine roller, a specialised vehicle used for RCP

of operations. On one of our RCP routes, when the EOD team escorted a convoy, the dismounted warfighters got in contact. "We answered fire until the arrival of helos that provided cover and monitored the area. After fire got less intensive we carried on searching the roads while enemy fire was still there, although not that intensive," Sergeant First Class Michal Mairych recalled. "It is a special feeling. But in such moment one watches for the perimeter and works completely automatically. Thanks to the drills, you acquire habits for situations like these and thoughts of danger or fears would only come up later on," Sergeant First Class Ladislav Valenta added. Throughout their deployment in Afghanistan, Czech EOD performed to very high standards; their members were often recognised and appreciated by coalition forces, including with the title Hero of the Week and Hero of the Battle Space. Sergeant First Class Václav Auterský was the first one to obtain the award in 2011, Sergeant First Class Karel Václavík became the next holder at mid-2012 and Sergeant First Class Pavel Ernst was honoured to receive the title at the beginning of 2013. Hero of the Week title is awarded by the brigade team commander based on proposals by commanding officers of contingents deployed in the Logar and Wardak provinces. SFC Ernst received the award from the Czech contingent commander, Colonel Josef Kopecký. "The title is usually awarded to heavily wounded or fallen US Army soldiers, so it came as a complete surprise to me," SFC Ernst said. He became the hero of the week for his excellent job in disposing several IED systems in the province and for a six-month cooperation as well as for own discovery and disposal of a Remotely Controlled Improvised Explosive Device (RCIED) thanks to own intuition, terrain analysis and a metal detector. "HUSKY vehicles with a special ground penetrating radar did not find anything on the route, but there were apparent indications that an IED could be planted there." The two previous heroes of the week have a similar experience. Moreover, Sergeant First Class Václavík with his team helped an injured coalition soldier while having to answer fire themselves. "members of the EOD company the 151st Engineer Battalion have always proven a high professionalism, courage, bravery and commitment," Lieutenant-Colonel Zdeněk Hejpetr, chief of the technical and information support branch of the 15th Engineer Brigade, joined in. The fourth title Hero of the Week was awarded to Sergeant First Class Petr Godeša in the spring of 2013. On their tours in Afghanistan, Czech EOD teams use equipment in the inventory of the Czech Armed Forces, but they also work with U.S. Army equipment. In July 2013, the 15th Engineer Brigade took over some of the equipment, for instance eight Talon EOD robots, night vision devices and additional EOD materiel, from the U.S. Army as a part of the U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program.

by CPT Miroslava Štenclová
photos by CPT Miroslava Štenclová,
Olga Haladová and EOD units
of the 15th Engineer Brigade

Thanks to a donation by the United States, the Czech Armed Forces' inventory now includes Talon EOD robots

Talon complementing Theodor

On our travels to Afghanistan, we often spotted Czech EOD specialists working with Talon robots they had lent from their American colleagues. They had nothing but praise for the robots in Afghan conditions and frequently mentioned Talon robots could be a very good augmentation of EOD units' inventory.

That wish materialised on Tuesday 30 July 2013. The U.S. Ambassador in the Czech Republic H.E. Norman Eisen handed over materiel valued at USD 3.2 million in a ceremony to the 15th Engineer Brigade as a part of the U.S. Security Assistance program. The delivery comprised eight Talon EOD robot systems, twelve night vision kits, four EOD-9 suits, four spectrometers to identify chemicals used for home-made explosives, 8 kits of special non-magnetic tools for EOD specialists and 48 metal detectors.

Supplies from the US represent one of the most important sources for the MoD outside the budget. The primary U.S. foreign assistance programs include the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS).

"We have gathered here to bring to fruition a successful cooperation of two years. This ceremony bears a testament to the fact that the

Czech Republic became one of the lead nations in NATO for EOD operations," Ambassador Eisen said to mark the occasion.

Assisted in the Ground Zero

EOD Talon robot was developed by Foster-Miller and the company claims it is one of the fastest EOD robots that can travel through sand, water and snow as well as climb stairs and operate in contaminated areas. The operator may be up to 1,000 metres away from the unit. It was first used operationally in Bosnia in 2000 and has proved extremely well both in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Talon was used in Ground Zero after the September 11 attacks searching debris for 45 days without electronic failure.



The robot is 57.2cm wide, 86.4cm long and height 42.7cm with robotic arm manipulator stowed. It can reach as high as 130 centimetres with the arm extended. The arm has three degrees of freedom and can handle objects weighing from 13 to 34 kilograms (according to the length of extension). The robot is fitted with a system comprising several cameras, including one infrared, which enables night vision without the need for illumination. It is also fitted with universal pliers that can hold a variety of additional tools such as wire cutter, drill or earth removing tools. The weight depends on the type and quantity of components and the type of batteries the robot is equipped with. The manufacturer states the robot weighs from 52 to 71 kilograms (the reconnaissance variant only weighs 27 kilograms). It is just a fraction of the weight of tEODor robot in the inventory of the Czech EOD service, which reaches 360 kilograms with the robotic arm manipulator and batteries.

Complementing one another

"Each of the two types of robots is designed for different jobs and for different types of operations. The conditions in Afghanistan were particularly suitable for TALON, where its mobility and weight proved a great advantage. Also, it does not take so much space, both for storage and transport," Sergeant First Class Miroslav T. explains. "We used it almost for all EOD activities we were up to in Afghanistan: from charge planting to removing soil, handling suspicious objects, reconnaissance. We did not do without it even after our mission was over – we used it as an optical device for analysis." Likewise, commander of EOD company the 15th Engineer Brigade Captain Martin Turek underscores the American donation greatly increased the range of missions the unit is able to perform. "These robots provided by the United States have naturally expanded our capabilities and broadened our spectrum of operations. There are situations demanding smaller robots that are easier to work with. Thanks to the two systems, we are now able to cover the whole range of jobs," Captain Turek explained.

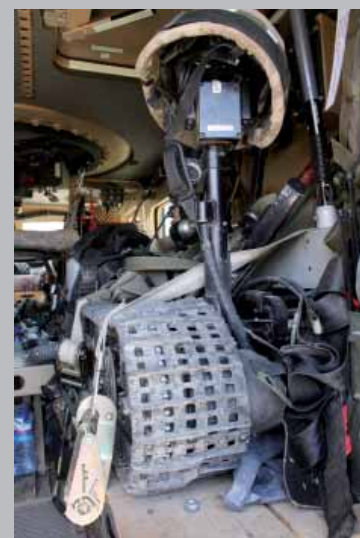
"Each of the two robots is designed for different use. Talon is excellent in desert and difficult climatic conditions. It is rather used for offensive work. But if you are up to a terrorist attack at an airport or in a built-up area requiring some precision work, you will choose tEODor." Czech EOD service had tEODor robot deployed at the Kabul International Airport for four years. Its great advantage was that it could carry a variety of equipment, including scissors, chop saws, aku screwdrivers etc., simply everything possibly needed. TEODor was able to negotiate heavy obstacles standing in the way. It was able to cut sheet metal, drill holes in walls, break windows and tow vehicles. But it was impossible for two EOD personnel to unload it from a vehicle operatively.

Talon also has a weapons payload of up to ninety kilograms as a weapons carrier. It can travel maximum 6.6 kilometres per hour. The robot's total operating time depends on batteries it is equipped with. In case it has lithium-ion batteries, it can be on standby without charging for up to seven days. It should be able to work for as many as eight hours. In case fitted only with standard lead batteries, it is significantly less. "Actual operating time depends on a range of factors. It is not just the tape of battery; the quality of charging is also important. The ambient temperature also plays a role. In the domestic environments, it is able to operate for about three hours without recharging," Sergeant First Class Miroslav T. says.

Talon is able to perform not only EOD missions but serve as a carrier of multiple infantry weapons fired by operators from a stand-off position. In 2007, these robots were employed in Iraq as carriers for M249 light machineguns in the inventory of U.S. Army. But they can also serve as carriers of M16 assault rifles, M240 machineguns, 40mm grenade launchers, or 50 calibre M82 Barrett sniper rifles.

"This donation will also enable us to do full predeployment training before our men and women in uniform are sent downrange for operations," First Deputy Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces Major-General Miroslav Žižka concluded.

by Vladimír Marek



Flight missions of pilots from Czech Air Force
21st and 24th airbase in the Lithuanian airspace

Baltic Eye

The report the ground specialist gives to the pilot is simple, but tells it all. "Aircraft 6066 ready for flight, all works performed, refuelled with five thousand three hundred pounds, two CATM training missiles fixed."

A pair of L-159 ALCA subsonic aircraft with numbers 6070 and 6066 arrive runway threshold at several minutes to go to ten o'clock. They start off soon and a couple hundred metres on they lift off the Šiauliai airport in Lithuania. Pilots of one-five-niners 1LT Radek Zbojník and 1LT Kateřina Hlavsová turn to heading for the area designated TSA 4. The flight line however does not remain calm for long. Honeywell F124-GA-100 engines are again heard a couple of minutes later as a pair of L-159T1 double-seaters are getting ready for take-off. Organised on the basis of a longterm cooperation between the Czech and Lithuanian armed forces, exercise Baltic Eye has just started its morning missions...

Benefitting all trainees

"Baltic Eye is a preparatory phase for the 212th Tactical Squadron in the run-up to the NATO live exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013. After a week of performing air tasking orders, the Czech Air Force contingent will transfer from Lithuania to Poland, specifically to the Poznan airfield and start performing its assignment under the exercise scenario. The Czech Air Force assigned six L-159A aircraft and four JAS-39C supersonic fighters. L-159 light combat aircraft will fly training missions from the Poznan airbase in Poland and the Gripen will operate from their home base at Čáslav using in-flight refuelling capability provided by a French KC-135FR tanker," says Lieutenant-Colonel Jakub Štefánek, deputy chief of combat training section the Czech Air Force Command, and gives a positive evaluation of the readiness standards

achieved by the tactical units of the Czech Air Force.

It is no secret that the flight effort by Czech Air Force pilots in the Lithuanian airspace is designed to enhance professional preparedness of the local specialists, particularly air traffic controllers, for combat use in the Control and Reporting Centre (CRC) Karmelava, who have to complete mandatory number of controls on aerial targets. Based on annual plan, there was a timeframe set in each month for a pair of L-159s to fly from Čáslav airbase to Šiauliai to help maintain the air defence system of the Baltic States to the standards required by NATO. It is correct to use the past tense, because those one-day missions ended in spring earlier this year. "The flight effort was actually concentrated into exercise Baltic Eye. A week-long deployment provides much higher effectiveness and enables a maximum flight training intensity," LTC Jakub Štefánek states.

Another bonus is interoperability training between the Czech Air Force flight personnel and the NATO task force that provides defence coverage from the Šiauliai airport to the airspace of Baltic States as a part of the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS). This time around, the assignment was performed by Belgian Air Force quick reaction alert pilots with F-16s.

Training areas designated for flight missions in the Baltic (TSA 3 and TSA 4) offer excellent conditions for flight missions. Although they did not practice overwater flights, the exercise provided other valuable professional experiences for them. "A flat terrain without any

salient features and proximity of the sea allow us to perform some missions we do not fly back at home," the commanding officer of the Czech contingent explains and specifies that live ammunition is not used in exercise Baltic Eye. Aviation fans however realise that L-159A have Captive Air Training Missiles (CATM) on their pylons – practice AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles without warheads.

Interceptor vs Target

"There are four flight missions planned for every day of flying activity. Each of them involves a pair of L-159s with one aircraft acting as an interceptor and the other as a target. CRC Karmelava controls them onto one another in assigned TSA area. After visual identification, they switch the roles. Our Lithuanian colleagues join the missions onboard the double-seaters," explains Captain Denis Dúbravčík, the leader of flight 3 the 212th Tactical Squadron and adds that in exercise Baltic Eye 2013 they operate two of the eight upgraded L-159A subsonic combat airplanes.

In this context, it should be mentioned the Government of the Czech Republic signed a contract with Aero Vodochody in mid-2009 on upgrading the first batch of eight L-159A aircraft. The upgrade package installs new communication systems, software enhancement and cockpit modernisation.

There were ten pilots from the 212th Tactical Squadron to take part in Baltic Eye 2013.

It was a premiere run for four of them. "It is my first foreign exercise with the one-five-niner," First-Lieutenant Martin Svoboda says several minutes after landing from almost a two-hour mission. "I took off runway one four and turned to two seven zero. I climbed to flight level thirteen thousand feet and proceeded into assigned TSA 3 area. A CASA transport airplane was my target in this case," the pilot says and



describes the control onto C-295M airplane with tail number 0455: "The CRC is fully authorised to determine the geometry of the manoeuvre, indeed it is up to professional skills of the controller on the ground. In a way, I am a training asset and act as a remote controlled model airplane obeying by the word. The control must get me into an optimal position to perform visual identification of the target. In my ten controls onto CASA, the rate of success varied."

Baltic Eye scenarios

Description of a several days' flight effort by pilots from Čáslav and Kbely airbase during exercise Baltic Eye would undoubtedly make a dedicated publication. Therefore, the reader will be offered three training missions with different focus. The main role in the first mission was played by a pair of two Advanced Light Combat Aircraft (ALCA). They performed fourteen controls in the fighter vs target mode in TSA 4, which in reality is located over the Šiauliai airport. "After take-off, we simulated the target. The ground CRC assigned us a route with heading and speed. Our flight level was three thousand metres and the fighter flew approximately seven hundred metres below us. The fighter was controlled from the front hemisphere onto the target in a turn. His task was to identify us visually," Captain Tomáš Brušík says and goes on to explain that it is the distance that allows pilots to read the insignia and figures on the fuselage, number of people in the cockpit, or whether the machine is armed with weapons or not. The required data is then transferred to the Control and Reporting Centre Karmelava.

The job is then complete for the fighter interceptor. Then they switch roles and fly the mission actually with the same flight parameters. Obviously, such training events benefit both parties. Professional improvements of ground specialists in Baltic States have already been



discussed. They have to undergo such drill in order for the curve of the control to get as close to ideal one as possible. In other words, they bear the responsibility for effectively controlling the fighter onto the target. "Our plus is that we train those procedures without the use of radar. We do not fly such missions frequently in the Czech Republic. Although our role is in fact passive in such scenarios, as we strictly follow instruction of the controller, it definitely brings professional benefit for both parties," the experienced L-159 ALCA aircraft pilot argues.

The second example from the spectrum of missions is a joint training involving a couple of one-five-niners with the pair of Belgian QRA F-16 fighters. Obviously, the scenario assigned to the subsonic airplanes with clearly visible inscription Czech Air Force on the fuselage is to act as violators of the airspace. Their conduct initiated a Tango Scramble involving the two F-16s. In a couple of minutes, the F-16s approach the ALCAs. The QRA leader performs identification of the target and use standard procedures to order L-159 pilots to follow them immediately to the designated airport. The other F-16, also in combat configuration, monitors the situation from the rear hemisphere, ready to step in immediately.

"We simulated a pair of airplanes without radio communication," Czech pilots 1LT Radek Zábajník and 1LT Kateřina Hlavsová concur. Escorted by a pair of F-16s, their airplanes are

taken to the runway of Šiauliai in the shortest possible way. One of the F-16s again uses a standard procedure to demonstrate for the ALCAs the runway they are to land at. Both L-159 extract their landing gears to show they would obey the QRA order. And if they would not comply? "Everybody is quick to reconsider that. There are many ways for them to coerce us into obedience. You cannot try and play something. We were meek targets for F-16s," both 212th Tactical Squadron pilots laugh and add that everything was done according to exactly defined procedures with emphasis on flight safety. "I performed such a mission for the first time with the L-159 aircraft. A joint mission with the Belgian F-16s was both interesting and professionally rewarding. I take it as another valuable experience. No doubt it is bonus in my flight career," ALCA pilot 1LT Kateřina Hlavsová underscores.

The third piece into the Czech puzzle in exercise Baltic Eye is named CASA. Its aircrew performed a masterpiece already during loading the materiel at Čáslav airbase. Omnipresent large boxes, especially the so-called blue piano on wheels, made many people wonder until everything was precisely stored onboard the C-295M. Then it was the turn for several dozen pieces of luggage and thirty-four passengers, including the aircrew. All of that brought the CASA to its maximum take-off weight. "We do not normally

fly at MTOW, but it is not exceptional. You have to be aware all the time that the airplane flies the limit, and if something happens you do not have much time to do any corrections," C-295M airplane captain CAPT Jaroslav Bulíř says and demonstrates the way how the centre of gravity is calculated for the machine to be in balance.

