Our medics help

Construction of border fences in Hungary, deployment of a field hospital in Slovenia, and deliberations about further deployment and support of not only coalition partners in their management of the refugee crisis the extent of which is unheard of for modern Europe; these were the activities of our soldiers abroad, and their assistance continues.

The Czech military unit has operated in Hungary since mid-October last year. The main task was to help with the construction of the border fence for the management and adjustment of the influx of refugees, for whom the route through Hungary was a common way to get to Europe before continuing to Germany and the United Kingdom. The service is far from being over. The incessant arrivals of buses full of migrants, migrants arriving on foot, but also detained vans or trucks with hidden refugees all require medical presence. Cold to freezing weather and often completely deficient clothing cause frostbites, respiratory problems, the need for fever treatment, viral infections, but also skin diseases and war injuries.

All essentials available

Medics work in Šentilj refugee centre near Maribor. Upon their arrival to Slovenia, they had treated around 60 refugees every day, then their number decreased. “Most of them are people with upper respiratory diseases, diarrhoea, pyrexia and minor injuries,” said the commander of the Czech medical unit Aleš Rybka. Only sick people or those who are interested in getting treatment turn to medics. “They behave decently and mostly very politely, of course a language barrier plays its part. We had no conflict in the sense of hostility, violence and so on,” said Rybka. Some of the refugees ask to be treated preferentially, he says. “But we provide medical treatment to children first, then women, and only then to young guys with sore throats; they can certainly wait unlike a child who has diarrhoea and is clearly dehydrated,” he added. All essentials are available in the center – medication, bandages and other medical supplies. The buses with refugees often stop and refugees only ask for Ibuprofen, Paracetamol or other pills to lower their temperature or ease their viral infection. They don’t want to be delayed on their journey.

Not only war refugees

Absurdly, if we could learn from our and foreign media, are refugees from Kosovo and Albania, countries where there is no imminent danger of life, there is not rage a war and people are not daily exposed to the reality of death. Unfortunatley common phenomenon is thought to comfortably live in Europe, high financial support at their destination countries (which is disinformation of smugglers and traffickers) and also not completely stable political environment associated with high unemployment. Our soldiers and medics day in and day out help everyone without regard to religion, sexual orientation or skin color but a condition to stop or significantly reduce the migration crisis is especially calming the situation in their home countries where refugees are running away from and complete elimination of terrorist and extremist groups which even called them a state. Otherwise the old continent will not be what it used to be and peace and democracy will be just empty phrases with regard to the fear which will be widespread during the ever-intensifying terrorist attacks on civilians and our values.

Different mentalities

Young men account for nearly three quarters of the refugees. They come mostly from Afghanistan. Families with children and older people are coming mainly from Syria. “Many of them are educated. In my personal opinion, families with children escape from war, but many people misuse the situation,” said Rybka. Soldiers frequently found brutal photos or videos in the refugees’ mobile phones during their checks. A filmed decapitation, photos of beheadings or mass executions are everyday reality. The most common explanation is the fear of ISIS and the presence of similar perversions in mobile phones would make the escape easier. Pretended liking for this atrocious ideology during the checks could help them to flee from places where ISIS operates. The situation is complicated in the case of young people when many of them are soldiers or conscripts. Some are running away from the military service, especially with regard to service in President Bashar Assad’s forces or the Afghan army, which is in a very unstable state. Young are afraid of their own borders in the fight and of course death. However, who actually runs away from war is it only speculation.

By Michal Voško, photos by Jan Kasib, Wikipedia

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Minister Stropnický: “After taking the office, one of the most pleasing surprises for me was the shape our soldiers were in.”

At the end of 2015, the Sobotka Cabinet found themselves half way through their term. On that occasion, we interviewed the Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic, H.E. Martin Stropnický.

When you assumed the tenure as defence minister, did it occur to you that in a very short time the security situation would fundamentally change and you would be up to challenging events associated with the conflicts in the Ukraine, in Syria and a massive migration wave?

Definitely not. When something surprising happens, politicians usually say they had expected it. I do not seek to learn that. When something happens, politicians usually say they had expected it. I do not seek to learn that.

You served in the capacity of the Minister of Culture in the past. How much do the two Ministries differ?

Entirely. That derives from the very simple fact that the Ministry of Culture is simply smaller in size. I do not discuss the importance, but the number of personnel and budget. With all due respect for the Ministry of Culture, the primary role of the Ministry of Defence is to provide one of the most essential attributes of the state, mission to deliver security to our citizens and territorial integrity. It is not comparable in this respect. On the other hand, the two Ministries are similar as to certain type of administration, development of documents for the government, their approval, as well as negotiations with the Members of the Parliament. The experience I gained in this regard in the “culture” certainly helped me a lot. From the viewpoint of our ANO movement, I was perhaps the only one who had a hands-on experience with the performance of the ministerial capacity. But again I need to say that “defence” is incomparable. It has a large civilian component, but most importantly it has the essential part: the armed forces. The MoD also has three hospitals, four state enterprises, twelve recreational facilities, an institute of history, Military Police, Military Intelligence. It is huge aggregate of workings. The breadth of coverage is the key difference.

Minister, you came to the MoD and insisted that before the budget would increase, it was first critical to fill the holes leaking public funds. Have you managed to achieve that?

I hope so. Knock on wood, but what has avoided us – and I trust this will be the case down the road – is scandals. And that is one of cornerstones this Ministry works on. We will not realise overpriced, unjustified procurements. Naturally, one may not evade conflict situations in the acquisition business. Virtually any supplier denied a contract has at least bad sentiment. It does not take much to push it to the media. It is not difficult to make it a story that describes our choice as non-transparent and ineffective. In that sense, defence ministers will always be on the edge. I brought a close working team of colleagues whom I augmented during the past year. Those have been individuals I had known before, had a long-standing confidence in them and did not have to test or watch them. For me, coming to the Ministry was like entering a minefield. Many people discouraged me and told me it was not manageable and could not be stood. I do not make any appraisals of my performance. To be fair, there were a number of high-quality staff when I came to the Ministry, who had survived all the shocks and can be relied on. And then there are the others. For those, you however need to put in place adequate supervisory machinery.

Your team of closest colleagues has changed quite substantially over the past two years. The promulgation of the Civil Service Act has affected to an extent. Does something like that represent a challenge for top managers?

Not really. I believe that goes with it. Human capital is the most precious asset, including in the military. You can have any equipment you want, if the soldier is not internally, mentally and humanly resilient, high-quality and strong, then even the best weapon systems would not help. With office workers, excuse me, it is similar. The tradition in this country is that many men wish to have a prestigious card, and they do not always admit there is a huge responsibility to it. Indeed, the MoD also involves a tremendous amount of personnel management effort. One thing is to select your closest team. But that is not an end. Ministers naturally cannot do micromanagement. But they have to know branch directors, section heads; that is the key. Ministers have to be able to motivate people not only to commend them, but also to tell them off when it is not working. All of that claims time, energy and some estimation. Age is definitely something that helps in this respect. I have worked in lead positions roughly since when I was thirty-five. Of course, they were less important than...
attacks do not always produce the desired effect and perhaps also to some prudence. Loud attacks do not always produce the desired outcomes. In that sense, my previous appointment as a theatre director helped me considerably. If management is mentally demanding, then it is just there. In theatre, you are up to working with very distinctive personalities and rather emotional people. Otherwise they could not do the job. In that work, I certainly committed some mistakes, but I also learnt some lessons. To put it plainly: personnel management is at least fifty percent of the success.

The Cabinet endorsed the Czech Armed Forces Development Concept. Does that policy document represent some sort of a cookbook for the Army to follow during the two years left on your tenure? Absolutely. Halfway through the term, our Cabinet has its fundamental policies developed and endorsed. And that is the key. I would like to thank to all colleagues including the General Staff, which was involved both in the development concept and in the 2030 Security Outlook and amendments to the defence acts. All of those are clear-cut cornerstones of the building concept. For many years, I am glad the military finally has such documents. They specifically determine what, when and how we will procure. They significantly curtail the tendencies to improvise. Improvisation always entails a greater risk of inefficiencies or non-transparent contract. I am very glad that we have those documents available. I am very glad to have smoothly reached an agreement with General Bečvář in this regard. We have a clear roadmap to follow.

The Gross Domestic Product may not be so strongly on the rise in the Czech Republic as is now. How difficult it may be to achieve the goals envisaged under the concept?

The concept is based on realistic budgetary outlook. We have a clear financial plan in place for 2017 and 2018. But you are right that no one may foresee the way national economy would perform. On the other hand, in those economic analyses and forecasts, and they were developed by experts outside the MoD, there is nothing we should be afraid of.

The Cabinet endorsed the Czech Armed Forces Development Concept. Does that policy document represent some sort of a cookbook for the Army to follow during the two years left on your tenure?

The Czech Armed Forces was employed to provide security to the Vrbětic ammunition depot and trains augmentation of the Police of the Czech Republic for reinforced border protection. Does it mean the Armed Forces’ role could change in the future towards supporting more the Integrated Emergency System and the Police?

This is presently tackled by a number of personalities and rather emotional people. When a training exercise was called a year ago in Poland for five thousand soldiers, thirty-five thousand volunteers put up their hands. But Poland has a different historical experience and traditions.

In Western Europe, the mental separation has already occurred and it has been a similar case in our country too. There were two factors in my perspective: transitioning to an all-volunteer armed forces, as something not concerning the common citizen. But thankfully there are exceptions. For instance in Poland people are much more aware that it is essential to be involved in enhancing the national defence posture. When a training exercise was called a year ago in Poland for five thousand soldiers, thirty-five thousand volunteers put up their hands. But Poland has a different historical experience and traditions.