"On maximum take-off weight we need a longer runway and higher speed. After take-off, the plane cannot be stretched that much, neither it may perform any fast manoeuvring. And it naturally takes longer before you get to your assigned flight level," CAPT Bulíř states and specifies that after lifting off the Čáslav airfield, CASA climbed at a rate of approximately eight feet per second. The most interesting active involvement of Czech Air Force CASA in exercise Baltic Eye was the role of a renegade plane it played. In that case, the Belgian F-16 supersonics again handled the case quickly and safely defended the no-fly zone. "It is a training benefitting both sides. For QRA aircraft because they may not practise intercepts on commercial airliners with passengers onboard; and for us that we refresh the related standard procedures," CAPT Bulíř says and points out they have a sustained cooperation in this regard with the Čáslav tactical airbase for quite some time. Cooperation with NATO partners is not exceptional either.

Modernised L-159s

Even rookies in defence business know there is no way without the ground specialist personnel. In exercise Baltic Eye 2013, that was demonstrated by technical personnel of the 212th Tactical Squadron, who again proved their high professional qualities. As usual in such cases, specialists from the aircraft maintenance squadron contributed their expert know-how too. "It is the way that has repeatedly proven well for us, especially for more complex aircraft maintenance," says Major Marek Pažúr, deputy commander of the 212th Tactical Squadron for engineer support service – the Squadron chief engineer officer – and goes on to say that an experienced team of technical personnel were sent to Šiauliai, who have already served operational tours abroad and did not need any special preparation for the Baltic Eye. Speaking about the ground specialist profession, it should be mentioned that operation of L-159 subsonics is supported by three occupational specialties: airplane technician, avionics technician and



armourer technician. Specialist regulations and directives prescribe exactly defined actions for the technicians to perform as part of individual types of preparation. The final play is up to the airplane technician, who is the last one to sign the airplane preparation log and hand the machine over to the pilot for flight.

"Regardless of whether in Čáslav or at Šiauliai, the process of prepping the plane for flight is identical. Each flight activity is preceded by so-called preflight preparation, which involves a sequence of exactly defined works individual technicians must perform on the airplane," Major Pažúr explains. Based on their experience, they just took along the most necessary stuff. "You cannot possibly take everything, because you are limited by capacity. Our well-proven basic toolkit comprises appliances for possible recovery of the machine, tyre sets and key subsystems, be they related to the engine, avionics or hydraulic system. Of course, we have a procedure set up for serious defects outside the home base to get the aircraft, although in emergency mode, back to the Czech Republic," the squadron engineer officer states and adds that the host nation would provide necessary facilities and assistance in case needed. Major Pažúr regards essential that the fleet operated by the 212th Tactical Squadron underwent so-called PP 2000 works over the past three years. Insiders know that involves mandatory works after two thousand flight hours, or after eight years, which was the case of the Čáslav-based squadron. In addition, the one-five-niners were installed the

upgrade package discussed above. The most visible change are bigger multifunction displays (5 by 7 inch) and new HaveQuick II secure communications system. The Elcrodat 4-2 NATO standard encrypted communication system and Mode 4 IFF identification were added as well.

A short look at the flight line shows that a pair of L-159T1 machines will soon start taxiing toward the runway. Pilot greets with the technician, who gives the airplane a symbolic slap on the wing in farewell...

Devil in details

It would be unfair not to mention Captain Václav Svoboda. Back at Čáslav airbase he serves as a specialist engineer with the 21st Wing, but his responsibilities substantially expanded here at Šiauliai. Besides purely technical matters, he was in charge of everything connected with logistics support, needless to say that to full satisfaction of the whole Czech Air Force contingent on the exercise. "Combining exercise Baltic Eye in Lithuania and exercise Steadfast Jazz in Poland is an effective solution, but there are nevertheless some snags. In order for the Czech Air Force to have optimal conditions for their operation both at Šiauliai and in Poznań, it was essential to deconflict and harmonise a gamut of details from ground and air transfers into the area of operations, through setting up facilities for technical and flight personnel and to different configurations of L-159 when it comes to weapon systems. The host nations would tell you



what they can provide and you have to cater for all the rest. Everything is based on the planned employment of forces and assets. No doubt both exercises substantially differ in nature and level. Steadfast Jazz 2013 was a NATO event training comprehensive capabilities in air operations and close air support to ground units. Operational activity will be more intensive there," CAPT Svoboda points out.

The key is for the host to truly live up to what they declared in planning conferences and coordination talks. There were no problems on the Lithuanian side. "Cooperation with the Lithuanians is outstanding. They very much appreciate our flight effort that considerably helps them keep and increase their professional abilities in the realm of air defence. The joint training benefits them and they return with their active approach and a forthcoming attitude," Captain Svoboda reaffirms.

He is being requested via the radio every now and then. Before he walks off to the flight line, he manages to give a quick answer to our final question: "The most important thing is to coordinate well in time so that everything comes together optimally on the day of departure. Every trifle is important. Even a little detail may cause considerable problems abroad. You have to be ready for any situation that my possibly occur there. Besides experience, you have to have the ability to anticipate."

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba



We met underground, or better put in a bunker, and discussed safeguarding skies over Europe, including the Czech Republic. Put more accurately, it was at the multinational air operations centre with official name Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) nearby the town of Uedem in northern Germany, and the debate was about guarding the assigned airspace within the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS).

The reason to visit the CAOC at Uedem was twofold. First, it was connected with the recent reorganisation of CAOCs as part of NATO military structures rationalisation. The other motive was the end of a three-year tour of duty served by Colonel Petr Mikulenka, who first acted as deputy director of operations branch and then was in command of the Training Division.

In reality, CAOC is a unique regional facility responsible for security of its assigned airspace. In case of a non-standard situation, the CAOC order pairs of quick reaction alert supersonic aircraft in the nations integrated in NATINADS to take-off immediately (Alpha Scramble) with the primary task to perform a visual identification of the target.

The Czech Republic has been a full member of the NATO Integrated Air Defence System for fourteen years and has assigned air and air defence assets to NATINADS on 24/7/365 basis.

Its key contribution is a pair of JAS-39C Gripen multirole fighters on fifteen-minute standby alert for so-called live take-off. The first pair is permanently backed up by a reserve of additional two machines. It is no secret that such task forces are on 24/7 standby in other European NATO nations from Benelux to the Baltic States alike. Air policing missions are performed with

various air assets, predominantly the F-16 Fighting Falcon multirole fighters, but there are also Eurofighters or MiG-29s. Collective defence of NATO nations that do not have own super-sonic capability is provided by regular rotations

of NATO contingents, such as in the Baltic Air Policing or Iceland Air Policing mission. By the way, Czech fighter pilots have deployed in the Baltic States for two operational tours already and always performed to the highest standards on their operational assignment protecting the airspace of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The life story of Colonel Petr Mikulenka is not a completely standard one either. It is not generally known that he was at the inception of Czech Air Force's implementation into NATINADS. Later on, he landed with the very first Czech Air Force Gripen machine at the runway of Čáslav AFB and subsequently was the first Czech to take off as a QRA pilot to intercept a target based on order by the superior CAOC.

Just several years passed and his professional role turned around in the sense that it was him to order Alpha Scrambles to QRA pilots from



the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC). Now, end general introductions and let us proceed to professional specificities, because there have been many interesting developments over the past months.

One for north, one for south

The original European CAOC architecture recently ceased to exist. The notional dividing line between areas of responsibility was however left in place with the Alps separating the northern and southern part of Europe. A major turnover however occurred in the number of those tactical NATO command headquarters that were reduced dramatically. Region north, including the United Kingdom and Iceland, was previously guarded by two CAOCs – Finderup in Denmark and Uedem in Germany. Following optimisation of NATO's military structures, only CAOC UE or Combined Air Operations Centre Uedem is left. Reorganisation had a substantially greater impact on CAOC centers in charge of protecting skies over southern Europe. Out of the original number of five installations located in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey and Greece, only CAOC TJ or Combined Air Operations Centre in Torrejón, Spain, remains.

"Our area of responsibility grew enormously. The original group of nine European states, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Federal Republic of Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, were joined by the United Kingdom, Iceland, Denmark and Norway," Colonel Mikulenka says and goes on to specify that besides Iceland, the duty team at CAOC Uedem is already in direct of control of British, Danish and Norwegian QRA aircraft at their home bases. Besides fighters, they took over radar assets, control and warning components as well as air defence systems assigned to NATINADS.

COL Mikulenka also confirms that was an extremely demanding transformational step. "It involved weeks and weeks of tireless effort. We were therefore greatly pleased to be able to report to our superior echelon that the defence of the assigned area of responsibility was

provided and fully operational. Our primary mission – air policing – goes on according to exactly defined procedures and rules of engagement. As to other CAOC operations, we have achieved the initial operational capability. No doubt progress deadlines will be met," states the Czech officer whose position ranked him among the top officials at the CAOC. The fact that COL Mikulenka was the fourth in command of CAOC authorised him to act as one of the final authorities in activating QRA assets. Several times a month, he served a standby duty with direct command authority over the duty team. The leader immediately reported to him any possible nonstandard situations in the airspace and Colonel Mikulenka made a judgment to give a go-ahead for Alpha or not. On rare occasions he decided in contradiction of the recommendation given by the leader of duty team. That was what he was authorised to do, naturally based on relevant facts.

A short look at the map of Europe with designated area of responsibility is breathtaking and underscores the importance of CAOC Uedem mission. "You need to add some specificities to a standard air policing. For instance monitoring of Russian strategic bomber flights along the borders of some NATO nations," COL Mikulenka smiles and understandably does not go into detail. Unofficial sources however say they call Alpha several times a week and, interestingly, time of year also matters.

As a matter of fact, Alpha scrambles are more frequent in summer, as there is a higher intensity of charter flights, and therefore a higher number of mistakes by flight crews. It is correct to say though that twenty percent of the cases involve loss of communication with the air traffic management and the human factor is to blame in an overwhelming majority of cases. It is no surprise for experts. Flying several hours on the autopilot and with minimum activity by the pilots, micro sleep is not exceptional in some cases. A late retuning of communications onboard or incorrect radio frequency commences a nonstandard situation soliciting relevant responses. An enormous workload flight personnel are faced with is another negative factor. Referring to charter pilots as the birds of the night is very close to reality.



Into the same river three times

Figuratively speaking, Petr Mikulenka entered the same river called the NATINADS three times. For the first time, it was before the Czech Republic joined the NATO Alliance. He was then a member of the MoD working group charged with preparing the Czech fighter pilots for service in the NATINADS and later was involved in the procedure that certified the Čáslav airbase for QRA duty in NATINADS. He underwent a relevant training course by U.S. instructors at Ramstein airbase.

The second successful step he was also extensively involved in led to the fact that the Czech Republic's airspace has been protected by advanced fourth generation JAS-39C Gripen fighters since 15 July 2005. That was successfully accomplished just two months after the first pair of Gripens had arrived the 21st Tactical Airbase Čáslav (first six C-variant single-seaters were delivered on 18 April 2005 and additional six JAS-39C and two JAS-39D double-seater machines arrived four months later). Colonel Mikulenka played a lead role in that hectic time readying his colleagues for QRA duties by flying QRA training flights with them as an instructor. Several times a month, he served a QRA duty shift at the Čáslav airbase ready to take-off to the target within fifteen minutes limit based on CAOC's order.

In August 2010, COL Mikulenka entered NATINADS through another door. At CAOC Uedem, he was assigned deputy director operations division for thirty months and was in command of the training division for the last six months. He has an in-depth knowledge of how the skies over Central and Northern Europe, including the Czech Republic, are protected. No doubt the professional experience he obtained will prove useful in his new assignment – Deputy Director of the Czech MoD Joint Operations Centre. He underscores the three-year tour of duty at CAOC Uedem trained him well. "A big school and a huge responsibility," he summarises the three years he served at CAOC and expresses his pride over the high repute Czech military professionals enjoy at this prestigious NATO command headquarters. "Czechs have a high credit here, including for a maximum commitment they show in their service assignments. A pleasant feeling is magnified by preparedness of Czech fighter pilots serving in NATINADS. They became one of the mainstays of the integrated NATO system. Although difficult meteo conditions occasionally grounded a few QRA duty airplanes, the Čáslav airbase was always green-lit in representation of its full readiness for possible take-off." Asked about how painful it was to abstain from active flying, Colonel Mikulenka answered: "Indeed I experienced a deficit, but my job at CAOC partly compensated for it. I was not completely separated from flying. My assignment allowed me to be in everyday contact with flying. My fighter pilot experience came in handy in the decision-making process on QRA scrambles," COL Mikulenka described and expressed his conviction that he may still be able to soar into the Czech skies in the cockpit of a Gripen aircraft one day...

by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba

Reporting from Bamako, Mali, where a Czech Armed Forces task force has been deployed for over nine months by now

CLOUD over African sun

The pilot of our airplane is instructed to wait – the runway is busy at the moment. Dusk is slowly setting in over the two-million capital of Mali, Bamako. Most of the streets disappear in the dark though. Just a small part is emergency lit. We would only learn later on that the rain season started. A cloudburst just rolled over Bamako and electricity went out again. For this city of contrasts, that is said to be completely normal

Down on the ground, we experience an airport no European state would be ashamed of. At least as concerns some of its VIP lounges full of marble and luxury furniture. A broad illuminated highway leading from the airport downtown resembles of the arrival to the Prague city centre from Václav Havel airport Ruzyně. Later on, we learn from Czech compatriots living in Bamako that we have actually

been lucky to have landed at the city already at night. Merciful darkness veiled both poverty and mess. We are able to see all of that when there is sunlight on the next day. The metropolis is intersected with broad avenues, but that is it – side roads are unpaved and lined with shacks and makeshift dwellings. Garbage heaps are interlaid with big puddles produced by yesterday's rain that claimed several lives.

The downpour a week ago was however much worse, leaving the toll of more than thirty dead. Traffic in Bamako is also worth mentioning as it follows rules completely unfathomable for foreigners. People drive in many notional lanes and overtake from all sides. The faster have the right of way. Majority of numerous motorcycle riders do not wear helmets.

Problems with Tuaregs

Uprisings of Tuaregs living in the northern desert part of the country do not represent anything new under the sun in Mali. There were many of such uprisings in the past fuelled by ethnic and economic difficulties. Strongly arabised Berber Tuaregs look down on the majority black population in a way. They have historical reasons for that. In the past, they had considerable proceeds from trading in black slaves from Sub-Saharan Africa into Arab countries in the north of the continent. The economic aspect is factored by poverty in the northern part of the country that was further exacerbated by droughts in 1970s. All those problems seemed to be staved off in July 2002, when Tuareg Ahmed Ag Hamani was appointed Prime Minister of the Government of Mali.

A decade of peace followed to be only disturbed in March 2012 by military putsch waged by Captain Amandou Haya. He announced that his soldiers terminated the incompetent regime in Bamako and became a general officer overnight.

"It was not any peaceful takeover. Shooting took place in the streets of Bamako. Even in the very proximity of my house," recalls Milada Kane, née Čubrdová, a Czech lady who has lived in Mali already since 1968. The biggest problem was however that radical Islamists quickly took control of the north of the country. When they even occupied the town of Konna in the central part of the country, Mali requested France to provide assistance, which was eventually rendered by the whole European Union. The Czech military professionals also contributed to certain stabilisation in the country. Presidential elections took place without problems. The newly elected head of state, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, enjoys a high popularity with the locals. Everybody expects him to resolve the conflict raging in the north of the country by peace talks and secure peace, stability and prosperity for the future of Mali. There is a semi-presidential system in Mali, which rather resembles of a full presidential one. Ibrahim Keita selected a prime minister



ceremony is that we have a deployment in Mali serving in support of the European Union Training Mission (EUTM). The Czech Republic is also committed to developing closer ties with the Malian Government," Minister Pícek said on the occasion.

Tailor's salon in the open

We are driving across the mighty river of Niger that divides Bamako in two parts connected with several bridges from eight to twelve hundred metres long. The rain season started and filled the riverbed with water. Ships bob in distance and the golden season of river transport begins. Main streets are hemmed with uninterrupted lines of sheds made of any possible materials. Under one of the canopies, local tailor manufactures suits on a treadle sewing machine. His colleague kindles a charcoal iron to press the clothes. Other stands sell everything but the girl – from foodstuff and consumer goods to motorbikes. It is business that best helps overcome potential ethnic issues. "Mali was a rather stable country for many years as opposed to other countries in Africa. Although desert comprises the major part of its territory, it is self-sufficient in agricultural production as opposed to Algeria. The country primarily produces cotton, but Malians also grow rice, maize, millet, veggies and also bananas in the green areas along the Niger river," explains Colonel Martin Vybíral, the Czech army and air attaché in Algeria co-accredited in Mali. "This part of Africa is a sort of European Union of this continent. French is spoken in most of the countries in the region, convertible franc is used, and customs and trading laws and regulations are identical. That naturally fosters a rather intensive trade exchange."

Most of Malians are convinced that things are looking up gain, certain unrests in the north of the country notwithstanding. "Inhabitants have high hopes in the President. Negotiations took place recently with the representatives of the northern part of the country, which produced very promising outcomes. The Government strongly rejected either separation of the territory or its autonomy. But they promised certain economic aid and development support. It



who formed a cabinet, allegedly with a view to the President's recommendations. On the day of his inauguration, Keita declared public holiday in the whole country. The ceremony was attended by tens of thousands of people in a new football stadium, where the final construction works were allegedly completed just a day ago.

The units of Malian army and other security services lined up in the football pitch were complemented by representatives of foreign armed forces. In addition to the military parade, the program includes performances of many choirs, including children. There are many dancing performances and the parade features dozens of masks representing individual African countries. In a way, it resembles the triumphal arrival of Cleopatra into Rome.

The newly elected leadership of the country is not supported by local inhabitants only; they also enjoy a strong foreign backing. Inauguration of President Ibrahim Keita was attended by over forty foreign delegations including the President of France and King of Morocco. The Czech Republic was represented by Defence Minister Vlastimil Pícek. "One of the reasons for me to have taken part in the inauguration





happened in the past that much was promised and nothing actually delivered. But it should be the case this time around. The proposed measures only include realistic matters that should be fulfilled too," the honorary consul of the Czech Republic in Mali Tiécoura Kane points out.

HQ in a hotel

We approach the Azalai hotel that houses the EU Training Mission command headquarters. The positive Czech footprint can be seen already from distance. One of the Czech IVECO armoured vehicles stands on the road behind the hotel, another is on standby to block the entry gate. Tatra trucks and Kajman vehicles are parked in the motor pool. While it is Malian soldier to lift the barrier, there are two Czech soldiers with BREN assault rifles loaded with live ammunition standing on duty close to him. Entry to the hotel is controlled by another Czech servicemember.

Czech soldiers have been deployed in Mali since March 2013. The first contingent was relieved in September after a six-month tour. Servicemembers forming the 2nd deployment have been a just a couple of months through their tour in EUTM. A thirty-eight strong contingent

comprise of individuals who have served tours in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their commanding officer is Lieutenant Martin Sekera. He graduated from the Defence University in 2012. He also completed Alpe 2009 survival course. In addition to Russian, he has an excellent command of English to STAN-AG 3 standards. Back in the Czech Republic, he serves as a leader of one of the mechanised platoons of the 41st Mechanised Battalion. "It was definitely not easy for me to go downrange for the first time as a commanding officer. Many things were completely new to me, especially in preparation. At the end of the day, preparation and planning for such a mission are closer to the work of company commander rather than platoon leader. Fortunately, all members of the 2nd deployment are all experienced. It is rather a reward for me to be in command of such a team," Lieutenant Martin Sekera says.

All soldiers are French

EU forces comprise of servicemembers from many armed forces. Of course, the French are the most numerous. The Czech contingent is said to be the fourth largest. Our soldiers most frequently get into contact with the French. "It

took us some time to get used to working with the French armed forces. Locals predominantly show a friendly attitude; we have not practically encountered any expressions of refusal of our engagement here. It may be of interest that as we drive through settlements, people sometimes wave and call "Vive la France". As a matter of fact, locals regard all foreign soldiers French. Apparently, an overwhelming majority of the population wants us here, but the more difficult it is to stay on alert," Lieutenant Sekera.

The new assignment for the 2nd deployment Czech Armed Forces is to support training of Malian armed forces. For quite some time, training courses have been organised at the Koulikoro military training school some sixty kilometres away from Bamako. Besides commanders of various echelons, the whole battalions are trained there. Duration of training depends on circumstances; normally the courses take ten months. Malian armed forces have personnel strength of roughly thirteen thousand, but that includes the gendarmerie, police and river police service that operates on the Niger river. Women have quite a high representation in the military too. The qualities of the armed forces are something that makes even locals wonder. "We had a high unemployment some years ago and the government decided to tackle it by enlisting jobless people with the military. Most of them joined the military just have to regular income; they take it as any other job. They just go to work, do some paperwork and that is it for them," Milada Kane explains.

Four Czech instructors of the 43rd Airborne Battalion joined training efforts immediately upon their arrival. "We have just had a limited experience with the Malian armed forces, because Czech instructors have so far been only involved in training future platoon leaders and company commanders. Working with them is good because they are educated and often speak foreign languages. They nevertheless lack military habits – first thing they are concerned with when a break is called is that they start to pre-



pare tea. Perimeter security only comes second for them," Lieutenant Sekera points out.

Logistics partly French

Given its size, the Czech unit is not logistically self-sufficient. In that respect, it has to rely on logistic support provided by the French armed forces in part. Given the language barrier, that entails certain difficulties. The Czech part of logistic support has worked without problems so far. The first contingent served their tour in desert uniforms; the current deployment was issued field uniforms designed for jungle environments. Mali is quite a complex country in terms of camouflage spectrum. While desert uniforms definitely come in handy in the northern part of the country, areas along Niger river with vegetation rather demand woodland pattern. "Of course, the local climate poses high demands on equipment maintenance. As a result of high temperature, tires wear down fast and car windows are apt to ruptures. The weather also poses extra requirements on the way ammunition and other materiel is stored; we measured temperatures reaching as high as 80 degrees Celsius in containers during the day," Lieutenant Sekera describes. Boarding was not an easy matter either. During their six months, the first contingent had fish on the menu practically every day. Meals eaten by second contingent follows the suit. According to Colonel Martin Vybiral, it is mostly



the captain fish species that was planted in the past in African waters as humanitarian aid. It has extensively spread in the meantime. It grows quite big and the fillets are excellent. Many of the better restaurants in Bamako have captain fish on the menu. But one may become fed up even with delicious meals.

Malaria threat

At the first sight, the mosquito pestering us at the moment looks exactly the same as mosquitoes back at home do, but those in Africa carry malaria. Lieutenant Sekera does not hide the fact that climatic conditions in Mali and possible threat of diseases represent the biggest problem for his soldiers too. "My predecessor First-Lieutenant Štěpánek warned us that the weather changes very quickly here in the rain season. That proved soon as we were getting off the plane, the sun was scorching and the temperature well exceeded 30 degrees, and heavy rainfall came in ten minutes' time. Air humidity and temperatures are enormous here, so there is a danger of dehydration. Moreover, drinking regimen is complicated by the fact that drinkable water stored in any possible way heats up after several hours of patrolling so, that it becomes undrinkable," Lieutenant Sekera says. "We have

been here just for a couple of weeks, so we are still acclimatising. First, we all underwent perhaps mandatory replacement of intestinal microflora, which took several days with some. We have nevertheless not need to tackle any serious problem impacting the performance of our assignment. The previous deployment had two cases of malaria. The disease probably represents the biggest threat here. We took repellents and mosquito nets from the Czech Republic and we do all movements outdoors with our skin covered as much as we possibly can."

The Czech Armed Forces' second deployment in Mali includes the medic of the 71st Mechanised Battalion, Sergeant First Class Pluhař. So far, he managed to solve all problems of the Czech service personnel on his own. There is a Bulgarian medical doctor assigned to the HQ. In case of need, a German field medical facility is stationed at Koulikoro camp. Twenty-four hours on, we are bidding farewell with this African country full of contradiction for us. Bamako is getting out of sight somewhere beneath us. Medically speaking, the Malian disease has been diagnosed and antibiotics applied. But there is still some time to go before the cure takes full effect.

by Vladimír Marek



Taking stock of five-year endeavour by Czech soldiers

Assistance under fire

The 1st Czech Armed Forces Military Advisory Team (MAT) have just ended their tour in Logar, Afghanistan. The moment when the last MAT servicemember went through the gate of Camp Shank marked an end to the five year plus engagement of the Czech military in the province. And that already deserves a little look back.

2008 bore a major milestone for the engagement of the Czech Armed Forces in Afghanistan. Having strived to set up own Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) for some time, the Czech diplomacy finally succeeded. The decision was made for the newly formed unit to be stationed at Camp Shank and operate in one of the smallest Afghan provinces, Logar, which is located southeast of Kabul and divided by major geographical formations much the same way the whole country of Afghanistan is. Highway One, the strategic road leading from Kabul into the Paktia and Khost provinces, runs across the whole area. The capital and administration centre of the province is Pul-i-Alam with roughly 23,000 inhabitants and the province comprises of seven districts: Muhammed Agha, Charkh, Puli Alam, Baraki Barak, Khushi, Azra and Kharwar.

The first PRT deployment with the strength of almost two hundred warfighters was mounted by the 102nd Reconnaissance Battalion home-based in Prostějov. Their predeployment training came to a head in January 2008 and they took over the operational assignment in March. Their mission was to provide security to the PRT civilian component comprising ten experts in various development areas. They engaged in

coordinating development and humanitarian aid programs and cooperated with the local authorities, international NGOs and other players in the reconstruction process. Besides guarding civilian experts, the military component's role was to enhance security in the province, support provincial authorities and provide assistance on building stability essential for reconstruction efforts. In addition, they also supported or trained Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, assisted reforms, development and strengthening of civilian administration.

Drying up live

Throughout the deployment of the Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team in Logar, Czechs managed to complete over two hundred and fifty projects, particularly constructing schools, clinics, checkpoints, jailhouses, police stations, farms, powerplants, and renovating dams, irrigations channels and bridges. We have continuously delivered a complete spectrum of humanitarian aid. From handover of seven ambulance cars to the Logar Province Government through teaching aids, medical materiel, heating wood, first-aid kits, basic foodstuff and blankets.

Afghanistan has been an agricultural country and is likely to stay that way for quite some time to come. The essential precondition for a prosperous agriculture is water, which was where the efforts of Czech specialists focused on. At the outset, there was an extensive project to build monitoring wells, river profiles and measuring stations. First of all, it was necessary to measure flow rate and occurrence of water in wells in various seasons. In the spring, when snow melts in the mountains, the riverbeds in Logar are full, but dry up fast in summer. "The biggest challenge is that there are no hydrologic data available in Afghanistan we could use. At the same time, lack of water is one of the most severe problems here. In this country, rivers dry up right in front of your eyes. But there is no global miracle cure. The point is rather to manage available water carefully. That requires relevant data. In case you do new hydrologic and water management projects, their impact needs to be considered first. If we project a weir, we need to do everything not to limit the flow rate. Too many new drilled wells is not a solution either. That would drain underground water too," Alena Lišková, a PRT civilian expert, explained several years ago.

Scores of operations

The PRT military component trained over twelve hundred Afghan National Police officers. Czech Armed Forces service personnel were also involved in hundreds of security operations. That involved, for instance, the combat operation Welcome Home, in which they took control of a Taliban training camp in June 2012. Operation Desert Serpent then represented five-day fighting in one of districts with the highest level

of threat, Baraki Barak, during which the Czech PRT provided cover to their American comrades. Reconnaissance operation Phoenix in a remote mountain district of Khushi along the border on Pakistan was designed to suppress criminal gangs smuggling weapons and narcotics. Five-day mission Clean Garden tasked the Czech warriors to clear the very environs of Camp Shank and identify locations used by insurgents to bombard the base with rockets and mortars. Operation Thunder Spring saw Czech soldiers apprehend insurgents responsible for making improvised explosive devices. A complete list would go on and on. All those encounters represented a huge volume of lessons learnt for the Czech servicemembers. Many of the soldiers were forced to operate under fire for the first time in their life, and exposed them to a huge mental pressure. They nevertheless proved to be able to handle such situations. That is attested by the fact that an overwhelming majority of combat contact badges were awarded to Czech soldiers based on their performance on deployment in Afghanistan.

Receiving fire

On 1 October 2008, First-Lieutenant Jiří L. was tasked to do reconnaissance and find the posts from where the enemy fired rockets targeting the coalition force's base. It was in Baraki Barak, which was the very far limit for the Czech warfighters to operate. Four Humvees moved along Route Georgia. But they were ordered to deviate and follow an alternate route. After some time, they came to a gorge formed by water erosion. Humvees do not have such an offroad mobility and one got stuck there. "We were trying to recover the vehicle as an RPG projectile hit us from six o'clock and detonated about six feet from the vehicle. Our lads had unfortunately been working in that very area. The opponent opened machinegun and other small arms fire at the very same time," Warrant Officer Martin K., who participated in the operation as a humvee gunner, describes the incident. "The comrade on the roof of the second humvee opened fire first. He had a grenade launcher and a PKB machinegun. His reaction was perfect. He pinpointed for us the place we receive fire from so that we could join. We shot approximately over six hundred feet. Quite soon we managed to eliminate one of the



pockets of resistance." RPG fragments wounded five servicemembers and a part of the team was busy providing treatment to them. Others tried to recover the stuck vehicle. At that moment, our resistance was up to the gunners on top of the remaining two humvees.

"As we were in an area with ongoing hostilities, we could not call in a MEDEVAC. I attempted to establish communication with the base; we requested air support, MEDEVAC helicopter and sending a quick reaction team," 1LT

L. recalled. "Communications however only worked one-way. There was no confirmation of our information being received. So, we had to rely on ourselves. We started cover fire and made a progressive retreat."

The problem was that another vehicle got stuck in the vadi. Enemy fire was so intensive that it was impossible to recover it. So they deleted the data in the radio and jammers, took weapons and ammo left the vehicle. Its crew then made a retreat in the cover another humvee



that came to help. Once they got out of effective range, those who did not squeeze inside got on top of the vehicle. In the meantime a Czech/US Quick Reaction Team set off from Camp Shank to meet them at a designated place.

Toll of blood

The five-year plus endeavour by Czech soldiers in Logar province nevertheless took its toll. Already the first deployment sadly had

a fatality. On Wednesday 30 April 2008, one of the up-armoured humvees carrying Czech warriors hit an improvised explosive device in performance of an operational mission. The explosion demolished the vehicle and killed the driver, twenty-nine-year-old Sergeant First Class Radim Vaculik, and injured four other soldiers, one of them heavily. Further deployment also had to pay their price in the form of casualties. On Tuesday 18 November 2008, Mobile Observation Team led by Captain Roman Ondroušek was tasked with transporting materiel into the local school at Khushi. The convoy travelled off road. Four vehicles have gone through when an explosion occurred under the fifth one, and veiled it with a huge cloud of smoke and dust. The front was all demolished. The charge exploded under the front left wheel and threw the humvee aside. EOD specialists concluded later on it was most probably a Soviet-made antitank mine. Although the soldiers were shocked in the outset, they immediately responded to the situation. They checked the vehicle crew for injuries and reported to the commander. The driver just had minor injuries, he was bleeding. Then they did the necessary measures and left the vehicle. They were extremely lucky to drive slow, hardly twenty kilometres per hour. The detonation occurred still under the wheel, not in the middle of the undercarriage, which is least protected. Thus, the explosion was contained by the hardened front wheel arch.

Rocket bombardment

Bombardment of Camp Shank with Chinese-made rockets from surrounding heights was also unpleasant to say the least. Many of the deployments were faced with an intensive rocket fire that also claimed injuries. For example, several Czech servicemembers were wounded by one of the incoming rockets on 22 September 2008. They were just reaching a shelter and the retarder protecting the entry slowed them down. Fortunately they just suffered light injuries except for one. Considering how close the warhead exploded, they were very lucky that time. Americans ended up worse. A rocket fragment hit one of the U.S. female servicemembers directly in a B-hut. Her kidney injury was so serious that she had to undergo a surgery. The B-hut accommodating Czech service personnel sustained a hit too. A large fragment shattered the backrest on one of the chairs.

In total, eleven contingents mounting the Provincial Reconstruction Team and one Military Advisory Team were consecutively deployed in Logar. Out of the original strength of almost two hundred, the contingent grew up to several hundred personnel. Over twenty five thousand Czech service personnel served operational tours in Logar with the 7th Mechanised Brigade and the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade servicemembers bearing the brunt of the effort. Camp Shank (named after a U.S. Army sergeant who fell in Afghanistan) changed substantially in the five years' time. A small forward operating location grew into a huge base providing temporary home for many thousand soldiers, which even had its own runway.

by Vladimír Marek



Czech CBRN specialists had a chance in the course of exercise Toxic Leak to try out handling chemical warfare agents in Zemianské Kostolany, Slovakia

Soldiers wearing protective masks and suits were moving on the horizon. Right in front of us, a warning sign with inscription "danger area" was sticking up. Red letters literally hurt the eyes. This time everything was for real. Behind that notional line, training was underway with chemical warfare agents that can really kill people. That was where the zone of death began with strictly prohibited entry for outsiders.

Held at Zemianské Kostolany in Slovakia in mid-October Exercise, exercise Toxic Leak was however not that exceptional for military professionals of the 31st Chemical, Biologic, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Brigade based in Liberec, who specialise in defence against weapons of mass destruction. All CBRN defence professionals should at least once but better twice a year undergo training in handling chemical warfare agents.

"We have practised handling warfare agents solely in the Czech Republic at the Kamenná Chaloupka (Stony Cottage) facility. The area here is much larger though; it is possible to train with a bigger volume of agents. Also, we are able to practise basic level tasks and special tasks at the same time," exercise director MAJ Kateřina Seidlová explains. "But it is also good

that we have the opportunity to get to know better the equipment and procedures employed by the Slovak CBRN defence service. There are also opportunities during the exercise to have expert consultations and share experience." The exercise was also designed to reinforce soldiers' habits to tackle mental and physical strain from the presence of health hazards and expand their familiarity with the principles of staying, moving and operating in contaminated areas.