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Their approach to the families of the fallen helped a lot then. As we walked home, we thought we could not leave it like that, that we needed to do something for the families of killed soldiers. The reaction was the very spontaneous. People suddenly saw they were not alone with the loss, that there were also others who had face a situation like that. In that context, we found out there was no database of KDA service-people. At the same time, it accelerated the establishment of the military charity fund. When I visited the United States back in 2014, one of the most remarkable memories I had was how U.S. citizens naturally honoured the fallen soldiers everywhere. I thought we should follow that example even then.

Do we still not have a long way to get to that point? People sometimes question especially the modern veterans of war and heroes.

We are a nation of commentators. Virtually everything is questioned in our country. That may even be considered a certain quality in specific circumstances. We simply do not like strong words, pathos etc. But there are things that should be untouchable. One should not criticise, not play it like Schweik, do not question it and show honour and respect. There is a little memorial in every little village in the Czech Republic displaying the names of the fallen in World War I. Those were young lads, not even twenty-five years old. From that little village, they went down into the Dolomites, where they were smashed to smithereens. It is very important that we upkeep their memorials and graves, that we teach this to children at schools. I also try to contribute my humble part to remembering our fallen.

You underwent a training exercise recently with your bodyguards, during which you could see how an attacker would be eliminated but also to practice shooting yourself. What is your personal attitude on the martial sports and sports at large?

I have had an active relation to sports throughout my life. I played football, first junior league. I even though once that I would do that for living. I ended it when I was eighteen. I had to choose among music, theatre, football and a lady. Football lost the battle then. But we also had much sport at the Academy of Performing Arts. There is fencing, water training course, horse riding, dancing and gymnastics, acrobatics. I seek to keep fit even at present. It is very important that we upkeep their memorials and graves, that we teach this to children at schools. I also try to contribute my humble part to remembering our fallen. In my humble part to remembering our fallen.

A nation not honouring its heroes is said to be a patriot there. Much more challenging is to be a patriot when we do our tax returns. There you can tell whether people do not skimp their state, the relationship is measurable there. Even more important is whether people are willing to join national defence they so frequently speak about. Whether they know its history, at least on elementary level. Whether they know what their country emerged from and what it has been through. But also whether they can speak and write their native tongue properly. Many a noisy person and fighter for Czech nation are finding it hard to achieve.

A nation not honouring its heroes is said to have none when it will need them. Before Christmas 2014, you with your spouse initiated a remembrance function for the first time to recall the fallen soldiers, the "The Way to the Light". How was that idea born?

We did it with certain tension; we did not know how people would accept that. But since it was received very positively, we decided to set up a tradition and organised again in 2015. When we lost five soldiers in Afghanistan as a result of a suicide bomber attack, we waited at the Kbely military airfield with my wife Veronika. There were also the families of the killed soldiers. As coffins were being brought out of the airplane, it was painful and strong. I should say it was very good that my wife was with me. There were also others who had face a situation like that. In that context, we found out there was no database of KDA service-people. At the same time, it accelerated the establishment of the military charity fund. When I visited the United States back in 2014, one of the most remarkable memories I had was how U.S. citizens naturally honoured the fallen soldiers everywhere. I thought we should follow that example even then.

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The hotel Nord-Sud is situated in a quiet part of the Malian capital Bamako. At first sight, there are no indications that it houses nearly six hundred members of the Headquarters of the EUTM (European Union Training Mission). On Monday evening, March 21, just few minutes after 06:30, everything changed. The unknown assailant armed with AK-47s tried to get into a hotel entrance. But there he bumped into the Czech soldiers who had protected the Headquarters for three years. During the following fireworks, in which also Malian soldiers were involved, he was neutralized. No one managed to break into the hotel building.

“They Czech soldiers, in accordance with the procedures laid down by set rules, assumed defensive positions and after positive identification of the attacker they returned fire. Subsequently, in cooperation with members of the Malian National Guard, they incapacitated the attacker,” said on the incident Lieutenant General Josef Bečvář, Chief of the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces. “Our soldiers successfully beat off an attack on the EUTM Headquarters in Bamako, the striker failed to break into the premises. For their courage and decisive action they deserve my full recognition.”

Nobody was injured

None of the Czech soldiers or other members of the mission was hurt. After this incident, there were no attacks on the Headquarters.

The circumstances of the incident and the possible involvement of other persons were the subject of a subsequent investigation. Members of the 7th unit, Czech Armed Forces, further performed their standard tasks that were subsequently extended to the security procedures for the whole headquarters area. In its vicinity we understandably increased both patrolling and the deployment of Malian members of the Mali’s armed and security forces. In this context it is necessary to mention that the 7th unit of the Czech Armed Forces took over this operational task on 11 March 2016. That is less than two weeks before the attack. Its commander is Captain Jiří Staněk of the 44th Light Motorized Battalion Jiříčkův Hradec. The members of this battalion constitute the unit’s organizational core.

The unit is complemented by soldiers of Training Command—Military Academy Vyškov. They are experienced men with the background in foreign missions. Many of them, in the past, went through the deployment in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to protecting the Headquarters of training mission EUTM, residing in the hotel complex, our unit also provides escorts for the commander and staff of the mission and partly trains the Malian army. In that training, there are involved another four Czech soldiers.

Explosives. The latest incident happened at the end of March, however it demonstrated that the safety measures introduced by the EUTM Mission in Mali were set correctly and the cooperation with the Malian security forces is effective.

Since this year the next twenty-five-member contingent of our troops has been operating in the United Nations stabilization mission MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) in northeast Mali. That should help to ensure security and create conditions for further humanitarian and political assistance to the Malian government. The unit, consisting of members of the 601st Special Forces Group (ssg), performs tasks in the full spectrum of special operations, with a focus on the management of special reconnaissance and intelligence activities in favour of an overall effort by Commander of MINUSMA operation. By mandate, members of special units are to act in Mali until 31 December 2016.
In 2015 due to filling the position of the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee and joining the NATO Force Integration Units concept, representation in international military staffs and NATO agencies, EU military staffs and national representation offices was reinforced to 197 ACR members, who were assigned to locations on the territory of fifteen NATO nations and the Ukraine.

**Workplaces and locations abroad**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace abroad</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MONS: Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Greece, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Great Britain and Ukraine</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRUSSELS: Belgium</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORFOLK: USA</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>197</strong></td>
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**KEY MISSIONS in 2016**

1. Prepare for defence of the Czech Republic.
2. Plan, prepare and deploy assigned forces and assets in foreign operations and missions in conformity with the authorised mandate.
3. Plan, prepare and sustain capabilities of the ACR forces and assets assigned to high readiness forces and task forces for NATO (NRF), EU (V4 EU BG I/2016 and DEU EU BG II/2016) and the UN.
4. Prepare and realise exercises with multinational participation in the territory of the Czech Republic and participate in defined multinational exercises in foreign countries.
5. Implement the Czech Armed Forces Development Concept through continuous manning, realisation of strategic projects and development of subsequent concepts.
6. Implement amendments to defence legislation in the Czech Armed Forces after they enter into force.
7. Plan, prepare and perform concentrated training of the Active Reserve Component units in February–April 2016 and support its further development.
RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION — Afghanistan

In 2015 the Czech Republic was engaged in RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION on the Afghan territory in the area of responsibility of two regional TAACs (Train, Advise and Assist Command): TAAC-Capital (TAAC-C) and TAAC-East (TAAC-E).

TAAC-C – Kabul: within TAAC-C the following units were engaged at the Kabul international airport (HIKA – Hamid Karzai International Airport):
- AAT (Air Advisory Team) unit of 30 personnel, its mission was to contribute to the training of flight and ground personnel of Afghan Air Force in Mi-35 and Mi-17 helicopters;
- Field Surgical Team of 15 personnel + in a field hospital in the US;
- Representation at RSM, HKRA and BAF-headquarters – 19 personnel;
- NSE (National Support Element) of 50 personnel, which was in charge of logistics support of all ACR units in Afghanistan.

TAAC-E – in TAAC-E Parwan province BAF (Bayram Airfield), was deployed a force protection company, which was tasked to protect a designated area with 165 personnel.

Moreover, on the Afghan territory was also engaged a 601st special forces group detachment tasked to protect persons and property of Czech Embassy in Kabul, including the residence of the Czech ambassador.

EU NAVFOR MED (EU NAVFOR Sophia) — Italy

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers, who fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Rome, and 1 officer at forces headquarters (FHQ), which is located at an Italian aircraft carrier.

EU Training Mission (EUTM) — Mali

The CR contributed with task force ACR EU TM Mali of up to 38 personnel. One officer and one senior warrant officer fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters (in Bamako, 32 personnel were engaged in fulfilling tasks connected with the protection of headquarters EU TM Mali in Bamako and with escorting convoys. Four trainers were engaged in training Malian armed forces in the training centres in Koulikoro and Sikasso.

Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) — Arab Republic of Egypt, Sinai

The CR contributed to the MFO with 3 officers, who fulfilled tasks at the MFO HQ located at the Camp El Gosh, also the place of engagement of the air unit with C-295 CASA aircraft and up to 14 personnel.

EU NAVFOR ATALANTA – Great Britain

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers and 1 senior non-commissioned officer, who fulfilled tasks arising from their specific posting at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Northwood.

FOREIGN OPERATIONS

In 2015 the MoD joined 11 foreign operations. In total, almost 800 soldiers took part in these operations.

EU ALTHEA (EUFOR) — Bosnia and Herzegovina

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers, who fulfilled tasks connected with the training of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the operational headquarters, Butmir Airbase, Sarajevo.

EU NAVFOR ATALANTA — Great Britain

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers and 1 senior non-commissioned officer, who fulfilled tasks arising from their specific posting at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Northwood.