One of the best in the world

The history of the Radiological, Chemical and Biologic Defence Training and Testing Centre in Zemianské Kostolany, where the exercise was

organised, dates back to 1970s. The Czechoslovak federal armed forces had a medium chemical defence training area there then. The installation was modernised and put into the current shape in 2005. The Radiological, Chemical and Biologic Defence Training and Testing Centre was established there then. Thanks to the achieved standards, it has soon won an international renown. French, Slovenian, Hungarian, Austrian, Polish and Belgian service personnel train there with chemical warfare agents on regular basis. Inspectors and experts of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons come here every year for two or three-week courses to increase their professional readiness. It was a bit symbolical that OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize when exercise Toxic Leak was taking place. At the moment, OPCW inspectors help map and dispose chemical weapons in Syria. In 2005, the local installation provided general support to the Asian Olympic Games. Czech CBRN personnel were there for training for the first time.

"Having Czech soldiers over here for training is a clear advantage for us. We are much closer to one another than with other armed forces. We have common language, similar equipment and arms. We were one military until 1993, so the procedures are similar too. That both Czech Republic and Slovakia may boast leading experts in chemical weapons is definitely not by coincidence. NBC defence experts in the former federal armed forces ranked among the best in the world. Thanks to that, we still have something

to build on and follow upon the tradition of excellence," the director of the centre Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Stanko underscores. "The more we felt sorry that cooperation between our armed forces on defence against weapons of mass destruction has been quite limited until recently. We would appreciate that a new stage in our joint Czech-Slovak cooperation be born. NATO exercise Toxic Valley for CBRN defence forces ended in the territory of Slovakia several days ago. We would like to organise the second edition next year. We plan to involve mobile chemical labs, special equipment and organic units into the multinational training. Our facility may provide a full service in the sphere of handling chemical warfare agents from production, to training with them to the disposal right on the spot."

Pushing the limit

CBRN defence specialists from Liberec performed various tasks at individual sites during the exercise. For instance, those included preparation and application of the all-purpose decontamination compound, detection of unidentified agents using CHP 71 and PP3 devices, sampling warfare agents and their identification in chemical lab, decontamination using the ACHR-90 truck system and other operations. That phase of the exercise focused on reinforcing soldiers' habits to tackle mental and physical strain from the presence of health hazards and expanding their familiarity with the principles of staying, moving and operating in contaminated areas. At the same time, soldiers were to build their confidence in the properties of the protective means they use. Training was conducted on two levels. Basic tasks were carried out by the members of the 31st CBRN Brigade, who have no experience with chemical warfare agents, or serve in posts not directly related to the subjects trained. Special tasks claim an extensive expert knowledge and readiness to operate special equipment and devices. Those tasks are performed by individuals having rich experience with chemical warfare agents.

Standing on the notional starting line are those who will have their premiere contact with chemical warfare agents in a minute. It involves roughly half of the trainees. A sort of respect is apparent at the first sight. First of all, everybody must prove protective masks in the gas chamber. It is vital that everything works the way it should. The protective masks may neither be too loose nor too tight. The staff do not hide that they had several cases when novices in contact with chemical warfare agents collapsed shortly before the action. There is a strong mental pressure and when you add physical problems connected in having protective means too tight, nausea may come up.

Nothing like that happened this time though – everybody passes the ordeal by fire without problems. "I have served with the military for a year only; it is the first time for me to attend training like this. One nevertheless gets nervous when working with chemical warfare agents. You realise it just takes one mistake and you are in big trouble. It is essential to do everything the way we did in drilling exercises. The more relieving is when you successfully complete



training with live agents. All of a sudden it is a load off your mind and you feel like you have pushed your limits farther. When I will be doing it next time, it will be a completely different story," Private First Class Tomáš Fišera says. He enlisted with the CBRN service because he regards it an interesting profession. Moreover, he was born close to Liberec. "I am glad to participate in a training exercise here in Slovakia. It is pleasing to be here for variety. We have good billeting and messing here. We even get snacks and plenty of fruit," he adds.

Mental resilience

There was a pressure in 1990s to abolish training with chemical warfare agents. An experienced CBRN specialist came for training to Zemianské Kostolany from Italy. In his long service career, he never encountered live chemical warfare agents before arriving Slovakia. And you could tell watching him. "Today it shows it was a big mistake to cancel such type of training in the past. We have CBRN specialists coming over to us from countries where they do not organise training with CWAs. And you can see the difference between those practising with CWAs and those just doing simulations," deputy commander of the CBRN center, Major Branislav Husovský, points out. "Their mental resilience is completely different then. And it is not just about trying live agents once. Training must be performed at regular intervals – the drills must be refreshed. It is essential that you develop full



confidence in the protective means and that takes some time. You have to know that although you train with agents that can kill people, nothing will happen to you. It is both a drill and psychological preparation at the same time. During the training itself, you cannot think about what can happen; you have to concentrate on getting your job done."

A Sampling and Identification Team completed their task by then and transport the samples into the AL-2/ch field chemical lab. With that capability, First-Lieutenant Dušan Treflík participated in the NATO exercise Toxic Valley that was held before ex Toxic Leak. Team members put the samples into a box next to the entry into the mobile lab. "In case someone else transported the samples, we would accept them personally. But because we know each other, placing the samples in the box is enough," First-Lieutenant Treflík explains ahead of performing analysis of the delivered samples.

Automatic decontamination control

Soldiers who have rotated through individual training sites are up to decontaminating their protective means at the end. First, the items

are decontaminated with lime hypochlorite driven by a pump on the ACHR-90M truck. Everything is then washed with high-pressure water. All soldiers have their own chip, which is read immediately after the individual enters the automatic cubicle. Temperature of sixty degrees Celsius inside evaporates samples that are automatically evaluated. The automatic decontamination is however not the only new technology system available – there are multiple innovations. All facilities are equipped with camera systems. Evaluators as well as soldiers momentarily not taking part in training are able to watch in the lecture room the action their colleagues take handling chemical warfare agents without exposing themselves to any risk. "We are satisfied with what we have at the moment. Yet we do have plans to make progress with this type of training. We know very well what could be modernised further on, but it is naturally the question of funding our superior echelons allocable for us," Major Branislav Husovský adds.

As exercise Toxic Leak was coming to a head, Commander of Czech Land Forces Major-General Ján Gurník was in meeting with his Slovak counterparts discussing future cooperation in Trenčín, Slovakia. He did not hide that joint exercises in the territory of both countries represent one of the priorities for the Czech and Slovak Land Forces. A tangible outcome of those talks was an agreement to organise a combined exercise River in 2014.

"Cooperation with Slovak CBRN specialists has a great benefit for us including for financial reasons. Our facility at Kamenná Chaloupka ceased to be an MoD subsidised organisation in 1990s and you have to pay for everything there. Training in Slovakia is much cheaper for us," Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Blecha of the Land Forces Command headquarters says.

by Vladimír Marek

Along with aircrew and ground personnel, a CASA C-295M airplane reported to duty in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in the Sinai

Over the biblical mountain

In the morning on Monday 4 November 2013, a CASA C-295M airplane took off the Prague Kbely airfield and turned to heading for the Sinai. Thirteen Czech military professionals will operate their machine in the Multinational Force and Observers mission till the end of 2014 in the historically first operational of a Czech CASA abroad.

First of all, let us take a look at the mission statement. The situation in the Sinai escalated during the so-called Six-day war. During that military conflict of June 1967 between Israel and a coalition of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, Arab countries lost some of their territories including the Sinai Peninsula. The situation only started to consolidate in 1979 when Egyptian-Israeli treaty of peace normalised the relations after the end of the fifth Arab-Israeli war.



The Protocol on establishing the Multinational Force and Observers mission was ratified in August 1981 to operate in the Sinai Peninsula and verify the implementation of security arrangements in the Sinai and in part of Israel. Primary missions of MFO include operation of checkpoints, reconnaissance

patrols, and observation posts along the international boundary. The MFO are currently staffed by 1,660 armed forces servicemembers from twelve nations and 170 civilians. The Armed Forces of the Czech Republic has sent three ground observers into the mission since 2010. In the peninsula with more than sixty

thousand square kilometres, the MFO is primarily stationed at two bases. The larger one, North Camp in El Gorah, is located in the north some 15 kilometres southwest from Gaza Strip and 20 kilometres from the seashore of the Mediterranean Sea. The smaller South Camp is at the very south close to Sharm el Sheikh. Additional forces man checkpoints in Zone C. The MFO area of operations is divided into four zones, with three of them being in the Sinai, and the fourth one comprising a three-kilometre strip inside Israel and littoral waters of individual sections. Deployment of the CASA aircraft was requested by the MFO Headquarters. CASA was operated as a part of the MFO by the French in the past and MFO personnel only have the best experience with the aircraft. The deployment of thirteen Czech service personnel comprises pilots, systems engineers as well as ground specialists. Common maintenance will therefore be provided on spot. In case a more extensive repair is required, the airplane will be flown into the Czech Republic. There is another machine at the Kbelly airfield available as a reserve. The aircraft is intended to be quite busy; planners say it will log six hundred flight hours.

“Our mission will be to provide monitoring flights over the border between Egypt and Israel with international observers onboard. We will enable them to watch what it is happening on the ground. In addition, we will perform transport flights,” said Lieutenant-Colonel Milan Laniak, the commanding officer and pilot. “This mission has some specificities and it will be a great benefit for us to participate. When you fly in the Czech Republic over towns and fields, your orientation is much easier. Contrarily, you can see a brown landscape over the desert of Sinai, which does not offer many landmarks from the perspective of an individual coming from Central Europe. Moreover, this will be the very first operational deployment for the Czech CASA airplanes. As pilots, we will finally try out flying in foreign environment and under non-national command.”

by Vladimír Marek
photos by Vladimír Marek, Ladislav Sekan
and the Military History Institute

The Czech Land Forces has worked several years on setting up a forward observer system that would facilitate calling artillery and air support even for leaders of small units

SUPPORT on demand

Some years ago, we had a chance to watch Warrant Officer Pavel Stehlík in action in Afghanistan. He was one of the first ones to complete a week-long course at Náměšť airbase, which trains Immediate Close Air Support (ICAS). Since then, the Czech Armed Forces managed to achieve a considerable progress.

In July earlier this year, first two Czech Forward Observers (FO) to have been trained abroad returned with a very good score from a two-week course at a U.S. Air Force Base at Ramstein, Germany. "From the very start of the Czech Armed Forces' engagement in Afghanistan, it was obvious that our involvement in combat operations would not do just with the forward air controllers, whose parent unit is stationed at the 22nd Airbase Náměšť. They are too scarce an asset to reinforce companies or even platoons with them. We therefore decided to train own forward observers from among professionals serving with mechanised and artillery units for this occupational specialism," Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Blecha of the Land Forces Command explains.

"We organised initial training courses with a major assistance by the forward air controllers directly in their station at the Náměšť airbase. Then we followed with a system of Artillery Forward Observer (AFO) system of courses that we currently prepare at Vyškov. Combined-arms training exercises of brigades, which use artillery, mortar and air assets, also play an important role in increasing the forward observers' professional qualifications. No wonder we welcomed the offer made by the United States. The scores achieved by our service personnel confirm we are not rookies in this domain. But that is all just a beginning. We would like as many as fifteen land forces servicemembers to be trained in the course next year."

Tried to get them

As to preparation and training of forward observers, everything starts with identifying suitable candidates at subunit level, followed by selection procedure at Vyškov and, for the very best candidates, the Artillery Forward Observer course follows. Close Air Support is trained in courses organised by forward air controllers at the 22nd Airbase Náměšť. Everything comes to a head with currency and lead-in training. When it comes to training forward observers at the U.S. Air Force Base Ramstein, one of the basic conditions for entry is excellent English. The tests are taken directly at the U.S. Embassy in Prague and you have to score at least eight-five percent. Both of the Czech Armed Forces graduates from the course met that condition amply - artillery reconnaissance platoon leader Lieutenant Jan Ivan scored 95 percent and Sergeant First Class Petr Menhart 89 percent.

During the course itself, both of our observers had to produce, communicate with the aircraft, set final attack cones, produce situational reports and recommend the best ammunition for pilots to use. "Besides us and the U.S. personnel, Hungarian soldiers also took part in the course. We had several computers in the room in front of us to operate a laser designator. The evaluator team comprised a forward air controller and a forward observer instructor. The final evaluation was produced not only by ex forward air controllers, but also helicopter pilots and even a bomber airplane pilot. They immediately



assessed every step we took, anything we said, and wrote it down into A4 forms. Some points were regarded critical, and if we got them wrong, we failed the whole sim session. That involved incorrect repeating of coordinates," Lieutenant Ivan explains. "When we completed the assignment, the first thing we learnt was whether we passed or not. We completed eight simulations in total. Those who had three fails dropped out immediately. One of our U.S. colleagues experienced something like that."

At the same time, the instructors deliberately created the most complicated situations for us and literally tried to take the trainees in. In doing so, they were successful with the Czech observers in the first session. "When we arrived Ramstein and learnt there were fifty minutes for each simulator session, we said to ourselves: no problem - a piece of cake. The instructors however did their best to make us commit a mistake. We had to work extremely carefully and suddenly there was a problem to fit within the fifty minutes. For instance, they read target coordinates erroneously on purpose for us. We naturally did not expect such intricacy. Everything was taking place really fast and we had to concentrate on multiple tasks. We simply had bad luck. Fortunately that was the only failed sim session we had," Lieutenant Jan Ivan smiles in the end.

Meticulously

It proved once again that the profession of forward observers requires extreme carefulness. The specialist has to be in control of both coordinates and targets, but also aware of the operating range, position of friendly forces and the opponent, areas inhabited by civilians and many other aspects. All information they provide only

serve as a recommendation - forward air controllers may change it at their discretion. "The only parameter the pilot has to obey for using laser-guided munitions is the final attack cone. The bomb uses its seeker to home onto the signal that will guide it onto the target," Sergeant First Class Petr Menhart adds. "When we were at Náměšť airbase, they rather taught us combat reality including tactics. We were in terrain, only had a map and notepad, and the objective was to guide the aircraft onto the target as successfully as possible. The course at Ramstein rather focused on getting the procedures right. That involved much more effort. We did not complete a whole mission at Náměšť; we have intentionally avoided the stuff not falling into our basket. At Ramstein AFB, we went through completely everything, including after action reviews."

Both participants in the course organised at Ramstein concur that the very multinational environment represents a great experience. They made a particular progress in specialist language skills. Instructors came from most diverse corners of America, including from Alaska or Texas. Course graduates worked in pairs with the instructors. At the end, it was obvious the trainees got quite close to the instructors. Some of the instructors even claimed the trainees picked some of the dialects they spoke.

In real combat, forward observers represent a high value asset, especially for the smallest units. As mentioned, the number of forward air controllers is not high enough to allow supporting companies or even platoons.

Maintaining habits

Sergeant First Class Petr Menhart was deployed in Afghanistan in 2011 in the Czech

Armed Forces' 2nd OMLT deployment in Wardak. That was one of the most troubled deployments the Czech Armed Forces ever sent downrange - they suffered two fatalities and numerous casualties. "That tour was quite demanding and possibly would not do without the support of forward air controllers and forward observers. We used air at least three times a week and artillery support virtually on daily basis. We controlled the fire of U.S. mortars or mortars assigned to an Afghan National Army company. It was not easy. In some cases, the equipment was operated by illiterate soldiers, who were even unable to read figures on the sight. Calculating elements of fire was also problematic. We had to devise our own system that surprisingly worked well. Over the last six weeks, we made use of the well-proven calibre 122-mm D-30 howitzers," SFC Menhart recalls. "But our system nevertheless worked excellently there as whole. We had forward observers in every platoon. One or two forward air controllers were then assigned to higher echelons of command. Their mission was to coordinate with the air. They had more powerful radios and were able to handle three of four tasks independently at the same time."

But it is not just about acquiring forward observer skills and abilities, but drilling them at regular intervals. In the other case, one loses currency. Regular training claims six flight hours per person and year. It is also essential to make use of air ranges that permit the employment of laser target designators. Artillery fire controls can be practised during training of mechanised units and the artillery brigade.

"Our soldiers had a clear advantage in Ramstein, because they serve in reconnaissance assignments at our brigade. They were able to use much of their experience, such as target identification, geospatial knowledge, working with communications etc. All of that nevertheless represents just a part of skills possessed by artillery reconnaissance specialists. Each battery has a reconnaissance platoon equipped with the LOS light observation system, whose role is to provide reconnaissance for the fire battery. The platoon's mission is to gather all information necessary for fire control, i.e. target identification and controlling on it," deputy commander 13th Artillery Brigade LTC Jiří Kývala adds. "During the modernisation at hand, we will also reflect on the forward observers. One of the things we would like to obtain for them are laser target designator kits. They were a part of the equipment they used on operational deployment in Afghanistan. We only have the best experience with them."

by Vladimír Marek

A Review brings additional information on procedures of Close Air Support (CAS) delivered by Mi-24/35 attack helicopters

Only ones to deliver CAS at night

The most interesting part was probably the activities performed by the Forward Air Controllers (FAC) in provision of Close Air Support (CAS) to ground forces in contact with the opponent. This time we visited the "Tiger" helicopter squadron of the Helicopter Airbase Náměšť, whose members have had a long-standing experience with CAS.