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In the period from 1 January to 31 December 2015 the ACR assigned up to 1,500 personnel for the NRF (Brigade command and support elements up to 344 personnel, airborne mechanized battalion up to 656 personnel, MP platoon up to 34 personnel, NSE up to 217 personnel, engineer construction company up to 60 personnel, special forces task group up to 75 personnel and air defence battery up to 106 personnel).

Czech Participation in Readiness Forces, International Foreign Operations and Observer Missions in 2015

NATO READINESS FORCES

NATO Response Force (NRF)

In 2015 the MoD joined 11 foreign operations. In total, almost 800 soldiers took part in these operations.

Joint Enterprise (KFOR) – Kosovo

11 ACR servicemen were engaged in the operation, including 3 DCM (Deployable Communication Module) servicemen, who were assigned to positions at KFOR command at the Camp-Film City in Pristina.

EU MINUSMA – Mali

The CR contributed to the mission with 3 officers, who fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters at Camp Ziouani.

EU NAVFOR ATALANTA – Great Britain

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers and 1 senior non-commissioned officer, who fulfilled tasks arising from their specific posting at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Northwood.

UN MINUSMA – Mali

The CR contributed with 1 officer, who fulfilled tasks at the mission HQ in Bamako.

UNDOF – Golan Heights

The CR contributed to the mission with 3 officers, who fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters at Camp Ziouani.

Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) — Arab Republic of Egypt, Sinai

The CR contributed with task force ACR EU TM Mali of up to 38 personnel. One officer and one senior warrant officer fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters (in Bamako, 32 personnel were engaged in fulfilling tasks connected with the protection of headquarters EU TM Mali in Bamako and with escorting convoys. Four trainers were engaged in training Malian armed forces in the training centres in Koulikoro and Sikasso.

EU NAVFOR MED (EU NAVFOR Sophia) – Italy

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers, who fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Rome, and 1 officer at forces headquarters (FHQ), which is located at an Italian aircraft carrier.

EU Training Mission (EUTM) – Mali

The CR contributed with task force ACR EU TM Mali of up to 38 personnel. One officer and one senior warrant officer fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters (in Bamako, 32 personnel were engaged in fulfilling tasks connected with the protection of headquarters EU TM Mali in Bamako and with escorting convoys. Four trainers were engaged in training Malian armed forces in the training centres in Koulikoro and Sikasso.

Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) — Arab Republic of Egypt, Sinai

The CR contributed to the MFO with 3 officers, who fulfilled tasks at the MFO HQ located at the Camp El Gosh, also the place of engagement of the air unit with C-295 CASA aircraft and up to 14 personnel.

UNDOF – Golan Heights

The CR contributed to the mission with 3 officers, who fulfilled tasks at operational headquarters at Camp Ziouani.

EU NAVFOR ATALANTA – Great Britain

The CR contributed to the operation with 2 officers and 1 senior non-commissioned officer, who fulfilled tasks arising from their specific posting at operational headquarters (OHQ) in Northwood.

In 2015 ACR military observers contributed to 4 UN peacekeeping missions with 10 personnel.

MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) – 3 personnel

UNMIL (Kosovo) – 2 personnel

UNAMA (Afghanistan) – 2 personnel

MINUSCA (Central African Republic) – 3 personnel

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In 2015 ACR military observers contributed to 4 UN peacekeeping missions with 10 personnel.
The training of ACR units focused on fulfilling tasks arising from commitments of the Czech Republic towards the NATO and EU, commitments of the CR in the area of regional defence cooperation and last but not least aimed at the maintenance and development of existing capabilities of individual components for a full range of operations in symmetric as well as asymmetric environment. In the context of refugee crisis development, unplanned ACR exercises were realised in the second term of 2015, which focused on the preparation to protect the state borders and the borders of the Schengen area. In 2015 ACR exercises with foreign partners played a significant role in the area of the troops training. In total, ACR servicemembers took part in 200 exercises with foreign partners; 132 of which took place outside the CR territory and 68 on our territory. These exercises are the key means of achieving the necessary forces and assets readiness level within the entire MoD to defend the CR and allies, and a necessary part of preparation for engagement in operations and in readiness forces of international organisations (NATO, EU, UN). The exercises with foreign partners enhance the capability of joint engagement (i.e. force interoperability), in practice put the level of developing capabilities to test, and thus also serve as a check of the ACR capabilities development efficiency.

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Training Priorities

Overview of Key Exercises With Foreign Partners’ Participation on the Czech Territory

LION EFFORT 2015
The exercise took place on 11 – 24 May 2015 and sought to harmonise standard operational procedures of JAS-39 Gripen fighter users (CZE, HUN, SWE), to practise Composite Air Operations (COMAO) and carry out training in airport air defence. 350 personnel in total participated in the exercise.

MEDICAL MAN
The exercise took place on 15 – 19 June 2015 on the Czech territory and sought to harmonise and achieve certification for Medical Module V4 EU BG. Besides ACR units, medical support units of countries assigned for V4 EU BG took part in the exercise with up to 50 foreign personnel.

TOBRUQ LEGACY 2015
The exercise took place on 22 June – 4 July 2015 in MTA Boletice and focused on joint training for operators of very short range air defence missile systems in joint tactical procedures and interoperability and on performance of a live fire exercise. The exercise was also attended by units from Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia and the US. The total exercise participation rate was 500 personnel with equipment.

AMPLE STRIKE
The exercise took place on 31 August – 22 September 2015 and was attended by servicemembers from 16 NATO nations and 2 PfP partner countries in the total amount of 1,200 trainees (300 of which were foreign participants). The aim was for complex preparation of 25 teams of forward air controllers and their interoperability with tactical and helicopter air force crew, in particular when fulfilling tasks of direct air support.

SKY SOLDIER 2015
The exercise took place on 21 – 25 September 2015. It was a joint exercise of Czech and American paratroopers, who made a night airborne attack on Bechyně airfield. It was followed by a helicopter operation which consisted in sealing the Vleschov (Tábor) airfield ground. The exercise was attended by ca. 300 paratroopers from the 43rd Airborne Battalion from Czchuj and the 173rd Airborne US Forces Brigade. The jumps were made from C-130 Hercules aircraft, and Mi-171Sh and Mi-24/35 helicopters were deployed in the helicopter operation.

RAMSTEIN GUARD (NEWFIP)
The RAMSTEIN GUARD (NEWFIP – NATO Force Integration Programme) exercise with foreign participation took place on the Czech territory on 23 – 27 November 2015. The aim of the exercise was to train combat action in electronic warfare environment, adversary’s air defence threat simulation and verification of own aircraft protection systems’ functionality.

Training Priorities and Focus in 2015

The training of ACR units focused on fulfilling tasks arising from commitments of the Czech Republic towards the NATO and EU, commitments of the CR in the area of regional defence cooperation and last but not least aimed at the maintenance and development of existing capabilities of individual components for a full range of operations in symmetric as well as asymmetric environment. In the context of refugee crisis development, unplanned ACR exercises were realised in the second term of 2015, which focused on the preparation to protect the state borders and the borders of the Schengen area. In 2015 ACR exercises with foreign partners played a significant role in the area of the troops training. In total, ACR servicemembers took part in 200 exercises with foreign partners; 132 of which took place outside the CR territory and 68 on our territory. These exercises are the key means of achieving the necessary forces and assets readiness level within the entire MoD to defend the CR and allies, and a necessary part of preparation for engagement in operations and in readiness forces of international organisations (NATO, EU, UN). The exercises with foreign partners enhance the capability of joint engagement (i.e. force interoperability), in practice put the level of developing capabilities to test, and thus also serve as a check of the ACR capabilities development efficiency.
Overview of Key Exercises With Foreign Partners’ Participation Outside the Czech Territory

**TOXIC LEAK I and II 2015**
The exercises took place on 20 – 24 April and 12 – 17 October 2015 in the Radiological, Chemical and Biological Protection Training and Testing Centre in Zemianske Kostoľany, Slovakia. It was attended by chemical and engineering specialists from ACR troops. It consisted of training with toxic substances, and the aim was to develop soldiers’ hands-on experience in an environment close to the real conditions, and to harmonise activity of CBRN-EOD (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear – Explosive Ordnance Disposal) teams when fulfilling special tasks which reflect the following realistic situations: ammunition or improvised explosive device is found and there is risk of dangerous substance leakage.

**CAPABLE LOGISTICIAN 2015**
The exercises took place on 1 – 26 June 2015 on the Hungarian territory under the direction of the Multinational Centre for Logistics Coordination. The ACR was represented by 90 servicemen from the Logistics Coordination, the 14th Logistics Support Regiment, the Multinational Centre for Logistics Coordination, the 14th Logistics Support Regiment, the 15th Engineer Regiment and the Military Police with equipment. One of the aims of the exercise was to harmonise and certify the Support Module of the EU BG based on the V4 countries’ (V4 EU BG) with the readiness period being the first semester of 2016.

**MOUNTAIN FLIGHT 2015**
The exercise took place on 8 – 26 June 2015 in France and sought to train helicopter crews in flying in mountain terrain, including group flying and operational and tactical training on foreign missions. The tasks were fulfilled by 3 Mi-171Sh helicopters, 1 Mi-27 helicopter and 2 Mi-35 helicopters from the 22nd Helicopter Air Base with crew and personnel totaling 55 personnel.

**Noble Jump**
The NATO VJTF exercise took place on 9 – 20 June 2015 on the Polish territory and sought to put to test the capability of VJTF units to make a strategic relocation to the place of deployment in a given time limit from activation, and to fulfil a combat mission in a designated area of operation in cooperation with other NATO units. The ACR was represented in the exercise by 150 servicemen of company task force from the 43rd Airborne Battalion formation pre-determined for the VJTF.

**Allied Spirit 2015**
The exercise took place on 4 – 24 August 2015 in the Joint Multinational Readiness Center Hohenfels. The organizer was the US Armed Forces in Europe and among the participants were troops from the US, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Canada, Hungary, Germany, Serbia and Great Britain. The ACR was represented by a task force of the Land Forces and Air Force, the core being 7th Mechanized Brigade servicemen totalizing 1,400 personnel and more than 420 items of equipment. The aim of the exercise was to enhance the readiness of the units in training and to demonstrate the capability of efficient cooperation of NATO and partner units during a joint ground operation. In the course of three weeks the participants practiced performing asault, defense as well as stabilization operations and harmonizing fire support as well as control and command of multinational units.

**Slovak Shield 2015**
The exercise took place on 12 – 27 September 2015 in the training area Leš in Slovakia.

The ACR contributed with 120 servicemen of the 71st Mechanized Battalion. The aim was to train the capabilities of commanders and staffs at tactical level and to react to potential military and non-military threats, and enhance the unit in combat action during relocation, in defensive and offensive manoeuvres. Another objective, which was met, was to train the capability of commanders, staffs and tactical units to carry out joint operations, and the capability to plan, command and control joint operations in international environment. The support units also improved in overall provision of combat action.

**Important Crisis Management Exercises**

**CMX 2015**
The CMX 2015 exercise of crisis management institutions took place on 4 – 10 March 2015. It was an exercise which is organised on a regular basis and is designed for the key civilian and military personnel and organisational structures with in the NATO. Moreover, it is an exercise which seeks to train cooperation between the Alliance, its partners and other international players at the political and military strategic level.

**Zona 2015**
The exercise took place on 22 – 24 September 2015 and its subject was the activity of central administrative agencies, regional institutions and other entities when facing events which arose in connection with a simulated accident of the Temelin nuclear power plant. Moreover, the MoD was tasked with practising the system of transmitting requirements for ACR forces and assets deployment, the system of reporting and disseminating information among the troops within the MoD and the ACR, the activity of assigning teams of radiological and chemical reconnaissance, cooperation of the Regional Military Headquarters and the local administration and autonomy and the MoD Joint Operations Centre, and last but not least to put to test the activity of a radiological reconnaissance air group.
Future Development of the Czech Armed Forces

The starting points for the provision of defence and security of the Czech Republic are an active participation in the system of NATO collective defence relying on a strong transatlantic connection, development of EU capabilities to manage crises, and cooperation with partner countries. Defence of the Czech Republic is based on three pillars: a responsible attitude of countries. Defence of the Czech Republic is an obligation to the state to defence and to commitments arising from its membership in the Alliance, operational armed forces, and citizen’s duty to defend their country.

Forces

The Long-Term Vision for Defence 2030 established the framework for the drafted ACR Build-up Concept and other conceptual materials of the Defence Ministry. The main aim of the Concept is to define the scope and method of capability achievement, which is required for the fulfillment of all ACR missions and commitments by the end of 2025, with regard to the NATO and EU security and military documents and outcomes of the defence planning processes. The Concept responds to the change in the security environment and predicts its development in the 2025 horizon. It draws on the intention to make use of the ACR and the expected resource framework.

To fulfill its missions, the ACR will need to have 24,262 military professionals, 3,720 civilian employees and 5,000 members on active reserve. To fulfil its missions, the ACR will need to have 24,262 military professionals, 3,720 civilian employees and 5,000 members on active reserve.

Mechanized troops – work on the preparation of the 7th mechanized brigade rearmament project started. In its resolution, the Government acknowledged procurement to acquire in total 62 pieces of wheeled armoured vehicles for command-staff and communication. In concrete terms, the plan is to acquire 20 pieces of vehicles on Pandur platform and 42 pieces of Tatra vehicles. The project Soldier in the 21st Century by means of acquisition of MBK modular combat sets and CAStAR assets will continue. Phase II of ACR rearmament with small arms was completed, in 2015 were supplied 5,665 pieces of assault rifles CZ 805 BREN, 5,342 pieces of pistols CZ 75 SP Phantom, and 269 pieces of machine-guns Minimi 7.62 × 51 mm were acquired. Transport asset completion, including assets with additional ballistic protection, is in progress.

Artillery – work on the project to acquire a NATO cannon was initiated. Mortars 81-M2 KM calibre 81mm were acquired.

Electronic warfare – UAS ScanEagle category small (15–30kg) was acquired. The ACR acquired the asset via programme 1206 of the US Congress. ACR acquired one set, which contains 10 pieces of UAV and ground equipment, 2 sets of IDM equipment with accessories for the radio station to connect to NATO information networks (e.g. CESMO – Cooperative Electronic Support Measures Operations) and 8 sets of MANPACK assets to protect units from RCIED were acquired.

Communication troops – phases II and III of the tactical radio communication system modernization project were carried out for the ground forces, which will increase the ACR units capabilities in the area of secured and unsecured radio communication and bring compatibility and interoperability with communication devices of the Allies. 10 sets of communication and information modules KIM-5, which will provide command and control support, in particular of ACR company-level combat task forces, were acquired. Data storage and data centre development implementation and MoD global data network modernization projects were prepared and initiated. Technical capabilities within the area of cyber defence were also enhanced.

Tactical air force – modernization of all parts of the L-159 simulator was completed, the preparation to transform three pieces of single-seat L-159 to the two-seat version was initiated, and the L-159 MSS (Mission Support System) information transformation project was initiated.

Helicopter air force – within Mi-171sh helicopter modernization project the development of M-134D-H Mingun machine guns, meteorological radars, FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared) systems and lightened ballistic defence took place. The modernization was funded from the foreign aid programme of the US Government. In 2015–2016 further modernization of Mi-171sh helicopters will take place with the aim to harmonize their avionics equipment and enhance satellite communication. The project to launch the acquisition of 12 pieces of multi-role helicopters which will replace Mi-24/35 helicopters is in progress.

Transport fleet – as part of the transport fleet development, a project to acquire an airfield pallet system for transport aircraft and to carry out MEDIUAC upgrade for Airbus A-319-119 has started. An increase of transport fleet capacities is being considered.

Anti-aircraft rocket troops – two more RVR reconnaissance sensors for low-level radio location reconnaissance were supplied to units in category V SHORAD (RBS-70 man-portable air defence system). The defence development project to implement the modular ballistic system of protection for air defence team RBS-70 for an off-road lorry medium T 810-V was completed.

Radio technical troops – in 2015 preparation for the acquisition process to modernize combat equipment of radio technical troops was initiated. In 2017–2021 an exchange for new MADK type 3D radio locators with expected life cycle until 2040 will take place.

Air traffic control – radio posts development and technological preparation was carried out, radio communication equipment was acquired and installed at Čáslav, Náměšť nad Oslavou, Prague-Kbely and Pardubice airbases to provide radio communication of air traffic control workplaces.

As at 1 June 2015, in connection with provision in Act No. 234/2014 Coll., On Civil Service, Regional Military Headquarters were reorganised. As at 1 July 2015, in connection with implementation of the Act No. 332/2014 Coll., amending Act No. 221/1999 Coll., On Military Professionals, were the following entities reorganised in compliance with the new organisational structure: MoD Joint Operations Centre, Multinational Logistics Coordination Centre, Logistics Agency, Communications and Information Systems Agency, Military Medical Agency, Military Geographical and Hydrometeorological Office, 601th Special Forces Group; the organisational components of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and the 7th Mechanised Brigade, the 13th Artillery Regiment and the 14th Logistics Support Regiment; Air Force Command, 22nd Helicopter Air Base, 24th Transport Fleet Base, Pardubice Airfield Administration and Training Command – Military Academy.

As at 31 December 2015, based on Act No. 15/2015 Coll., On Abolition of the Brdy Military Region, On Determining Borders of Military Regions, On Regional Borders’ Modification and On the Amendment of Related Acts (Act on Military Regions’ Borders), the Brdy Military Region’s Office was closed and a Group for the abolition of Brdy Military Region was established.

Relocation in Location

In the course of 2015 no MoD garrison or autonomous location was close down. The Brdy Military Region was being abolished in the course of 2015, and the final abolition took place on 31 December 2015. Garrison Jince – Military Region Brdy was renamed Garrison Jince on 1 January 2016.
Introducing the military specialisms

The Pandur driver

Pandur is an armoured personnel carrier (APC). It has all-wheel drive, can wade and swim, can handle mud and snow and it disappears into smoke screen from enemy shot. It is not a piece of cake to control “twenty-ton beast” and the fate of the crew often depends on driver’s mastery. For Corporal Marcel Sokol his „Pandur’s older driver” post in the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade has been near to his heart for the third year, and he knows this “armored tin” to the last detail. His mileage on it has been nearly five thousand kilometers.

„Before I went over to a Pandur’s driver post later 2012, I had worked as a senior gunner of the machine gun,” says Corporal Marcel Sokol from Zatec red berets. „I have been in the Army since 1998, from my eighteen, and a command- er offered me a Pandur’s driver post based on my previous experience. I nodded almost immediately.”

Category “C” is a must

However, the way to the APC’s driver post is not so easy. The category C driving license is a must. „He had to finish it the civilian sector and because I enjoy driving, I made driving license for whatever I could, thus for the bus too!” Corporal Sokol says. After handling of the necessary procedures he was sent directly to the Pandur driver course in Vyškov by his commander. He completed the course and he has cared for the property item worth several million since then in order to leave neither Pandur nor its crew in the lurch.

„When I first sat into the cockpit and closed the hatch above me, my first reaction was – there is nothing to see,” smiles the personable driver. Today he feels at home there and vice versa he can hand his gained experience to younger and inexperienced colleagues.