Besides professional skills of the helicopter captain and pilot-operator, the Mi-24/35 machine plays a key role in close air support too. It is a double-engine combat helicopter designed for close support to ground units, engage tanks and armoured targets, as well as for transport of

or two 500-kg bombs or two napalm tanks in the same quantity. The Mi-24D variant has rails at the tip of their wings for 2 + 2 type 9M17P Phalange (NATO designated AT-2C Swatter-C) antitank guided missiles. The advanced Mi-24/35 V variant uses 9M114 Shturm antitank guided missiles



24/35 helos. So, every Mi-24 captain is up to close air support training," says the former commander of the 221st Helicopter Squadron (from 1 December 2013 on, he serves as the chief of combat training section of the 22nd Wing), Major Pavel Procházka, and specifies that Hind captains proceed to CAS missions once they master basic ways of using weapon systems onboard. "When they become frequent in basic techniques and tactics of operating weapon systems, they are up to training close air support. First you start with so-called dry missions, including photo-shooting and then go on for live

have already been trained for performance of those demanding missions. It goes without saying that it is not a short-term affair. From the moment they get seated in the rear cockpit and, if their training is not hampered by any obstacles, it is normally a matter of one year plus.

Periodicity of flying CAS missions is not strictly defined in the Mi-24/35 aircrew training curriculum. It depends on arrangements with the forward air controller unit that is also home-based at the Náměšť airbase. "We do not fly CAS only in support of FACs stationed at Náměšť, but in fact in any joint action with ground units. Requesting air support has already become a standard part of combat operations. But I would not like to give the impression that training close air support is the highest priority for the members of our squadron. We perform a whole range of other missions. Helicopter captains logged some seventy flight hours last year. A part of that portion involves flights in support of training other units. But there is nothing that would oblige us to perform a CAS procedure say once a month," Major Pavel Procházka says.

Uneasy path to professional qualifications

As a matter of fact, Mi-24/35 gunships are the only "Czech" platform capable of delivering close air support at night. As with umbilical line, that is connected with using the Night Vision

air combat training section of the 22nd Wing at Náměšť helicopter airbase.

Contrarily to what many people would think, helicopter captains say that night CAS procedures are not that complex. "In reality, it is easier than at day! Especially because the helicopter captain usually clearly sees the laser beam designating for him the target he is to attack. Moreover, communication between the forward air controller and the helicopter cockpit is somewhat less extensive than at day," some pilots of the 221st "Tiger" Helicopter Squadron concur.

Those who read the report from NATO exercise Ramstein Rover 2013 know it was not only the Mi-24/35 gunships to deliver CAS but also other assets in the Czech Air Force inventory – the L-159 ALCA subsonic combat aircraft as well as JAS-39 Gripen multirole fighters from the 21st Airbase Čáslav. Each of aircraft contributed its specific air support capabilities to quickly and effectively solving the situation for the task forces on the ground.

But let us get back to the Náměšť Airbase – it has recently undergone reorganisation as Mi-171Sh transport helicopters were relocated there. By the way, the former combat squadron equipped with Mi-24/35 turned into a compound one with the arrival of the Hips. What will that do with CAS? Moreover, the final decision on whether Mi-24/35 Hinds will be modernised or decommissioned at the end of their short remaining service life in the Czech Air Force has not been made yet ...



persons and materiel in the cabin. The weapon systems onboard are particularly essential. In the recent NATO exercise Ramstein Rover 2013, the Hinds eliminated opposing forces primarily by firing the 50 calibre 9A624 quad rotating machine guns housed in the electrically controlled USPU-24 nose gun mount, or calibre 30mm 9A800 automatic grenade launcher. That is however not the end at all to the weapons payload the Hind gunships offer. The other weapons fixed on four pylons should be mentioned too. They comprise four UB-32 blocks (each with thirty-two calibre 57mm S-5 rockets), four 100 or 250-kg bombs

(AT-6 Spiral in NATO code) and additional effective weapons elements. The above facts make the Hind a truly effective asset for delivering CAS in support of ground units under heavy enemy fire. Also in exercise RARO 2013, the Mi-24/35 gunships repeatedly assisted NATO forces on managing the engagement in the battlefield and helped continue performing their missions.

The peak of combat use

"CAS is an integral part of lead-in combat training in the curriculum of training on Mi-

procedures in ranges within military training areas," the experienced Mi-24/35 pilot elaborates and states that CAS is undoubtedly the peak of the combat employment for the attack helicopter flight personnel. "CAS is the icing on the cake. But prior to flying hot missions, there are many professional steps we have to complete first. Before helicopter captains work their way through to CAS qualification, they have to exert much effort and show piloting mastery. It is quite a challenging process," MAJ Procházka underscores.

Major Procházka also indicated that roughly seventy percent of Mi-24/35 helicopter captains

Goggles (NVG), which for sure represents another professional leap ahead for Mi-24 pilots. Night CAS missions are however not flown by all helicopter captains. Why? "That is a matter of the quantity of equipment available and current personnel situation. To put it bluntly, we may not afford to train all squadron members in this regard. It cannot be done across the board given the range of missions we perform. I hope not to reveal anything grave saying that we do NVG training with the most experienced individuals – instructor pilots. It is mostly them to support FACs at night," explains the chief of

"It took us several years before we managed to become qualified for close air support. I hope I am not the only one to think it would be great pity to resign on this unique capability for any reason. Maximum should be done to maintain the current straining standards of flight personnel in CAS procedures. It is a machinery that works and provides multiple benefits, both in favour of the Czech Armed Forces and the NATO partners," Major Pavel Procházka concludes.

*by Pavel Lang
photos by Jan Kouba*



Controlling the crowd



A protest demonstration of locals in front of the military installation escalates. Shouted expressions of disgruntlement intensify, much like aggressive conduct by the protesters. Some of them are climbing onto the gate and trying to break in. Others are building a barricade on the access road, which they then set on fire.

The duty officer calls in a unit trained in crowd and riot control. In concert with military firefighters, soldiers start pushing the protesters off. Using the water cannon on the fire truck, the barricade is extinguished in a couple of minutes for soldiers to dismantle it. Their mission to restore order and clear the area has been accomplished.

That was one of the model situations testing capabilities of the 2nd battery the 252nd Air Defence Missile Battalion from Strakonice during their training exercise in Boletice MTA in November. They rehearsed tactical procedures and drills for crowd control and restoration of public order (Crowd and Riot Control – CRC).

All episodes were closely followed by experienced Military Police instructors. "Soldiers underwent basic training of individuals, teams

and squads at their home base already in April earlier this year. For now, we have focused on specific situations service personnel encounter on operational deployments," said Warrant Officer Vladimír Kopřiva, the chief CRC training instructor. That the soldiers from Strakonice could not wish for better teachers is proven by the rich experience the instructors have with leading the training for police forces or Czech Armed Forces units on predeployment training ahead of their tours in the territory of Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Even outsiders were able to notice enthusiasm with which the servicemembers endeavoured on simulated conflicts, be they on one side in the crowd control gear and their colleagues who played the protesters. "We have not had such a training in our unit so far," said one of the

participants, Master Sergeant Jaroslav Nábělek, and added: "Crowd control training met with a high interest with our unit and soldiers looked forward to practising individual situations, particularly the episode with the barricade on fire."

Military Police members overseeing the training were delighted with active approach and maximum commitment displayed by the trainees. "It is pleasing to lead training for people who enjoy that and are truly keen to learn," Warrant Officer Kopřiva pointed out and added: "Moreover, such level of training necessitates a good coordination, cohesion and harmonisation the unit must show. Improvisation on the site often plays an important role as well."

Leader of one of the teams, Staff Sergeant Pavel Hammer, concurs: "You never know what situation may come up. We have proven on multiple occasions in training that even a well planned course of action may turn out ineffective and you have to improvise." He had a first-hand experience with the others that controlling an aggressive crowd is both physically demanding and requires a high concentration and mental resilience. "Although it was our comrades from the unit to replicate the protesters, they did not spare us in any way. They performed their task and we performed ours. In such case, you deliver one hundred percent, concentrate on the situation on the spot and try to solve it as good as you

can," SSG Hammer described the feelings of the CRC unit personnel.

Special order unit of the Czech Police, who had concurrently been on Combat Life Saver (CLS) training course at Strakonice by coincidence, joined the training in MTA Boletice too. Although they are ordered to intervene in similar situations themselves, their task was nevertheless different this time. They provided first aid to those who suffered injuries as a result of unrest.

The reasons why the police is interested in medical training courses primarily provided to military personnel ahead of operational deployments are explained by police warrant officer Miroslav Stach: "We are assigned to floods and mass accidents, and operate against aggressive protesters or hooligans during sport matches. We get into situations in which we need to control high numbers of people, and manage many casualties. Standard first aid is not enough for us anymore."

The CLS provides them with valuable knowledge of procedures to provide pre-hospital care in tactical environments. "This course meets our requirements and benefits us greatly," Warrant Officer Stach concludes.

by Captain Jana Samcová, Press and Information Officer, 25th Air Defence Missile Regiment

What is CRC training?

CRC (Crowd and Riot Control) is defined as non-combat military operations in which military units use their forces and assets against civilian population without planned use of weapons and ammunition. The aim is to maintain or restore public order while minimising loss of life and health of the population and collateral damage on property.



CERTIFIED combat ready

Involving almost 1,900 service personnel with more than 600 vehicles, exercise Grim Campaigner 2013 was where a longterm training came to a head for the members of the 41st Mechanised Battalion and 43rd Airborne Mechanised Battalion. Following a successful test of their performance, Chief of General Staff Lieutenant-General Petr Pavel presented to commanders of both battalions the certificates issued according to NATO CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation) methodology.

Awarding the certificates is in a way only the final formal act that is nevertheless backed by thousands of hours of tough training. The whole process follows exactly defined conditions. Chief of Staff of the Land Forces Command, Colonel Karel Schuch, a subject-matter expert, describes the system.

Sir, what does CREVAL involve for NATO nations' armed forces?

It is one of the NATO's five primary evaluation programs. In addition to the CREVAL program, which is of longest standing and designed for evaluating land combat units and their command headquarters, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation also uses other methodologies. Combat Readiness Evaluation program was initialised in 2006; the OPEVAL (Operational Evaluation) methodology was used before that. For exercise Grim Campaigner 2013, we only used the part evaluating units; evaluation of the command headquarters' readiness is planned for 2014. The very program of unit evaluation comprises five subject-matter areas: documentation and planning, training as such, logistic support, communication and information support, and last one is the so-called

administration support that primarily assesses personnel management.

The exercise finalised the whole process of certification. When was it initiated?

We sent the information that we would evaluate the 41st Mechanised and 43rd Airborne Mechanised Battalions to the relevant NATO HQ in Mons at the end of 2012. The package includes a request for sending over

typical combat operations and units undergoing CREVAL successfully are earmarked for Washington Treaty Article 5 collective defence operations.

Who has the authority to decide on the option to be used? The NATO monitors?

Determining the subject of the exercise is purely a national decision; there are also national evaluators. Officers from the NATO command

management, system and contents of the documentation to be kept and so forth.

Can you tell the period of time required to complete preparations for certification? Was it from autumn 2012 for both battalions?

The act of sending applications is just a part of the whole process of preparation; it is not the date of its beginning. The whole training process is substantially longer and distributed over multiple phases and stages. Just as a recap: already back in 2006 we evaluated so-called Initial Operational Capabilities with the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, which was the starting phase of the whole process of evaluating combat units. Since then, the units have been modernised and their equipment replaced. But we nevertheless do not evaluate only the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, but the whole 4th Task Force. We have now certified the mechanised battalions; next we will focus on combat support and combat support service. For 2014, we plan to do the final evaluation of the command of the 4th Task Force and certification of the 42nd Mechanised Battalion.

That sounds rather idyllic: apply, perform an exercise and present certificates. Are there not any problems?

Of course we do face challenges, mostly in the logistics domain. That is however not the issue for the certified units, but the overall financial framework allocated for the Land Forces. Already back in 2008, when the 43rd Airborne Mechanised Battalion was evaluated first time, it showed logistic support was, let us say, the weak link, although evaluated as satisfactory, meeting the conditions.

At present, combat readiness standards have been achieved by the 311th Chemical, Biologic, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Battalion, 41st Mechanised Battalion and the 43rd Airborne Mechanised Battalion. What is the vision for the battalions forming the 7th Mechanised Brigade?

The process of progressive certification is not done at random. We are now finalising development of the 4th Task Force and then we will focus on the units comprising the 7th Task Force. We intend to complete that process by 2018. Although that may seem too long a timespan for some, please be assured it corresponds to standard timelines followed by other NATO units.

by Jan Procházka
photos by Miroslav Šindelář



so-called NATO Monitors – officers, whose presence is mandatory for certification. On behalf of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, they guarantee that the evaluation observes valid standards. The Czech Republic is presently under the HQ Allied Land Command located in Izmir, Turkey, which sent four evaluators.

The recent exercise was packed with various situations, attacks, assaults, use of helicopters and other episodes. Who sets the overall play?

The whole preparation must be based on the Combat Readiness Evaluation program that exactly defines what must be practised. For example, the forces have to take a staging area, deploy command posts, communication systems and the tactical situation is then played for the forces to tackle. There are three options: defence, attack or holding fight/manoeuvre defence. As a matter of fact, the program was designed for

have a supervisory role on observance of procedures and contents; in other words they evaluate how we evaluate. They nevertheless have a freedom of choice in terms of where they want to be during individual exercise episodes, what and which unit they want to watch. Everything is recorded on checklists whose format, contents and system of writing is exactly defined. National evaluators must fill in all boxes, all questions must be answered.

If we are to be interoperable with other NATO nations' armed forces, then my guess is we have to meet certain minimum levels already at the very application for certification ...

Correct. There are definitions for certain minimums. For instance, minimum manning level is 90 percent. The same level applies to the numbers of vehicles, equipment and materiel. Other areas are defined in the checklists, including but not limited to training standards or personnel

factsheet

NATO uses the following official programs to evaluate units and commands:

OPEVAL (Operational Evaluation): land forces combat readiness evaluation program used until 2005;
CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation): land forces combat readiness evaluation program effective from 2006 on;
TACEVAL (Tactical Evaluation): air forces combat readiness evaluation program;
MAREVAL (Maritime Evaluation): maritime units combat evaluation program;
JOINTEVAL (Joint Evaluation): program used for evaluating combat readiness of joint command headquarters;
SOFEVAL (Special Forces Evaluation): special forces evaluation program

Besides the above programs applicable to NATO nations, there is one more for evaluating forces and headquarters of PFP nations taking part in NATO operations, the OCC&EF, Operational Capability Concept – Evaluation and Feedback. In essence, it is a modified CREVAL program, but divided into multiple phases.



Ten years have passed from the deployment of the Czech 7th Field Hospital in Al-Basrah, Iraq

Medical helping hand OFFERED

While deployments of Czech CBRN specialists in Kuwait and Iraq in 2002 and 2003 represented a prologue of the mission, they were virtually tailed by Czech medical service personnel as the Czech 7th Field Hospital served two operational tours in Basra, Iraq, from April till December 2003.

It was April 2003 and gunfire could still be heard in the streets of Basra. It had just been a week from the moment when allied forces essentially broke resistance of Saddam Hussein's formations and entered the Basra city. Besides water and other essential aid, the metropolis of southern Iraq was particularly short of medical aid in those critical days.

A Czech military convoy advanced zigzag among houses crammed into the street. Soldiers had already toured two compounds. They finally succeeded in finding the right spot for setting up the field hospital. An Iraqi military medical facility area at the southeast limits of Basra became the place to be. At that moment, nothing stood in the way of deploying a medical aid capability. First mammoth aircraft carrying Czech soldiers and materiel of the 7th field hospital began to land at the Kuwaiti airport. In addition to military medical specialist, the contingent comprised a humanitarian detachment, a Military Police team, National Support Element (NSE) and a Civil-Military Cooperation team (CIMIC). An advance team of thirty-nine personnel transferred from Prague till 17 April 2003 as part of the first stage. Additional eighty-five members arrived April 22, the remainder then till 2 June 2003. Part of the armaments, equipment, tent shelters, materiel and medical instrumentation got into Kuwait on April 18-23, 2003, onboard a contracted An-124 Ruslan cargo plane that made six flights. The remainder arrived from 23 April through 14 May 2003 onboard U.S. Air Force C-5 and C-17 aircraft (total thirty-one sorties).