Before „Got” is heard

„Before „Got” is heard. How hard is to be a Pandur driver? Before you set out e.g. to planned training. Corporal Sokol describes. „It means checks of vehicle, equipment, mandatory equipment – including light bulbs, inflate system, horns, warning triangle, first aid kits, in short a classic outfit must be in order which is not so much different from the civilian vehicle equipment. „This machine has its specifications such as antennas, helmets, steel ropes to rescue, I have to check hooks, mirrors, all communication systems, simply leave nothing to chance,” calculates the experienced soldier.

Together with the gunner-operator, another member of the crew, they must test all systems connections. The next phase is the preparation of spare lubricants, equipment, powerpack check including transmission in order I really could report to commander that the vehicle is ready to set out and to fulfill the task. „This weekly ad- vance gives me the possibility that if I run into a problem, I will have some time left for its solu- tion,” CPL Sokol says. „If we were already on exer- cise, it means outside the home base, solution in field conditions would be done with difficulty.”

Crow’s teamwork required

The driver sits in the left front part. He uses a hatch with a trapdoor which is placed over his head for embarking to the vehicle. Aperture size allows him to wearing a protective bullet proof vest.

„I mainly monitor the computer in the cock- pit which shows me the temperatures of engine coolant, gearbox coolant, but also of all liquids” enumerates the driver. „Simply I have to have my eyes everywhere, the only big unusualness is that I only see ahead in the night mode and on the left or on the right side is darkness.”

At this moment it emerges that the crew must be absolutely teamwork. The driver must rely on the commander or gunner-operator who sees the target with a camera and tells him that he can ride through the terrain or I hear in the headset: „Yes, there is a branch on the left but it misses us, go at full” The Corporal replies an action situation.

Communication in helmets

If the driver sits in the cockpit, he waits for a commander’s command, „Got!” The whole crew has helmets on their heads and it is interconnected by intercom system. „Thanks to the intercom communication system we hear each other in our background noise, noise of roar- ing engines or noise of triggered gun turret sys- tem and I hear only commander’s instructions in the field,” says Marcel Sokol. „The main task is safely delivering of the crew to where it is intended.”

If the vehicle moves on the road, the orienta- tion is easier. Pandur was primarily designed for the roadway with a solid underlay. It is wheeled vehicles and it has no tracks in contrast to tank. Experienced commander knows that it is a wheeled vehicle and therefore he selects a route on the basis of characteristics of the ve- hicle. Although the driver has the last word as well signal for “Stop” in any case. „If I tell the commander that the selected terrain is not suit- able, an alternative way must be found, because I cannot maneuver the vehicle e.g. in swampland and threaten the whole crew,” states Sokol. „The driver is responsible for everything, for the vehi- cle, the crew and infantrymen sitting in the back. If I made a mistake, we could get worst of it all.”

Experience only through practice

The normal speed is 80 kilometers per hour. The beast has maximum speed set at 105 kilometers by the manufactures. „If we walked a tight- rope or our lives would be at a risk, we could go with Pandur at high speed of 120 kilometers per hour” says Corporal Sokol and we can recognize by its reaction that he has even tried that situa- tion in a test. „I have to know what the vehicle can do,” he adds with a smile.

Experience in driving a Pandur is gained only and only from practice in the field. It is neces- sary to try all situations in one can get into, dry try what the vehicle can do, how to keep control over the vehicle, and how it behaves on differ- ent surfaces. Climatic conditions play their part.

„In the spring and fall if conditions are good we go smoothly but it is not quite suitable for muddy terrain or snow due to sliding” says Sokol. „And we are back at those experiences. I have the automatic gearbox, there’s no manual, I have to downshift and know how to get out of this.”

If it is daylight, there is no problem with the ride. However, if it begins to rain or gets dark and commander decides to go into the field, so they have to go, come hell or high water. Orders are orders, no room for discussion. „In this case, I must stop, look around me, it is to be completely sure that we can do it,” says Corporal Sokol.

Experience is very expensive vehicle and there- fore must be constantly monitored and main- tained. „When the break is during training, the driver jumps out and goes around vehicle, checks all the wheels, axles and detects wheth- er everything is okay.” Corporal Sokol describes moments during the training break. „It happens very often that some obstacle or dirt get into the axle, then it overheats and problem has occurred. It must be quickly removed and the driver must know where he has to touch where to look to make sure that everything is in order. Before the commander again instructs „Go!” everything is checked and ready for combat readiness. Even after mission accomplishment and end of the action the vehicle maintenance by driver does not stop. It needs to be re-checked, cleaned and put into a condition that it is immediately ready to perform other tasks.

Take the job to heart

What to say to future drivers of heavy machin- ery? „Above all do not shy and ask experienced drivers about a difficult situation” says Corporal Marcel Sokol. „I was a novice too and I’ve never met that I was snubbed or turned their back on me. So ask them and don’t tell yourself I can deal with it alone. These tricks could hand over only by a driver who already has a few thousand kilo- meters logged and mainly you save lots of time, effort and nerves.”

And a last piece of advice? This profession must be done with heart.

by Jana Deckerová
The Czech Armed Forces Development Concept outlines the plan how the Czech military is authorised to look like in 2025

10-year Vision

In December last year, the Cabinet endorsed the 2025 Czech Armed Forces Development Concept. This major policy document is reviewed in the present article specifically in terms of the objective force status - the way the Czech military is meant to look like in a decade’s time.

The foresighted evolution of security en- vironments and contingency scenarios for the Czech Armed Forces’ employment call for a well-balanced development of capabilities to be possessed by all branches and services. Besides building an equilibrium across the force structure, the high value added niche specialisations will continue to develop, particularly in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence and electronic warfare passive surveillance systems as part of the Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance/Information, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (JISR/ISTAR).

The 2025 Czech Armed Forces will consist of a command and control system and forces comprising the land forces, air force and special forces, directly subordinated units and components reporting to the Chief of General Staff and units and components subordinate to the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces. The Czech national territory will also host multiple national components, in whose operations the Czech Armed Forces will be involved.

High responsiveness

Capabilities of the 2025 Czech Armed Forces will address its most likely employment options while respecting the requirements under the most demanding scenario. Staff training will focus on acquiring and fostering operational planning capabilities on battalion and brigade level, individual operational specialists will be prepared for contingency operations as part of multinational division or corps command headquarters.

Intensive combat readiness training will be the key precondition for fully harnessing the potential gained through the procurement of new equipment and material and enlistment of new military professionals, and will be an integral part of capability development. Training will focus on all types of warfare, operations, working closely with authorities responsible for cyber security and defence. The Czech Armed Forces will develop cyber operation planning and control and the ability to develop contingency plans.

Implementation of measures to achieve the desired end state with individual branches and services will develop and enhance key capabilities.

General Staff

The Czech Armed Forces General Staff will provide strategic control and operational command as a component of the Ministry of Defence. The General Staff will redesign its organisation and increase personnel strength to make sure it is able to deliver policies, force planning and development, involvement in state administration, operation planning and control and force training.

The General Staff will have the capability to develop strategic level policy documents as comprehensive sets of measures to achieve goals in defined domains, force planning and development, development of doctrines, regulations and manuals; development of the Czech Armed Forces command and control system; performance of government function in its authorised remote planning, control and conduct of joint operations, and planning, control and organisation of force training.

On the strategic-operation level of command and control, the General Staff will exercise command over directly subordinate Land Forces and Air Forces components and units.

The Czech Armed Forces command and control system will comprise command authorities, command posts, command and control support processes and systems and will provide an effective command over Czech Armed Forces units in the home territory as well as forces deployed for NATO and EU-led operations on the strategic and operation level.

Communication and information systems will provide information transmission and processing in the required formats and up to security standards, speed and capacity, including reach-back capabilities. The command and control system will use available software tools for processing information from lower echelons.

The C2 system will be built in accordance with NATO policies, particularly the Federated Mission Networking concept. The FMN system will ensure a full interoperability of command and control in the frame of Czech political-military ambitions on operations. The system will provide communication, voice and data transmission over long distances, generation of joint operational picture, access into the force command and control systems, automatic generation and control of network environment including cyber security measures, automatic acquisition and transmission of positioning reports. It will provide development of identification reports, processing of information from JISR/ISTAR sensors and connection of branches / services subsystems.

Armed Forces

The Czech Armed Forces will have a well-balanced force structure to comprise units and components as well as manpower, special forces, intelligence support forces and assets, units and components subordinate to the Chief of General Staff Czech Armed Forces and military units and components directly subordinate to the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces. The peacetime force structure will include active reserve component forces. Units and components will be fully deployable, partially deployable and stationary.

Deployable units and components will enhance their individual combat capabilities for warfighting at day, night, in reduced visibility using the battlefield identification system for individuals and vehicles to be compatible with command and control assets and with enhanced force protection system.

The Land Forces will comprise mechanised forces, artillery, engine forces, reconnaissance, electronic warfare forces and assets, CBRN defence service, deployable logistic support, civil-military cooperation and psychological operations forces and assets.

Mechanised forces

Mechanised forces will maintain their ability to deploy and employ a task force up to the size of Brigade Task Force (BdeTF) on the basis of mechanised brigade. According to their type, the components will be rapidly deployable and transportable, have a higher ability to manoeuvre in the field, enhanced firepower and resistance. In addition, it is planned to expand the combat components.
Compatiblity of command and control in the Land Forces will be progressively achieved by the acquisition of armoured command, control and communication vehicles. Combat effectiveness of the heavy brigade will be reinforced by the replacement of the obsolete BMP-2 with a multirole tracked platform. With a view to the need to maintain massive firepower, the decision will be made in 2020–2025 on modernisation or replacement of tanks in the inventory. Combat capabilities of light motorised battalions will be reinforced by the ability to engage armoured targets up to the level of mechanised battalions. The light brigade will maintain its airborne capability. Automated and remote controlled unmanned systems and assets (robotic systems) will be increasingly used to develop the capabilities of mechanised forces.

Engineer forces
Engineer service will be able to provide combat engineer support through ensuring mobility of own forces, reducing the opponent's mobility, survival of own manoeuvre forces and conditions conducive to provision of general engineer support. Engineer support will be provided through assignment and deployment of both organic engineer units and engineer battalion task force components (BnTF), or engineer company task forces (CoyTF) with rotary-wing units and engineer companies. The ability will be maintained to assign forces and assets for emergency management efforts. The engineer service will be able to perform consequence management following natural disasters, including renewal of the lines of communication.

To strengthen engineer support capabilities, a high priority will be placed on acquiring and introducing advanced engineer systems and material for road realignment and maintenance, establishing clearances in roadblocks, crossing water obstacles, installation of roadblocks, building protective structures and improved explosive device disposal, including with robotic systems.

CBRN defence service
The CBRN defence service will continue to assign forces and assets for BdeTF, form BnTF, CoyTF and assign specific capabilities in support of NATO forces. It will continue to develop its ability to monitor and assess radiological and chemical situation in support of government agencies and the Czech Armed Forces. CBRN defence will accentuate development of capabilities of defence against weapons of mass destruction, particularly in the domain of detection, identification, decontamination and collective protection. The CBRN defence service will provide support to the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Centre of Excellence.

Deployable logistics
Deployable logistics will support performance of missions primarily on foreign deployed operations. It will develop the ability to assign and deploy components into up to three task forces concurrently and to multinational logistic support headquarters for foreign deployed operations. Furthermore, the process of reception, staging and onward movement, platformatisation and convey transport capabilities will be developed. It will have organic capabilities for transport, storage and handling the mandatory quantity of standard Days of Supply, including ammunition. Its capabilities will be reinforced by developing another supply battalion. New types of vehicles with enhanced ballistic protection will be introduced to the inventory of the logistic support forces.

Tactical air units
As part of the Czech Air Force with the mission to maintain air superiority, the tactical air units will make sure the Czech Republic has the ability to defend its airspace in the frame of the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (NATINAMDS), Czech National Air Defence System and deliver close air support to land task forces at day and night. The ability of night flying using the night vision system will be provided.

Upon achieving the ability to engage ground targets with precision-guided ammunition in all weather at day and night, the supersonic air units will substantially expand the potential of tactical air units to engage ground targets, both individually and jointly with the land forces. It will retain the capability to deploy task forces equivalent to tactical flight for performance of air policing missions in NATO airspace outside the Czech Republic without rotation. Two-way secure and data communication capability using standardised protocols with land and airborne command and control centres will be developed. The decision will need to be taken by 2023 at latest about the future lease or acquisition of supersonic aircraft.

Helicopter units
Helicopter units performing combat support missions will possess the ability to deliver close air support to ground task forces. The Mi-24/35 helicopters will be replaced with multirole helicopters capable of performing missions at day and night and in adverse weather, and engaging small-size armoured targets with precision-guided munitions. That will expand the combat potential of the helicopter air units in support of land forces, special forces, command and control, aerial reconnaissance using optronic surveillance systems and involvement in search and rescue operations in combat conditions. The ability to perform missions in support of the Czech national air defence system will be retained.

As part of combat support missions, the helicopter air units will retain its capability to transport personnel and material in support of land brigade task forces by the completion of the Mi-171Sh helicopter upgrade project. Achievement of initial operation capabilities by the Special Operation Air Task Unit will provide air support to special forces. Missions in support of the Czech Armed Forces, the Police, Integrated Emergency System, provision of helicopter emergency medical service and search and rescue service will continue to be provided by the W-3A Sokol helicopters. The decision on their replacement will be made before the end of the Mi-8/17 helicopters' service life.

Although it is intended to continue the operation of the Russian made helicopters (especially Mi-24/35) till the end of their life cycle, the development of security situation may necessitate their replacement with the objective to reduce dependence on the Russian Federation. In addition, the requirement will need to be decided to acquire attack helicopters by the end of 2024 given their critical role in support of land forces.

Air transport units
The air transport units will retain the ability to transport personnel and materiel only over short and medium ranges. Strategic airlift will be provided by the means of participation in multinational programs. The ability of transport against weather will however be enhanced in the long run. Unless current capabilities are expanded, concurrent
Radiotechnical service

The radiotechnical service will provide continuous radar coverage of the airspace in altitude from 3 to 30 km. It will expand the radar coverage capability under 3 km through the acquisition of jamming resistant 3D mobile air defence radars (MADR) in 24/7/365 operation. The capability of AWACS system will continue to be used. The capability of two-way secure and data communication using standardised protocols will be expanded.

Air Traffic Management

Air traffic management service and the air navigation service will maintain the ability to provide air traffic services to military and civil air traffic in designated areas of the Czech Republic’s airspace. Legal regulations will govern the provision of air navigation services in military and non-military crises. Further development of that capability will respect the principles of the “Integrated European skies”.

The capability of surveillance services will be maintained through the replacement of airfield radio-location equipment. The capability of forward air controllers will be expanded in the domain of close air support for land forces.

Special Forces

The existing capabilities of Special Forces will be expanded with the support of special operations and information/psychological operations. Special forces will act across the whole operation spectrum independently, jointly or in cooperation with other forces and conduct the whole spectrum of special operations according to national and NATO standards with emphasis on acquisition of strategic information in complex environment in support of tactical and strategic decision-making, including low-profile, covert or overt operations, as well as offensive actions and information operations. The Special Forces will be able to assign and deploy special operation task forces including assigned air support and at the same time maintain sufficient standby forces and assets for the performance of national assignments. Helicopter support capability for special forces’ operational employment will be achieved as part of the Special Operations Air Task Unit.

Intelligence support

Intelligence support in the Czech Armed Forces will include operation and tactical level intelligence, reconnaissance, electronic warfare and geospatial and meteorological support. The capability will be maintained and developed of assigning forces and assets for national defence of the Czech Republic and from modular components with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities for task forces and the Czech national air defence system.

The intelligence service will expand the ability to provide intelligence fusion cycle on the strategic and operation level in the domain of joint intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance in accordance with operation requirements by the Czech Armed Forces, NATO and the EU. Land and aerial reconnaissance capabilities will be expanded through the acquisition of land, unmanned aerial systems to cover operational requirements in support of brigade task force, battalion task force and reconnaissance units. Those assets will operate as part of command, control, communication, data fusion, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance and electronic warfare functions in the specific domains of reconnaissance, jamming and counter-jamming, with integration into national as well as NATO command and control systems.

In order to develop the specialism the Czech Republic declared, capabilities will be developed in the domain of electronic warfare passive surveillance systems as part of joint intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance. The Czech Armed Forces will have in the inventory highly advanced passive surveillance systems with passive coherent location capability. In addition, the capability will be developed of passive surveillance of national territory in the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance system in support of air traffic management and the Czech national air defence system. The capabilities will be reinforced of electronic defence against direct energy weapons, particularly in most vulnerable assets of the command, weapons, reconnaissance and control systems, and communication and information system components.

Regional Military Headquarters

Government functions will be provided by the means of the Regional Military Headquarters as military administration authorities in their respective territorial regions. At the same time, the RMHQs will perform missions of defence according to dedicated legal regulations and will exercise command over light territorial units manned by active reserve component personnel. In the territory of Military Training Areas, the Military Training Area Administration Authorities will perform that function.

Stationary logistics

Stationary logistics will provide performance of MoD missions in the state territory and outside, including host nation support. In addition, the capability will be developed of supporting up to three task forces and contributing into multinational logistic
command headquarters while preserving necessary capabilities in the home territory. The stationary logistics will have stocked material including ammunition at least for 30 standard Days of Supply.

Military medical service

The military medical service will provide the performance of MoD missions in the home territory and outside, including the contribution to the support of NATO forces. It will develop the capability to assign and deploy medical units in support of task forces. It will maintain the capability to deliver primary care, public health protection and veterinary care in accordance with the Czech law. The development of deployable biologic defence capabilities will focus on early identification of selected bio warfare agents. In crisis, the Biologic Defence Centre will build up classification of selected bio warfare agents. In accordance with the Czech law.

Public health protection and veterinary care in maintaining the capability to deliver primary care, develop the capability to assign and deploy contribution to the support of NATO forces. It will achieve full interoperability with NATO forces’ command headquarters while preserving the required level of classification, reliability and security.

Cyber security

Information security and cyber defence will be treated comprehensively by creating a structure of control and executive authorities and mechanisms of Czech Armed Forces information and cyber security management. The authority with primary responsibility for information and cyber security is the Security Director of the Minister of Defence. The objective is to achieve a robust protection of information for all defence communication and information systems in stationary as well as deployable networks. Coordination and management of cyber defence will involve development of proactive cyber defence capabilities. Particularly through specialised analytical activities, the Czech Armed Forces will achieve the capability of coordinating and managing cyber security in the frame of defence information systems and infrastructure. Coordination and analytic activities will be closely interconnected with the requirements of international cooperation with foreign partners, especially in NATO and EU. The Computer Incident Response Centre will continue to be the primary executive component for subsequent predictive action, coordination and cyber security management.