The field hospital officially started to operate on 18 May 2003, but it got into full swing only several weeks later. Its mission was to provide humanitarian assistance and medical aid to the local population to mitigate the impact of the postwar situation, to provide specialist medical



care to the members of the Czech deployment and to service personnel of other nations' armed forces operating in the territory of Iraq in case needed. The humanitarian detachment provided aid to the local inhabitants particularly by transporting and distributing water as well as by collecting and disposal of unexploded ammunition. The hospital included 129 wheeled vehicles and 132 ISO containers. Total weight of the amount almost two thousand tons. The medical facility had 50 beds and six intensive care unit beds, plus it was able to provide treatment to up to 300 out-patients a day. In addition to medical staff, the personnel comprised seventeen medical doctors, two pharmacists, a veterinarian and a microbiologist. Colonel Mojmir Mrva M.D. was assigned the contingent commanding officer.

But the members of the contingent did not perform the above tasks only. They were also

involved in escorting a convoy carrying humanitarian materiel from Turkish borders across Kurdistan and Iraq. First, representatives of the People in Need foundation contacted the Ministry of Defence with a request for arranging a Czech military escort and protection for a truck with humanitarian materiel heading from Turkish borders into the foundation's field office in Amara. As a matter of fact, the foundation workers had certain difficulties with transportation of the materiel valued at forty million Czech Korunas already in the Turkish territory. In addition, intelligence warned of uneasy situation in the Kurdish mountains and a growing frequency of attacks on convoys carrying the needed materiel. Reconnaissance specialists home-based at Bechyně from the combat support platoon formed the core of the escort team. They loaded four Land Rover vehicles full of weapons, ammunition and fuel for the whole journey. The



vehicles also had machineguns mounted. Sufficient stock of food and water was placed on a trailer. On Thursday, 10 July 2003, the armed convoy set off north. It was almost twelve hundred kilometres to be covered to get to the border on Turkey.

Soldiers had a day off at the residence of the Slovak Embassy in Baghdad. They felt like Alice in wonderland. A beautiful building full of ancient furniture contrasted sharply with their provisional billeting back at Basra. The worse was their wake-up call on the day of departure. A fierce smallarms fire was heard in a house nearby shortly before five o'clock in the morning.

In the territory of Kurdistan, the Czech servicemen passed through marvellous mountains roughly at 1,800 metres above sea level. Down the Oil Road, it was however a tough job for the drivers. Oil from the local wells is carried

into Turkey on old trucks in open-top vats that let oil splash every now and then. So, the road was full of crude oil that made it rather slippery, especially in turns. Three days on, they finally arrived the border town of Zakho and took over the truck with humanitarian aid. Soldiers drove the whole trip back nonstop – almost twelve hundred kilometres in one go. And they had to made detours in several instances because of impassable bridges. They did not have to deal with any single technical failure across more than two thousand kilometres. They returned to Basrah shortly after midnight Tuesday 15 July 2003.

The 7th field hospital underwent personnel rotation at the turn of September and October



2003 and COL Přemysl Škácha became the new deployment's commanding officer. Before the newcomers could even warm up under the scorching sun of Iraq, more than fifteen hundred raging protesters turned up at the camp gate. Sheikh Sabah Saidi blamed Czechs of defaming the Koran. Allegedly, a text with sura from Koran with defaming inscription in English was found close to the Czech medical facility. The sheikh declared that as an insult to Islam and blamed it on the Czech soldiers. All meetings and explanations that they had nothing in common with that were to no avail. The sheikh demanded an apology in the media and threatened with demonstrations and violence. Saidi was known for having cooperated with the Shia radical movement of Muqtada al-Sadr, allegedly supported by Iran and the circles seeking to export the Islam revolution into Iraq. Basra municipality representatives dissociated themselves from the allegations and reiterated their acknowledgement of the job the Czech hospital had done. "We want to underscore that the Czech field hospital is the best form of humanitarian aid to have been rendered to date," the letter handed over to the 7th field hospital read.

In spite of that, demonstrators poured onto the gate of the Czech base at Basrah and even hurled stones. Czech soldiers were prepared for the contingency that Iraqis would break through. There was a cordon with plastic shields and dogs standing behind. Those tense moments posed a test to the members of the Czech contingent, which they stood well. "We just jumped in at the deep end. But we nevertheless eventually managed to pacify the action, particularly thanks to appropriate security measures we had previously

adopted," commanding officer Colonel Přemysl Škácha told us then.

"Our people were prepared perfectly. We received assistance from British soldiers. There was not a single case of failure. Everybody knew their duties, knew exactly what to do. In addition to our cordon, there were crews of two British APCs on standby to possibly step in. I trust the measures were robust enough." The situation got calm in several weeks' time. It was just a reminder how far some radicals were able to go; hardened base fortifications soldiers had built during the unrest bore testament to that. The field hospital accomplished its primary mission that was to help Iraqi people overcome the humanitarian crisis that arose as a result of combat operations. Throughout its seven-month deployment, the hospital provided treatment to more than ten thousand patients. It terminated performance of its operational assignment at 20 November 2003 and started to redeploy personnel, armaments, equipment and materiel back into the Czech Republic.

Withdrawal of soldiers took place from 4 through 21 December 2003. Arms, equipment and materiel were transported in the combined way – by sea and on rail: shipped from Umm Qasr port in Iraq into the port of Rijeka, Croatia and the movement from Rijeka into the Czech Republic continued on rail. Five trains carried 103 vehicles and 171 ISO containers with total weight of 1,958.5 tons. Transportation was completed at 21 January 2004.

by Vladimír Marek
photos by Vladimír Marek and the Field Hospital

I Want to Walk Again



Senior WO (ret) Jiří Schams probably does not have to be introduced. Since the fateful day of March 17, 2008, he has ceased to be known only as an excellent partner to his comrades from the Special Forces in Prostějov or the Military Police. In today's perspective, he has become almost an icon for all who feel deep respect to Czech soldiers.

Not because of the compassion for the serious injury he sustained while deployed in Afghanistan, but because of what was only to come. A story of indefatigable willpower, tenacity and hope. The story which Jiří Schams, aka Regi, has been writing since the time he survived.

First of all, no expectations?

The first time I met him was in June 2011. At that time, his uncle brought him to the Military Tradition Days in Vlkost. Jirka was sitting on his wheelchair, almost motionless, silently flowing through the crowd. He waved at my camera, but not much else.

At that time, people passing by still felt uneasy looking at him. In his dress uniform and with the salad bar on his chest, he looked like a crippled veteran which local people are accustomed to seeing only in American movies. As if everybody thought: "Well, what can you expect, with two pieces of shrapnel in his head."

Then the spring of 2013 came and we met again. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Jirka transferring himself from a car onto his wheelchair on his own power. Has this man been indeed diagnosed as a quadriplegic? Actually, this was the "label" he initially got, although it applies to patients who have lost, partially or totally, the use of all their limbs as a result of a cervical spine injury.

However, Jirka did not suffer a spine injury; it was his brain that was injured by a piece of shrapnel. Upon entering the head, the fragment hit the cerebellum – the brain area where the centre of balance, stability, movement coordination and planning is located. The piece of shrapnel (and perhaps there were multiple pieces)

also did additional damage which no one is able to specify accurately, as the knowledge of the human brain is limited. Even so – or perhaps precisely because of it – it was a mistake to try to find a pigeonhole within a set of known diagnoses for Jirka, and thus in fact deny, at least partly, a chance of improvement to him.

What matters most, however, is that Jirka was moving around visibly better this spring; moreover, his speech was comprehensible, and he even made jokes when in good mood. I made a short interview with him by phone just a few months later – no problem at all.

All the best...

I phoned him again later, to congratulate him on his birthday. "I usually do not celebrate birthdays. Not to speak of lying on the ground after a stormy party. I don't drink alcohol at all," was Jirka's brief description of how he spent September 22. However, he admitted that many friends, including, for example, the medical personnel who had taken care of him during his rehabilitation, had indeed called to congratulate him.

I couldn't help but ask him what birthday present he would like to receive. I could hardly expect anything else but "I would like to be able to walk again". He immediately mentioned that he valued experiences more than material presents. And, after a short pause, he diplomatically (so as not to hurt the feelings of one of his good friends) added: "But I got a box of excellent biscuits."

The chance? Technical developments...

However, let us go back to Jirka's principal wish – I may be wrong, but my impression is that it is in fact within reach. And there are several ways to make it come true. Even before this summer, Jirka traveled to Cambridge to try a so-called exoskeleton, an external robotic frame initially developed by Americans to make the life of soldiers carrying heavy loads easier.

The patent was subsequently released for medical research and lo and behold! – it has proved to be a useful aid for patients with a spinal column or brain injury. "It was great. To summarize the experience, moving around in the exoskeleton suit meant more autonomy for me," Jirka commented. Thanks to the state-of-the-art device, he could stand erect, was able to walk only with a walker for a few minutes, and he would only need crutches when undergoing his daily training.

"He was initially fighting with the device a bit. While patients without any feeling in their lower limbs let the exoskeleton do the walking, Jirka was forcing his movements upon it. The principal benefit does not consist in enabling Jirka to venture out on foot instead of on his wheelchair, although I am sure Jirka would like the former option, but mainly in that the device helps him restore and fixate the correct walking movement pattern and habits. It is thus an intermediate stage in the walking training rather than a permanent substitution," explains Martin Janoud, Jirka's assistant-cum-physiotherapist.

The only stumbling block is the price of the device, which has so far been introduced only by a US, an Israeli and recently also a Japanese companies. However, the good old saying of "the golden Czech hands" still holds true; a few weeks ago, the Czech Technical University started developing a similar, but much more sophisticated and widely available device of its own. A prototype will be presented in two years' time. (Editor's Note: The ATM magazine is preparing an article containing more information on exoskeletons and the Czech project.)

Miracles? Hard work and determination...

However, Jirka is not a type willing to wait for an electronic walking gadget. And so he spent three summer weeks in the Klimkovic Rehabilitation Centre, which has recently been mentioned in the media in connection with "miracles" done to child victims of brain polio who

learn to walk there. The so-called KLIM therapy consists in dressing the patient in a stabilization suit and safeguarding him or her.

Jirka enjoyed being suspended on pulleys and springs. "They first used warm bandages and massages to loosen my muscles. I still have them, you know. I did some muscle-strengthening exercises and then some balance training. I managed to kneel upright, and even walked a few steps on crutches."

If it were up to Jirka, he would have the rehabilitation system installed at home. This is generally not recommended, but Jirka's physiotherapist Martin wants to try it: "The problem with all physiotherapies, no matter whether they take place in Kladruhy, Slapy, Klimkovic or others, is that they are not repeated frequently enough. Jirka makes a great deal of progress in just a few weeks, but after two months at home he drops almost to the starting level."

This is why Jirka, if possible, exercises daily, as if the training were his new job. However, something like this had not been happening for years: "Shall I level with you? As a physiotherapist treating other handicapped people as well, I have come across individuals and institutions whose view was that if a handicapped person can live and function in some way, he or she should be satisfied with the condition. Even many doctors think inside the box of the initial diagnosis and are surprised if a patient asks, for example, for a surgery as a result of which he or she can achieve some improvement," explains Martin.

He also refers to the operation of the extraocular muscle that Jirka underwent in September. The irregular distribution of strains and forces was pulling Jirka's left eye down. To be able to see ahead, he had to tilt his head backward. With his head tilted back, he naturally could not concentrate on maintaining his balance, which was why he was also limited as to his walking. If everything turns out well, Jirka will have his right eye operated as well. He leaves it closed now; he sees everything twice now because of strabismus.

In addition to the daily exercises, Jirka regularly visits hippo-therapeutic sessions under the guidance of Šárka Smíšková of the ISAR civic association, who also plays a major role in his rehabilitation plan. And, every now and then, he is offered help by complete strangers, who have learnt his story from the media. One of them is Petr Havlíček from Uničov, whose reflections on massages are very well known to soldiers from the 601st Special Forces Group, as well as football or hockey players from Olomouc. "I feel relaxed, it is quite different from the traditional massage," is how Jirka describes the therapy.

By doing all of the above, Jirka is a source of inspiration for all patients who have found themselves in a similar situation, the specific nature of his injury notwithstanding. It took his current physiotherapist a year of trials and errors to put together an optimal rehabilitation plan. It was also quite difficult to find a physiotherapist-cum-enthusiast such as Martin, who would match Jirka's personality. Another physiotherapist, Jakub Pětiok, helped find him. He worked for six years at a specialized clinic in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and he now concentrates on promoting the following concept among his Czech colleagues: "If a patient has survived a serious brain injury, his or her rehabilitation potential is very high."

Regi as an example and a source of inspiration...

I met Jirka again in September, one week since his birthday, at the MedCup competition. He naturally could not miss the dress rehearsal (the first official MedCup will take place next year) of the event he had once dreamt about when a combat medic training with Prague paramedics. I told him to use his legs, but he replied: "I cannot rely a hundred percent on crutches yet." I thought: "Well, it is better to be careful, but you will show us sooner or later."

OK, let's not rush things. Even so, Jirka took us all by surprise again. He was given a present, a T-shirt which he decided to try on there and then. It was obvious that some people in the audience felt like assisting the "helpless" guy. However, they maintained their composure and two minutes of utter silence and wonderment ensued. Jirka took off his baseball cap, glasses, meticulously arranged the new T-shirt, pulled it on, and then put his glasses and baseball cap back on as well. In a very precise and careful manner. A quadriplegic? Good thing the doctors were wrong.



A member of one of the teams that participated in the competition stood next to Jirka. This was his first meeting with Jirka, and he had paid respect to him on behalf of his whole team a while ago. When looking at the small miracle, tears of emotion were rolling down his face. It is hard to describe the emotion of the moment in words. And then Jirka returned the ball I had passed to him upon his arrival. Rushing back to Prague, I said, by way of goodbye: "I have to be on my way now." I shouted back at me: "Don't forget your broom then!" Well, as I say, he is well on the mend.

And still something...

The previous paragraph would perhaps make an excellent ending. But I have to say why Jirka is so exceptional – to the point of becoming an icon, as written earlier. It is because his story has really become known and thousands of people monitor Jirka's progress on a daily basis, whether on a special page of the Armyweb site, or by sharing every tidbit of information or photographs on Facebook.

And for many of them, Jirka is indeed an example worth following – both militarily and "diagnostically". During the NATO Days, I stood next to the presentation of the REGI Base

Senior WO (ret) Jiří Schams was born on September 22, 1972, in Prague. He did his mandatory military service at the 1st Combined EW Regiment in Kolin, and then, already a professional soldier, at the 1st Radio Communications Centre in Zbiroh. His first mission was Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another milestone in his career, which made his boyhood dreams come true, was a transfer to the 6th Special Forces Brigade in Prostějov. In 2002, a special operations unit was formed within the Military Police in Prague. Known under the acronym SOG (Special Operations Group), it was another major challenge for Jirka. Early in 2003, by that time already a member of the elite outfit, he was sent to Iraq to protect the contingent of the 7th Field Hospital there. Next came another mission in the southern province of Basra. At that time, Jirka expanded his skills by adding another MOS, that of a combat medic, to his portfolio. In 2005 and 2006, there were more missions. On October 10, 2007, he is deployed in Helmand in the southern part of Afghanistan, which ultimately becomes his fate... On March 17, 2008, a suicide bomber blows himself up at the town of Gereshk. Two Danes and four Afghans are killed on the spot. The leader of the protection detail, Milan Štěrba, also dies. Warrant Officer Schams is seriously injured. His body is full of fragments; the fateful one hit him in the head.



Foundation at the MoD stand. So many people reacted to Jirka's photo and knew his story – soldiers, policemen, firefighters. But also people who, for one reason or another, have ended up on a wheelchair.

Jirka is too modest to admit his indirect influence described above. However, he does not hesitate to become involved directly. During his stay in Klimkovic in August, there was yet another soldier, Lance Corporal Lukáš Hirka, who was seriously injured in September 2012. "I visited him almost every evening. I tried to instill, through my presence, the willpower to carry on with the exercises into him. The fact is that Lukáš keeps working on himself and does a great job," Jirka mentioned by the way.

by Mirka Pašková

Still present in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Since June 2010, two Czech Armed Forces servicemembers have been posted to the HQ EUFOR in Sarajevo serving at regular rotation intervals. One of the Czech officers to have served a tour at the HQ is Lieutenant-Colonel Bohuslav Pernica, who elaborates both on his job specifications at HQ EUFOR and indeed the overall situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



What is the purpose of the military component in Operation Althea?

The operation is performed under so-called executive and nonexecutive mandate. The executive mandate represents the international community's responsibility for a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For EUFOR, that translates as monitoring the state's ability to cope with the economic burden of war that took place at the beginning of 1990s, and providing assistance to the central government if needed. The burden is considerable. About ten percent of the state territory is still mined. Depots safeguarded by the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina still hold a major surplus volume of arms and munitions. It is 17,500 tons just for the ammunition. And since it is virtually impossible to withdraw all light weapons and ammunition from locations of war operations and from the population, there is still a significant risk of proliferating the arms and ammunition from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the territories of the European Union. Not only does that burden hamper on Bosnia and Herzegovina's socioeconomic development, but it also drains funds necessary for developing the



armed forces. Most of all, however, the mine danger affects tourism in the country.