The Computer Incident Response Centre will achieve the capability of collection, assessment and generation of situational awareness in information and cyber security; the CIRC will be able to detect, contain and possible also block cyber attacks and perform in-depth analysis of malicious codes and, in cooperation with the MoD Security Department, to perform over-all analysis of cyber threats based on collection of data to the effect of providing a proactive detection of vulnerabilities on communication and information systems. That will also achieve the capability of predictive assessment of risks and threats involved in cyber security incidents and attacks; evaluation of possible impact on the services provided by communication and information systems, including the adoption of timely measures to revert and restore services of defence communication and information systems following cyber attacks.

The domain of national cyber defence will be sponsored by the Military Intelligence and will involve the creation of a cyber defence component – the National Cyber Forces Centre. The National Cyber Forces Centre will have the capability of conducting a broad spectrum of operations in the cyberspace and activities necessary for the provision of Czech Republic’s cyber defence. The National Cyber Forces Centre will be able of conducting operations in the cyberspace, both in support of operations by the Czech Armed Forces in the NATO and EU frameworks and to defend the Czech Republic in the contingency of a hybrid attack.

Training Command – Military Academy

The Training Command – Military Academy will perform training of military professionals and active reserve component personnel according to requirements by the Czech Armed Forces and provide in-career training in support of the MoD, and possibly other services and agencies. The capabilities of the education and training system will enable the provision of near real-world training environments. Simulation and trainer technology will be developed and the Simulation and Trainer Technology Centre will be interconnected with relevant centres in NATO nations.

Four Military Training Areas (MTA Břežany, MTA Boletice, MTA Hradiště, MTA Libavá) will be used to provide training to forces and assets of the Czech Armed Forces, the Integrated Emergency System and possibly other agencies.

Active reserve

The Czech Armed Forces will increasingly rely on the capabilities of the Active Reserve Component (ARC). In peacetime, the active reserve will be practically the only source of augmentation with trained personnel. ARC personnel will be used to augment the Czech Armed Forces’ peacetime manning levels for the performance of missions in the home territory and outside in high-priority build-up units with the strength up to 5,000 military service personnel. ARC personnel will be assigned into peacetime structure of Czech Armed Forces units and staffs and territorial forces under the command of the Regional Military Headquarters. The peacetime tables of those units will comprise the necessary core of military professionals and the units will be equipped with mandatory material.
In late January, the military representatives of NATO member countries elected retired Brigadier General František Mičánek for the position of Dean of the NATO Defence College (NDC) deployed in Rome.

He succeeds Slovenian Daria Daniels Škodnik, who is finishing on this position this year. The Dean of the NDC is subordinate to the college commander represented from June 2014 by Polish Major General Janusz Bogdanski. After the former Chief of the General Staff Petr Pavel, who became Chairman of the Ministry of Defence heading into the summer, this thus another representative of the Czech Staff Petr Pavel, who became Chairman of the college commander represented from June 2014 by Polish Major General Janusz the college commander represented from June 2014 by Polish Major General Janusz

According to General Petr Pavel he is a very capable expert and “in the Czech environment, we would hardly find someone more suitable.” František Mičánek will start in this function with the intention to change the traditional thinking in NATO. He is going to bring impulses from the new member countries. In his opinion, we have a unique approach to solving a wide range of current crises.

In September 1999 there was the great opening of a new modern building, with all necessary facilities. It is twice larger than the original object. It includes a large hall, rooms for study groups, extensive library of books and digital sources, mess, and hall for social events and of course a fitness centre and facilities for further sports activities. The college is the highest educational institution within NATO, and it is also directly subordinate to the highest Alliance authorities. The teaching schedule is divided into four divisions, which not only guarantee the educational and research processes, but also all material support. The teaching base is formed by six-month Senior Courses, which are intended not only for senior Allied officers, but also for the civilian staff of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

The participants come from several countries. More and more they are servicemen from PIF-countries, from the EU, Mediterranean Dialogue or the so-called Contact Countries. Students from Arab countries, including Iraq, do not constitute an exception; there are students from Japan, South Korea and Australia. These are mostly soldiers and employees of the Ministries of Defence or General Staffs and members of the diplomatic corps. Many people have gained experiences in missions and places abroad.

Then follows a lecture and the block of questions and answers arising from it. In the afternoon, the time frame is defined by the topic and processing group projects and presentations. The NATO Defence College has a very flexible and adaptable structure. Its leadership and logistic support are performed by only a handful of people. Teachers do not exist there. Depending on requirements, the college invites external lecturers from the highest structures. Because of the high prestige of this institution, all people are interested. Students always appraise each presenter. If the assessment is negative, the college will not invite him next time.

The NATO Defence College is known for its study tours. For each Senior Course they are mostly organized three trips of this kind. The first is focused on European security, the second on transatlantic relations and the last one is dedicated to a selected region.

During our visit the second study tour of the USA was being prepared. Participants planned to visit the United Nations in New York, the White House in Washington, and of course the Pentagon and NATO headquarters in Norfolk. At each of these places there were lectures waiting for them and practical explanations how these institutions actually work.
Operating covertly is the priority

Colonel Karel Řehka served as the Commander of the 601st Special Forces Group for more than four years. Since November 2014, he has been the Director of the newly established MoD Special Forces Directorate.

The command over Special Forces has been with the General Staff since this stop. This step was prepared for some time but has not been really popular with the members of Special Forces. What are the advantages of this new organisational setup and what is less convenient for you in this regard?

I believe it is not entirely correct to say such a step did not enjoy support among the members of the Special Forces. Our position in the organisation of the Military Intelligence worked well on long-term basis and provided us with good facilities for our employment and development. It is therefore logical that people asked why change something that works. Any major change entails certain risks and naturally arouses concerns with people. On the other hand, any change also means opportunity. We are soldiers and when the Minister of Defence decided it meant a task for us that we had to meet as best as we possibly could. It has always been my opinion that it did not really matter whether the special forces were a part of the Military Intelligence of the Czech Armed Forces. The important thing was whether the system was set up in a way for the Special Forces to be employed and developed in line with effective policies. In my perspective, the transition under the command of the General Staff was successful for us, the system was set up right and it did not have any negative consequences on the quality of our Special Forces. That is my strong opinion, but I should add that it was just a first step and we need to continue to work hard to successfully accomplish everything. Having said that, I must admit I was also thankful to the personal interest and commitment by the Defence Minister, a forthcoming and realistic attitude by the Czech Armed Forces including the Chief of General Staff and also thanks to the support by the new leadership of the Military Intelligence and other senior MoD officials, including particularly the State Secretary and his team.

What is the greatest benefit of being a part of the General Staff Czech Armed Forces?

I believe the greatest benefit of our new organisational positioning involves closer ties with the Czech Armed Forces High Command and a better mutual understanding overall. That is very important, because Alpha and Omega of the Special Forces activities will always consist in supporting joint military operations. I also value the fact the Czech Armed Forces appreciate the specificity of selecting personnel for the Special Forces and supports successful candidates to serve with the Special Forces. We could not do without that. The greatest challenges of our new organisational embedding is maintaining the ability of the Special Forces to operate covertly and maintaining the necessary degree of autonomy that the Special Forces need to work and develop properly. The system was set up right and I have no doubts that with the support by the Czech Armed Forces High Command, which I have enjoyed from the outset, we will be able to stay the course down the road.

People serving with the Special Forces often see their career progress in the Military Intelligence. Is it not complicated for them now to transition into a service that reports directly to the Ministry of Defence?

The Special Forces Directorate has been under the General Staff for some time already. Does it mean everything got settled already and is in full swing?

We had to work at full throttle from the first moment, just because we had people deployed on operations while the organisational redesign was ongoing. They were not interested in any transition; they had to be able to work on. Our Directorate did not come into being overnight. Already before the very subordination of the 601st Special Forces Group the organisational core of this new command element had been developed in autumn 2014, which was progressively fleshed out with personnel and prepared conditions for the transition. We are already in full swing, although we have not achieved full manning levels and we complete many things “on the move”. That is natural and logical, no one has the time and comfort to stand still and stop working.

What tasks do you focus on at the present?

We currently still work to fine-tune our directorate – to set an optimal system for our functioning in the future. That involves our internal processes, planning, including operational and future planning, command over soldiers who have the ability to control operations, cover the activities of special forces and others things. Plus we have efforts underway to revise some of our key policies. At the moment, that primarily concerns the Special Forces Development Concept as a subordinate policy in relation to the 2015 Czech Armed Forces Development Concept. That is a task assigned by the Chief of General Staff – it has a high priority. In this year, we are also up to starting the development of the new Special Operations Support Centre and we dedicate a sizeable effort to developing the capability of air support to special operations. Another area we would like to achieve progress in is our active reserve component. We plan to expand it, both in strength and as to its missions and activities. Operational activities are underway simultaneously with this development. We have SOF operators deployed in Afghanistan, Mali, quite a large task force with land and air component on standby in VIFIT and we help build capabilities of some of our partners.

How do you personally enjoy organisational and to a large extent administrative work? Do you not miss a combat unit and the associated training and action?

I do not know any special forces officer in the Czech Armed Forces or anywhere else who would join the military to do paperwork. But there is a logical development to everything. Commanders should be leaders and they should also be leaders where they can influence things. As a unit commander, I spent very nice – albeit demanding – four and half years with the 601st SFG. I am confident it was the right time for me to leave. It is for the good of the unit to give an opportunity for a new commander. That I could stay in the same team is an honour for me, something that I appreciate regardless of whether it is in Prostějov or in Prague. We have a good team of experienced individuals at the Special Forces Directorate; we have known each other from the unit as well as from operations for some time. And trust me: I cannot complain about lack of action.

The structure of special forces has expanded significantly. Besides the existing 601st Special Forces Group, the combat support unit and Special Operations Air Task Unit are in process of development. What shape will the helicopter unit have: will it be a completely autonomous component, or will you have some helicopters assigned for your requirements at the Šumavské airbase?