What about the non-executive mandate?

That involves the international community's commitment to help develop capabilities of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina through mentoring and training. In the instance of EUFOR, training is delivered by the means of mobile teams sent into Bosnia and Herzegovina for a limited period of time by countries willing to provide the demanded type of training. Nevertheless, NATO has also activities underway in this field through its command structure, as one of the goals of paramount importance for the central government is to attain membership in the NATO Alliance.

The Czech participation in Operation EUFOR Althea is tied with the non-executive mandate. Since 2010, the Czech Republic has contributed two senior commissioned officers assigned to the Headquarters EUFOR in Sarajevo as experts for training the Bosnian service personnel on chemical, biologic, radiological and nuclear defence, and on storing and stockpiling weapons and ammunition.

What is the current status of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina today?

The armed forces is a true symbol of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood. They were formed by a merger of the armed forces of the Republika Srpska and the Bosnian-Croat Federation; the armed forces today is a central government function. It is an all-volunteer force with authorised personnel strength of 10,000 men and women at arms, whose development observes the 2005 White Paper on Defence, the



only policy paper to have been adopted so far, and the principle of national representation parity. Although parity in national representation of Bosnians, Serbians and Croats in the armed forces may complicate personnel management, expressions of racial, nationalistic or political intolerance are very rare amongst soldiers. A high professionalism prevails there in that respect.

Two officers for the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is not many. The Czech Republic used to have a whole battalion deployed there back in 1990s.

That is really not many, but it should be emphasised that Bosnia and Herzegovina is no longer a warzone. It is a state striving for NATO and EU integration. It is also necessary to see that the Czech Republic's engagement in the process theory defines as nation building takes on other forms. Last year for instance, the Czech Republic donated EUR 20,000 from the budget of the Ministry of Affairs to improve safety of weapons and ammunition stockpiles at depots owned by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian ministry of defence. It also involves development projects as well as the British Military Advisory and Training Team stationed at Vyškov, whose courses trained a considerable number of Bosnian-Herzegovinian soldiers. During my tour, I met two ex students of BMATT ranked Captains, who knew Vyškov, the town I come from. One of them was even responsible for organising courses in my subject-matter area, i.e. weapons and ammunition storage.

The Czech Republic is absolutely not an unknown country in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Czech Armed Forces enjoy, I believe, a good repute with the local military professionals. The way global hotspots are defined today, and the way BMATT's territorial coverage is set, it definitely makes sense to support stationing of BMATT in our country in the future.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is however not just EUFOR and NATO...

Correct, development aid today is realised primarily by international organisation in the country today. The military play the second fiddle there, but their presence is nevertheless important. In some spheres, however, it is a highly complex environment, where relations and the international community's ability to realise a coordinated action is complicated by a high number of players in the field. In some instances, it may even resemble the play by a redneck football team with all players enthusiastically run where the ball is at the moment. Over those six months, seeking to understand what I was

a part of in the business of storing weapons and ammunition, and to fully join the efforts the international community has underway in this area, I needed to gain at least a general knowledge of the projects and activities in the area of operations the OSCE, NATO, U.S. and UN agencies are responsible for and to be in contact with their representatives on the ground.

Operation EUFOR Althea is apparently not a typical military mission. How can we prepare for such a mission?

That is correct. Bosnia and Herzegovina is today not a crisis zone. On the other hand, it is a region where consequences of war conflict are still apparent and may certainly be tackled successfully in case the central government receives support by the international community. It is essential to realise that the challenges soldiers are involved in tackling today in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not military but socioeconomic in nature. It is therefore a great advantage to have a general knowledge as a military officer. That does not involve knowing the area of operations only, but also understanding the players you are to work with. In case you manage to understand why they act the way they do, why they defend the position they have adopted, it saves you the frustration that things do not momentarily work the way you would wish according to the schemes you have brought along from the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Defence and the Czech Armed Forces. That actually means that as a senior officer, you should have an in-depth knowledge of geography, political science, international law and diplomacy, but also language. That is something you cannot possibly acquire during a six-month individual predeployment preparation, which you moreover do in parallel with your current assignments.

The other post the Czech Republic has filled in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a CBRN training specialist. What do the post specifications involve?

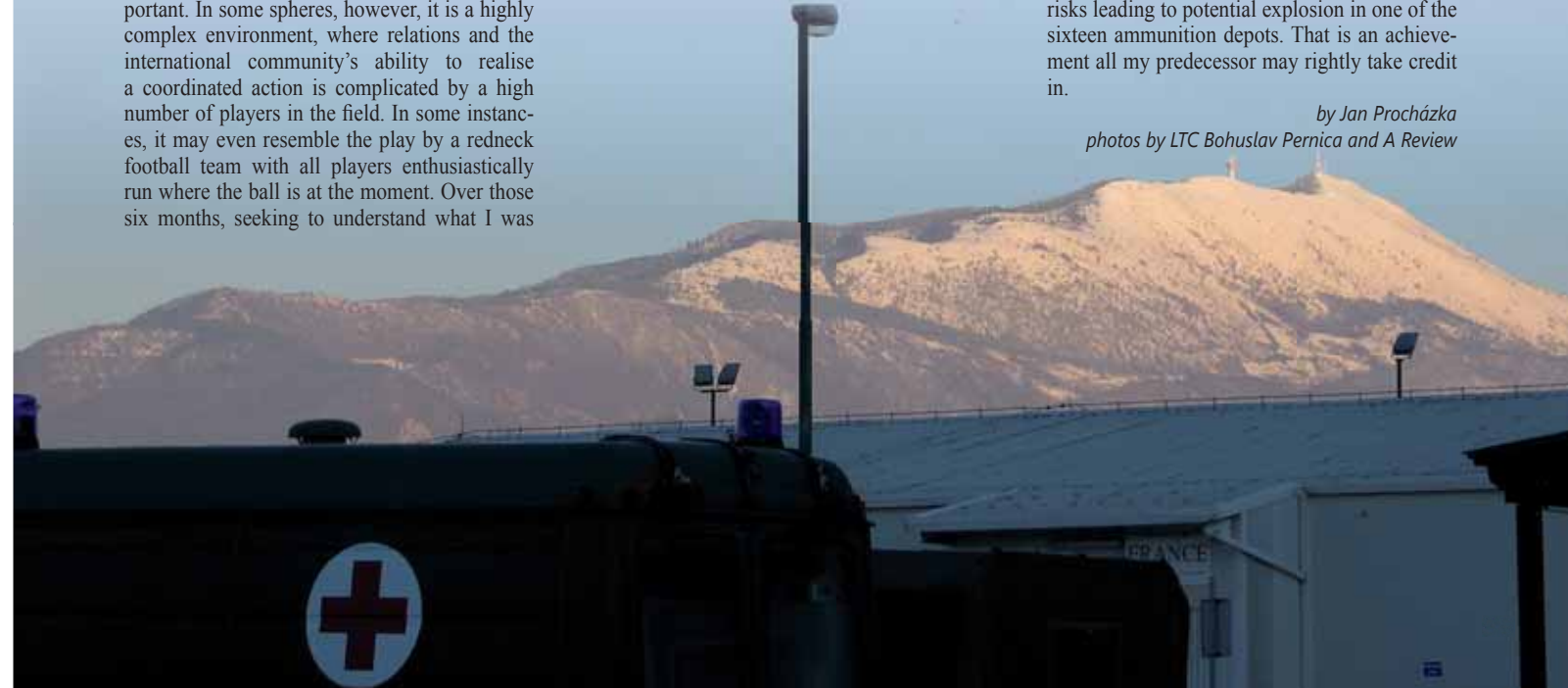
Bosnia and Herzegovina had sadly closed the training module for its CBRN company during our tour. They probably did so for budgetary

reasons, because CBRN training is costly in general and their current priorities are elsewhere given the limited defence budget. Eighty percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's defence budget goes for personnel and twenty percent is allocated for operation and maintenance. At the same time, there is a need to deploy service personnel for foreign operations. There are nevertheless very sensitive topics EUFOR should tackle together with Bosnia and Herzegovina without the need for an intensive CBRN training. Major Kapitán identified a range of such subjects as he strived to convince Bosnian-Herzegovinian military officials about the short-sightedness of their decision. Perhaps the biggest challenge is the commencement of demining the areas contaminated with depleted uranium, as Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the countries where this risk is present; before handing military installations such as former armoured vehicle repair plants or ranges over to municipalities, the armed forces is obliged to clear them so that the safe and secure environment is finally achieved.

Depleted Uranium? That sounds rather dangerous.

Although it may seem that tours of duty in Bosnia and Herzegovina are something like holiday, the contrary is true for the posts filled by the Czech Republic. It is not generally known that average age of excessive ammunition kept at sixteen ammunition depots across the country is today more than twenty years. Tank and artillery munitions have today approximated the limit that substantially increases the risk of its spontaneous ignition. According to longterm stats, that is the second most frequent cause of incidents in ammunition depots. Human factor is in the first place. Therefore, from 2010, when the project was set underway EUFOR has focus on building the capability for training military personnel responsible for maintaining and handling munitions in depots. Thanks to Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina's armed forces obtained equipment and the ability earlier this year to do indicative testing of the condition of propellants inside the stored munitions. As a part of discharging the nonexecutive mandate by the means of EUFOR, the EU managed to contain over fifty percent of risks leading to potential explosion in one of the sixteen ammunition depots. That is an achievement all my predecessor may rightly take credit in.

by Jan Procházka
photos by LTC Bohuslav Pernica and A Review





On the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the battles on Doss Alto, the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence helped organize a remembrance pilgrimage to the memorable places.

It is better to live like a lion for one day

We are jumping over boulders literally like chamois. We are climbing to Doss Alto. Lake Garda is down below. Somewhere up the hill is the legendary Elevation 703, where Czech legionnaires fought a victorious battle with attacking Austrian units on the Italian soil in September 1918. Czech and Slovak participants of the remembrance tour organized by the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic and the Czechoslovak Legionnaires Association decided to honour their memory by the ascent, accompanied by local alpinists who have been maintaining the glorious tradition for years.

In mid-August 1918, the newly formed Czechoslovak division was moved to the front-line. Under command of Italian General Andrea Graziani, its mission was to defend a 20-km section of the mountain terrain between Lake Garda and the Adige River. When the Austrian command learnt there were units composed of Czech and Slovak deserters facing them, they decided to mount something akin to a punitive expedition. They allegedly offered a reward for each

legionnaire – a leave of absence and 300 Korunas. And even a thousand for an officer.

The attack against the positions of Czechoslovak legionnaires started on September 21, 1918, at 04:00, by artillery bombardment. We are climbing toward the caverns of Roncola, Rossi and San Seba. The principal source of information used by the Italian guide describing the events for us is a combat report which the Italian command ordered prepared shortly after

the attack had been repelled. A unit of Austrian Special Forces, shock battalion “Riva”, started advancing in three directions – frontally, against the position on Saso Seg, up the valley bearing the same name, and against the cavern of Rossi. The strongest element attempted to outflank and take Elevation 703. While the first two advancing groups were repelled by fire, the third one scored some success. The first position to fall into Austrian hands was the forward observation post of Roncola. Its commander, Lieutenant Trojánek, chose to shoot himself rather than be taken prisoner and be degradingly executed. From there, Austrian shock troops advanced through a connecting trench until they found themselves some 15 meters from the southern mouth of a horseshoe-shaped cavern cut into rock atop Elevation 703, which was held by our 1st Machine Gun Company with six machine guns. The legionnaires used them to defend entrances to the cavern, while the enemy’s push was supported by grenades and flame-throwers. Assisted by artillery, the Czechoslovak legionnaires ultimately managed to break the Austrian attack.

“Legion 100” Project

Trenches and caverns are still visible in limestone rocks around Elevation 703. Even after 95 years, metal components of equipment, empty cartridges, remnants of barbed wire and cans have still been preserved here. “We commemorate the anniversary every year. However, this is a Legion 100 project event. As a matter of fact, we decided to give every round anniversary some more attention. In the region of Lake Garda, we wanted to commemorate the battles on Doss Alto on September 21, 1918, and also the next day, September 22, 1918, when soldiers who had been taken prisoners during them were executed. During our trip, we also focused on other places where our soldiers had fought, including, for example, the Piave River, where reconnaissance patrols of Czechoslovak legionnaires had been operating,” we were told by Milan Bachan, Deputy Director of the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence.

“I would like to thank local alpinists who tend not only to the graves of our legionnaires, but

also to other places that are so important for us. When I was at Doss Alto last year, the whole area was covered with aerochoric plants species. They managed to clear and also marked the route to the top of the hill in legionnaires’ colours, i.e. red and white. The fate of their ancestors is very similar to that of our legionnaires. The whole region of Trentino used to be a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The locals thus had to fight for the empire’s interests. To avoid that, they used to cross the frontline to join the Italian army. If captured, however, they faced the same fate as our legionnaires, i.e. execution. Moreover, some 50,000 inhabitants of the region were forcibly resettled to Bohemia and Moravia during the Great War. Many older people here thus still have personal ties to the Czech Republic, which continue to be maintained. Their activities make the work of our department easier. According to legislation in force, the graves should be maintained by the Italian side. However, it does not always work like this. But this is not only about the maintenance. It is equally important to remind what happened at that time. And the local city council does its best to do so, complementing our own efforts.”

Štorch and the others

On the way down, it is impossible to miss the place where the Sarca River flows into Lake Garda. It was in that very place where Austro-Hungarian soldiers captured our legionnaire Alois Štorch. He and his three fellow-fighters were landed on the Austrian-occupied shore of Lake Garda by an Italian electric-powered MAS boat one night early in July 1918, their mission being to gather information on the forthcoming Austrian offensive and to convince Czech crews serving Austrian howitzers to intentionally overshoot their targets during the attack. However, the action went wrong and Austrian troops literally chased them down. One of the foursome was shot and later drowned, another succeeded to get to the Italian side, utterly exhausted after a three-kilometer swim in ice-cold water. Štorch, however, was captured and subsequently executed. The Austrians intentionally chose a place which was well visible from Italian positions. General Graziani, commander of our legions, responded by heavy artillery bombardment of Austrian trenches. Participants in the pilgrimage paid tribute to Lance Corporal Štorch’s memory directly on the execution site. There are many similar stories about brave Czechoslovak legionnaires heard not just around Lake Garda, but also farther to the east, along the Piave River. As a matter of fact, the Italian front saw the highest number of executions of Czechoslovak legionnaires executed by the enemy, 47. Fifty-five others are registered as missing. Most of them were probably executed as well. In the town of Arco, in an olive grove overlooked by a steep rock cliff, four Czechoslovak POWs captured during the Doss Alto attack were executed. In addition to representatives of the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence, the solemn ceremony and subsequent mass held there 95 years later was also attended by Petr Buriánek, Czech Ambassador to Rome, and Zdeněk Holík and Milada Holíková, née Nováčková, great-grandson and granddaughter, respectively, of one of



the executed legionnaires, Karel Nováček. At that time, he had already been 39 years old. He was the corpsman of the unit deployed on Doss Alto. He would have probably made it to safety if he had not tried to treat injured soldiers until the very last moment. “I was born after my great-grandfather’s death; I only remember my grandfather’s recollections, who recalled how his father used to rock him on his knees when on leave. Actually, I visited these places for the first time with my grandfather forty years ago. I had an opportunity to take part in the march up to Doss Alto yesterday and also saw the place where my great-grandfather had been taken prisoner. It’s always a very emotional experience. Whenever I come here, it always evokes the same feelings,” adds Zdeněk Holík.

Heroism of Bedřich Havlena

In Conegliano, fifteen Czech POWs were executed on June 16, 1918. Their Hungarian executioners shot them at point-blank range. Before doing that, however, they had pitilessly forced them to pass along and see the bodies of their dead comrades.

At Montello, a reconnaissance patrol of the 31st Czechoslovak Rifle Regiment was surprised by overwhelming Austrian forces. After a bitter fight, most of its members were captured. The ten Czechoslovak soldiers were executed in the evening of the same day in Colle di Guardia.

Legionnaires Vincenc Hytl, Václav Řípa and František Tormaides were executed by hanging in the Pivon suburbs of Oderzo. Participants in the pilgrimage had a chance to talk to an eyewitness of the execution, Zavardo Candido, who had turned 102 this March. “I was a little boy then. We were playing here when Austrian soldiers came and started making preparations for the execution. They said it was nothing to be seen by children and drove us away. However, we were too curious to see what would happen, so we hid in a nearby copse and saw the whole thing from there. They hanged them on a tree opposite the house where the memorial plaque is now. Only a few local people were watching the sad event. Most of the audience were Austrian soldiers,” recalls Zavardo Candido.

Perhaps the most emotional story is that of the execution of Bedřich Havlena, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Corps. Together with other legionnaires, the 30 years old excise officer from Zamberk was transported to the frontline in an Italian armoured car, which was supposed to pick them up again after the completion of their reconnaissance mission. However, that was not to happen.

During the Austro-Hungarian attack, Havlena found himself deep behind enemy lines. He had managed to hide in reed growing along the banks of the Piave River for three days before a patrol discovered him. There exist legends about his very brave conduct during the execution. When captured, he proudly stated that he was a Czech fighting for his homeland against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When the gallows broke under his weight during the execution, some claimed that, according to civil legislation, the execution should not be continued or repeated. However, Havlena wanted no mercy, stating that if he accepted it, he would be sent to fight against Italians and our legionnaires, which was something he could not do. He also expressed his conviction that the war would be over by the end of the year and that his homeland would be free.

Before the second attempt, he had checked the gallows himself and put the noose on his neck. “The pilgrimage offers people belonging to various age groups and having different life experiences a chance to meet. In addition to members of active reserves, there are legionnaires, soldiers and ex-soldiers, or WWII veterans. The oldest participant is Tichomir Mirkovič, aged 83. Our goal is not only to honour the memory of fallen, but also to improve the public awareness of what our legionnaires accomplished,” says Pavel Filipek of the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence. “This is my first-ever trip to these memorial places and the experience is very emotional. For example, I was very impressed by an epitaph on one of the tombstones: ‘It is better to live like a lion for one day than as a sheep for a hundred years’.”

In the 1920s, remains of the Czechoslovak legionnaires executed in Italy were exhumed and interred in Prague’s Olšany Cemetery. Bronze and marble plaques commemorate them now in places where they were executed. “Here, along the Piave River, most of the memorial plaques are placed on privately owned buildings. Needless to say, the Italians are very accommodating with respect to activities of our department regarding the commemoration of the tradition of Czechoslovak legionnaires. I usually notify them of our visit in advance. But we could again see for ourselves now that all it takes is knock on the door, say that we are from the Czech Republic and wish to commemorate Czechoslovak legionnaires, and there is never any problem. Compared to how solemn occasions are dealt with in our country, the Italian attitude to soldiers who laid down their lives for their country could serve as an example for us,” adds Milan Bachan, Deputy Director of the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence, by way of conclusion.

by Vladimír Marek





Many of our officers in the ranks of the Free French Forces showed extraordinary heroism. Richard Zdráhala was one of them.

He did not give up even in captivity

When writing about WW2 veterans, they are mostly members of our units, whether in the Soviet Union, United Kingdom or Middle East. Richard Zdráhala is an exception in this respect, being one of the Czechoslovak officers which our government “loaned” to the so-called Free French Forces, i.e. French units under command of General Charles de Gaulle fighting against the Germans, during the war.

Richard Zdráhala was born on September 23, 1912, in Lipník nad Bečvou. He attended elementary school in Lipník and Medlov, off Uničov. In June 1930, he graduated summa cum laude from the Higher Secondary School in Šumperk. He subsequently attended the Military Academy in Hranice, which he completed in 1933, and joined Artillery Regiment No. 10 in Lučenec in the rank of Lieutenant, first as the XO and later as Deputy CO of Battery No. 10. He was trained as a Weapons Air Observer at the Military Air Training Centre in Prostějov, and subsequently served as an Artillery Observer to Air Regiment No. 2 in Olomouc. During the 1938 mobilization, he was assigned to Air Regiment No. 1 in the same capacity.

In June 1939, Richard Zdráhala crossed the Polish border and made it to our unit in Cracow without any problems. However, the situation there was very difficult. Most of the refugees did not have any warm clothing. There was even no money for laundering services. After an agreement with command authorities, Zdráhala decided to return to the Protectorate to collect money which remained on the account of military clubs. In the meantime, Germany invaded Poland and the war broke out. Zdráhala received an order to arrange the escape of several important soldiers and politicians, whose presence abroad had been personally requested by President Beneš, from the area of Velká nad Veličkou to Slovakia. He himself crossed the Slovak border only in the beginning of December 1939. From there, he proceeded to Belgrade. After a rigorous journey via Thessaloniki, Ankara and Beirut, he arrived to Agde in France, where he was appointed the

Commanding Officer of a battery in the 2nd Battalion of the Czechoslovak Artillery Regiment.

After France's defeat, Zdráhala sailed to the United Kingdom. However, he was in for quite a disappointment there. Because of too many officers and lack of rank-and-file personnel, units composed solely of officers were formed in Britain. Zdráhala was assigned to one of them. Moreover, real fighting seemed to be a long way away. His only hope at that time was that, as a former Artillery Air Observer, he would be allowed to join our airmen. But nothing was happening. In the spring of 1941, an order was read to our units, which announced that General Charles de Gaulle was looking for officers for his Free French Army. The candidates were required to know French and to have a tank, artillery, anti-aircraft, anti-tank or signals MOS. In return, the French offered that those who would join the French Army would keep the ranks they had achieved in Czechoslovak armed forces. Richard Zdráhala accepted the offer. He held the captain's rank at that time.

After some initial training time spent in the Sandhurst Training Camp, he was transported to Congo in Africa aboard the Belgian ship Cacablana. His baptism by

fire took place in Syria, where his unit was deployed against followers of the Vichy government collaborating with Germans.

“I was assigned to a unit deployed south of Beirut. When I came to its anti-tank battery, they did not have a single officer there. Some had been killed, others injured. So I became their commander. As the night fell, we moved the battery to the southern outskirts of Beirut, where it took up positions around the airport. In the meantime, Australian infantry, together with a Foreign Legion battalion and a battalion of Free French marines, advanced to the city. With Beirut captured, General Dentz commanding the



Vichyist forces in Syria surrendered,” Richard Zdráhala recalled in his memoirs.

His next task was to collect all artillery guns captured in Lebanon and Syria, sort them, and have the damaged pieces repaired.

He departed for the Libyan front in the first half of 1942 as the commander of an anti-tank battery of the marine brigade. “I felt distrust on every step. The battalion commander, Major Savey, also did not know what he was in for. A former priest, he suspected all who had come from Central and Eastern Europe of sympathies to Communism. Platoon leaders had a hard time to put up with having a foreigner, albeit with a higher rank, as their commander,” recalled the captain. “So I bit the bullet and told myself I would have to endure and somehow tear down the barrier between me and other officers and enlisted men. I chose an option which was different from a purely military approach; just issuing strict orders wouldn’t have got me anywhere. This was why I often discussed with them, for example, how to achieve better times when aiming at a moving target. We agreed to demonstrate live firing using real tanks, so that soldiers could see the effect of armour-piercing shells with their own eyes, or shooting at moving targets, so that they could establish the range at which they should open fire at a massed tank attack to make sure all vehicles would be destroyed. As I had some acquaintances in the artillery depot, organizing and staging the demonstration posed no problem for me. I found out I was starting acquiring a reputation of somebody akin to an anti-tank expert among officers and men. They started treating me in a friendlier way. Officers of the battery were approaching me with ideas how to improve this or that.”

In mid-February 1942, the brigade received orders to take up defensive positions south of the Libyan port of Tobruk, at Bir Hakeim. It set up

a circular defence perimeter around Bir Hakeim, the length of which was about 12 kilometers.

“Most of the tanks of the enemy unit made a sharp left turn and charged right at us. At the same time, the enemy artillery started a heavy bombardment of our forward line of defence, in particular the emplacements of our AT and AA guns. Axis pilots dove from the sky, strafing our positions mercilessly. When their destructive job was over, about a hundred of enemy tanks started advancing to our positions at top speed, accompanied by infantry seeking cover behind the armoured vehicles. The tanks were making short stops to fire,” was Captain Zdráhala’s recollection of one of the many battles in the North African theatre. At that time, he was already the Deputy CO of the anti-tank battalion. “We allowed them to come to a distance of 1,500m from our forward defence line and then opened heavy and concentrated fire. In clouds of dust and amid wisps of smoke created by our fire, I noticed several successful hits. Some of the armoured monsters caught fire. When their crews attempted to bail out, we immediately mowed them down with machine gun and rifle fire.”

However, the situation of Zdráhala’s brigade and other Free French units was getting worse. They were running out of ammunition and supplies. Finally a decision was made to break out of the German grip. Zdráhala was ordered to cover the units attempting to break through against attacks of enemy tanks.

“At about the sunrise, enemy tanks started attacking our retreating units from every compass point. As long as our AT guns still had some ammunition left, they managed to keep the enemy armour at a safe distance. However, as time went by, our fire was getting less intensive. This allowed enemy tanks and infantry to cut off a part of our retreating units and push them into minefields around Bir Hakeim, where they

were dealt with one by one,” was how Richard Zdráhala later described the fateful moments. “With the ammunition expended, I ordered the rest of the battalion to disengage and follow the other retreating groups. Southwest of Bir Hakeim, we encountered an advancing German column. They immediately opened fire and soon destroyed two of our vehicles. I wanted to see what happened to their crews and possibly pick them up. Suddenly there was a tremendous bang. I thought we had received a direct hit, as if someone had lifted our vehicle and slammed it into the ground. The front of the vehicle ploughed into the sand and then the car turned over. As we were trying to get out, German soldiers appeared in front of us, shouting “Hände hoch!” I could not stand up; my knee was hurting terribly and all bloody.”

The Germans took Zdráhala back to Bir Hakeim, by that time already in their hands. From there he got to an Italian POW camp in Derna. After some time, he and other officer POWs were transported by air to a POW camp off Sulmona in Italy. There a group of prisoners, including Zdráhala, managed to dig a tunnel and escape. Together with other escapees, they marched to the north, as far as the mountain range of Gran Sasso, where they were recaptured.

Another unsuccessful escape attempt of Richard Zdráhala took place in the spring of 1944, as POWs were being transferred from a POW camp near Mühlberg elsewhere. After the escape, he and English Major Fitzgerald were moving on foot toward Postřelmov. Along the way, they decided to take a rest. They got into a barn from the back and settled on hay in the attic. However, they were discovered by a group of ten armed German civilians with dogs. The latter handed them over to the Security Police in Zábřeh. Zdráhala was finally transferred to the strictest-regime POW camp in the Colditz Castle, off Leipzig, which was liberated by American forces on April 15, 1945.

Upon returning to Czechoslovakia, Zdráhala was first assigned to the Artillery Command of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defence. As early as in September 1946, he became the Commandant of the Anti-Tank Artillery Officers’ School in Josefov. Two months later, however, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and permanently assigned to the Training Group of the Main Staff of the Artillery Command as a senior training specialist. Zdráhala was one of just a few officers of our western army, whose military career was not interrupted by the Communist coup in February 1945. He died on July 19, 1977, aged 65.

by Vladimír Marek
photos by CMA-MHA

A MEMORIAL for Army General Tomáš Sedláček

Army General Tomáš Sedláček was and will always remain an honorary member of the Prague Garrison Command. His acts, behaviour and conduct made him one of the most significant personalities of our military traditions, and he was a symbol of tenacity, determination and immense vitality for many of us. His legacy is a commitment for all members of the Prague Garrison Command.

The initial idea of the memorial was born among members of the Guard of Honour battalion, who wanted to pay, in a solemn way, a tribute to the brave man. Their inspiration was the unveiling of the foundation stone of the statue of General Rudolf Pernický (a close friend of General Sedláček) in Prague – Suchbát. It was at that time that the idea to address the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and ask them whether they would

be willing to sculpt a bust of General Sedláček, which would subsequently be installed on the premises of the Prague Garrison Command.

Professor of Architecture Peter Siegl of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague entrusted the preparation of graphic designs to his students, for whom the bust of General Sedláček ultimately became their grade work. A commission consisting of representatives of the Prague Garrison Command – Lieutenant Colonels Jaromír Jančura and Lubomír Adamus, Major Miroslav Leška, Senior Warrant Officer Milan Magerčák, military historians – Jiří Bílek, Colonel Eduard Stehlík, and next of kin – Sedláček's daughter Klementýna Vilimová and her husband – was appointed to evaluate and shortlist the graphic designs. The shortlist finally contained 10 works, which were displayed in the unit's Hall of Traditions, where the public could also comment on them.

In July 2013, the whole project was personally presented to Chief of the General Staff of the Army of the Czech Republic, Lieutenant General Petr Pavel. Since then, the whole project has been proceeding under his auspices. On Tuesday, August 6, 2013, the displayed designs were shown to Czech Minister of Defence Vlastimil Picek. He too expressed his full support to the project.

The graphic designs numbered 8 and 1 attracted the greatest attention, both among the lay public and within the commission. And these two designs were also finalized by students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

The funding of the memorial will be very demanding. The commission has contacted and



keeps contacting potential partners and sponsors. At the moment, the partners include the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (the team led by Professor of Architecture Peter Siegl), Municipal District Authority of Praha 6, represented by Mayor Marie Kousalíková and Deputy Mayor Jan Záruba, Czechoslovak Association of Legionnaires, represented by its Chairman, Colonel (ret) Pavel Budinský, and the Municipality of Lázně Toušeň, represented by Mayor Luboš Valíhrach.

However, the basic funding concept is still based on voluntary contributions of individual donors. We thus appeal to all comrades, friends and fans who knew General Sedláček, but also to those who wish to maintain his legacy for future generations in this way, to help us. All voluntary contributions should be remitted to a transparent account opened at FIO Bank – Account No.: 2100476240, Bank code: 2010, under the name "Association of Friends of Army General Tomáš Sedláček, Prague Garrison o. s. The funds collected by the campaign will be used to finance preparations, manufacture and installation of the memorial and its subsequent maintenance. An etui, the soul of the memorial, will contain a message addressed to future generations and some documents, including the account statement, the names of donors and the sums they contributed. The organizers of the project of the Memorial of Army General Tomáš Sedláček hereby thank for every donation.

by Lubomír Adamus and Vladimír Marek
photos by the Prague Garrison Command

About General Sedláček

"Lot of snow everywhere, it kept falling, and we couldn't see our own noses because of the fog. The whole brigade plus guerillas, some 400 people, were plodding forward, single-file, up a beaten trail. I put on my English battledress, English coat, a Soviet cape with a hood I pulled over my garrison cap. I wore my British boots. We grew icicles on our unshaven faces. One had to take care not to lose contact with the man walking in front of him, lest the whole group stretched too much. All we could see was a few meters of the trail, plus a few footprints to the left or right, when someone needed to relieve himself. We kept walking like this for the whole day and whole night." This is how General Tomáš Sedláček described the retreat of the 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade in the Soviet Union after the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising via Chabeneč and farther into the mountains.



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

Tomáš Sedláček was being raised in sports since his early childhood. At the age of 17, he graduated from a technical secondary school and immediately volunteered for mandatory military service at the 1st Artillery Regiment of Jan Žižka of Trocnov, stationed in Praha-Ruzyně, immediately after his school-leaving exams. "With the first year of service at my belt, I wanted to enrol at the Military Academy in Hranice, but they turned me down, perhaps thinking I was too young. I had to wait another year," he related. In 1938, he was mustered out of the Military Academy in Hranice as an artillery lieutenant.

In 1938, he was mustered out of the Military Academy in Hranice as an artillery lieutenant. At that time, the artillery was mainly a horse-drawn service, which was why a substantial part of training was dedicated to equestrian skills. For Tomáš Sedláček, horse riding was another sport in his portfolio and he enjoyed it tremendously.

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

After the evacuation to Great Britain, he attended many special training courses, including one for parachutists. In 1943, he was assigned to the British 112th Royal Light Field Artillery Regiment based in Eastbourne.

In the summer of 1944, Tomáš Sedláček was seconded to the Eastern Front, to the 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade. It was with this unit that he was later deployed in Slovakia...

"I actually flew twice there. The first attempt was on September 14 or so, but there was fog over the Tri Duby Airfield, it was impossible to land. So we returned, landed on an airstrip near Lvov and waited for the weather to improve. We maintained a high alert status, ready to take off immediately. But nothing was happening. It was only on October 6 that we actually took off. However, the situation over the Tri Duby Airfield was exactly the same, with fog everywhere. Still, we made an approach and landed," the general recalled.

After the retreat of the insurgents to the mountains, Tomáš Sedláček and remnants of the brigade regrouped at Soliska; from there, they had to undergo the deadly retreat via Chabeneč mentioned above. "We were told we could skirt along the slopes of the Low Tatras Mountains and head for the frontline. However, the distance was relatively long and, moreover, the weather got significantly worse. Snow kept falling all the time. Covering the hundred or so kilometres suddenly seemed impossible," Tomáš Sedláček recalled later. He and other members of the brigade managed to cross the frontline only in February 1945.

In the early 1950s, he was arrested and sentenced for espionage and high treason in a kangaroo trial. He was released from prison only in 1960. However, he had to wait another thirty years, until 1990, for his full rehabilitation. Army General (ret) Tomáš Sedláček died on August 27, 2012, aged 94.



Ask for additional information: sedlacek.pvp.os@gmail.com

*Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year 2014*