Air support is critical for any special forces; that is why we have devoted considerable attention and energy to the development of this new capability. It is a joint effort of Special Forces and the Air Force. The project is realised by a working team with representation of the Special Forces and the Air Force from various command echelons and the whole process is orchestrated by a specialist from my Directorate. He is an air specialist in this domain and has been reengaged
to the Special Forces Directorate from the Air Force Command on rotation basis. I am responsible for the very capability of special operations support. But because there are air assets and flight personnel, the key person logically is and will be the Commander of the Air Force. At present, that involves a part of the squadron from the Náměšť airbase, which is trained, equipped and certified for the performance of special operations missions. But it is primarily a capability, not a unit. The capability is not just about helicopters and aircrews. It also involves command and control, planning and support. The organisation and shape of the unit is presently subject to evaluation and assessments. With a huge U.S. involvement and shape of the unit is presently subject to evaluation and assessments. The organisational capability is not just about helicopter operations missions. But it is primarily a capability, that involves a part of the squadron from the Náměšť airbase.

What will be the difference between the 601st SIG and the combat support unit? Huge. The Special Operations Support Center is scheduled to be established at 1 July 2016 as a new unit of the Czech Armed Forces subordinate to the Special Forces Directorate. The unit will comprise a ‘commando’ type of manoeuvre force, much like the U.S. Rangers. The mission of the unit will be to operate hand in hand with the 601st SIG and provide it with combat support. Paramilitary training naturally applies to all service personnel manning the centre. Although the personnel selection criteria are tough at this combat unit, they are much less selective than those for 601st SIG operators. Members of that unit will not need to embrace such a broad spectrum of tactical activities as the 601st SIG operators. But they will be expected to deliver the same excellent performance on their missions. I trust that service in this unit will offer to the soldiers an exclusive training and experience they will be able to use not only in support of Special Forces, but also in other Czech units, where majority of them will return after some time of serving in the Center. Another part of the Center will be tasked to develop the Czech Armed Forces’ capability to lead information operations and conduct tactical psychological operations in support of deployed Special Forces elements. That domain is crucial for me with a view to future development of the operation environment.

Will the training and equipment of this unit substantially differ from other helicopter units? The equipment of the upgraded helicopter earmarked that way naturally differs from the original versions in terms of sensors, level of protection, firepower, communication systems and so forth. The key thing is however for the unit to cooperate with the ground element of the Special Forces on regular basis, that they knew each other, knew what to expect from each other and had mutual confidence. Special operations are about people, not the equipment, although the equipment is important too. The crews of those helicopters must exercise advanced piloting techniques and also undergo certain level of training with the 601st Special Forces Group. I personally believe the greatest benefit of the whole project is the historically unprecedented level of cooperation and integration between airmen and SOF operators that we have already managed to achieve.

The 43rd Airborne Battalion is undoubtedly an elite unit of the Land Forces and the only airborne battalion in the Czech Armed Forces. As such, it performs the whole spectrum of airborne mission in support of the Czech Armed Forces. The combat ‘commando’ component of the Special Operations Support Centre will specialise only in supporting special operations tasks and not in deploying to that effect, which will also reflect in the personnel selection, force training, education and planning.

What stage is the building of those two new units at and when they are scheduled to be ready? Building the capability of air support to special operations has passed various stages for several years already. We have recently achieved the initial operational capability benchmark we set for ourselves and the unit was certified by a NATO Special Forces evaluation team for the SOAUT level (Special Operations Air Task Unit). It has been assigned to the VITF along with the 601st SIG forces. We set the interim operational capability in line with our declared capability target in the NATO defence planning and we expect to achieve it some two years ahead of schedule. Set on a relatively ambitious level with a view to the NATO needs and Czech national interests, it is unlikely that we achieve the full operational capability before 2025. So it is a long-term effort.

The Special Operations Support Centre will also be developed in the long run and it would not be responsible to provide its capability in milestones. In general, I would like to achieve the initial operational capability to deploy some components of the unit effectively within a year from its inception. Building the unit’s full operational capability will take more than five years. As always, everything will depend on the ability to obtain enough quality personnel.

Physical fitness of young people deteriorates on a sustained basis. How difficult is it for you to recruit high-quality, physically fit individuals in this context? Success derives from people, not the equipment. It has always been and will be difficult to obtain enough quality personnel. The military wants to increase its personnel strength much like the Police and other organisations do and they target the same cohorts, while demography is not really in favour. Not only to attract, but also retain the right people will surely be a major challenge facing us in the years ahead. The more complicated is it for us that for the Special Forces we require previous service in Czech Armed Forces units and then we do further selection. But I should say that contrary to all conceptions personnel selection for the Special Forces is really much more about psychological testing than physical fitness, although those two are connected.

The 601st Special Forces Group also undergoes some changes; there is an effort to focus on more strategic assignments. What does it mean specifically? In principle, that is not a change, it is a generally valid principle of special forces employment. Building special forces is extremely time-consuming and the special force in our reality will always have a limited capacity. It is therefore important to focus on quality and employ them only where it has strategic importance, it is only their domain and no one else is up to mission requirements. Otherwise you run the risk that when there is a problem claiming truly high-quality special forces, they would not be available. We naturally adjust our development and training to the foreseeable development of the security environment, but specific intentions are not for publication.

You have recently mentioned that you would like to strengthen your capabilities in information and psychological operations domain. Does it mean that you intensify your cooperation with the 103rd CIMIC/PSYOPS Centre? Cooperation of Special Forces and the 103rd CIMIC/PSYOPS centre has been under for several years already. The domain of information operations has not seen extensive development in the Czech Armed Forces. The 2025 Czech Armed Forces Development Concept has already planned development of information operations. The mission of our Special Forces also involves information operation support, but we have just pursued this domain very marginally. We have to endeavour on it more intensively. By doing this, we would also like to contribute to overall development of information operations in the Czech Armed Forces. With psychological operations, we particularly seek to build own tactical capability for the needs of the Special Forces. The mission of the 103rd CIMIC/PSYOPS centre is primarily to lead psychological operations and civil-military cooperation on tactical level. They have high quality experts in this respect. I personally believe it is very important that the cooperation of Special Forces and this specialised unit deepened in the future to the benefit of both. I trust we will agree on that also with the Land Forces Command and the 103rd CIMIC/PSYOPS Centre. The Czech Special Forces are recently deployed in the north of Mali. What specific assignment do you have there?

Our unit performs SOF missions together with our Dutch and other partners in the north of Mali in support Operation MISUSMA command. They are ready to perform the whole special operations spectrum, including strike operations. We expect their special reconnaissance capability will be important for the operation commander.

Do the Special Forces prepare for another foreign deployment? Everything we do is preparation for future operations, deployed or other. That is the only reason we exist for. In addition to common foreign missions that are publicly known, we engage in many additional activities and train for various employment scenarios. It is not soldiers who decide on future foreign deployments. But it is our duty to be ready for them, when they become current. Czech Special Operation Forces have their limits, and we can influence that; we also seek to balance the intensity of operations with the need to maintain quality and capability development.
We spoke with Chief of the General Staff not only on the tasks that the army will meet in the coming period, but also about changes regarding the Active Reserve Force.

I am Proud of the Work of Soldiers

We asked Chief of the General Staff General Josef Bečvář for an interview focused on aspects that army has been engaged recently.

General, a few days ago, the Command Assembly was held to assess the main tasks of the Czech Armed Forces for 2015. How do you evaluate last year?

Last year was challenging for the military, but also successful and I believe that we can look back with pride at soldiers’ activities in 2015. I just briefly summarize it in numbers; in 2015 a total of 800 of our soldiers fulfilled their duties in foreign operations. Most of them were in Afghanistan, Mali and the Sinai. This does not mean that other missions were less significant. I must also remember air-policing in Iceland, which we operatively took over last year, according to the needs of our coalition partners. A total of 1,500 soldiers were earmarked for NRF 2015. Last year, 850 soldiers were intensively preparing for V4 EU BG, 250 soldiers began to prepare for DEU EU BG and our contribution to the NRF for the year 2016 consists of 816 persons. The deployment at Vrbětice has been also demanding, during the last 15 months about 7,000 of our soldiers were replaced there. Many tasks arose in connection with the migration crisis, whether it was earmarking standby troops, or coordination exercises together with the Police of the Czech Republic, or the accomplishment of tasks during Lake Balaton and Bled exercises in Hungary and Slovenia. The tasks were challenging even during training, especially in an international environment, where Czech soldiers were rightly appreciated by our coalition partners. For all this I express my thanks to the members of the Czech Armed Forces. For the military, however, there is extremely important also other aspect of the year 2015, that is to say the overall trend of changes we started, from the increase in the military budget for this year, through the success in recruiting new soldiers and the Government’s approval with the Development Concept of the Czech Armed Forces, to the updating of the military legislation.

You’ve talked about recruitment and complementary recruiting career soldiers. How does it look like with the army now?

Last year we set ourselves the objective of recruiting 1,850 new soldiers. 1,500 of them were planned for military units and installations, and 350 to study at the University of Defence or military field at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports (FTVS) at Charles University. The average manning in units has increased during 2015 from 75% to 80% due to the successful recruitment. The land forces are strengthened by 700 soldiers and air force by 200 soldiers. But we are still below the target number and we must therefore continue in this trend of intensive recruitment.

It is positive that we are able to attract those interested in joining the military. In the January entry term we hired 567 new soldiers and it is estimated that in April it could be another 640 recruits who will strengthen the army. Unfortunately, the undermanning remains primarily with the 13th Artillery Regiment, 14th Logistic Support Regiment, or 15th Engineer Regiment and 25th Anti-aircraft Missile Regiment. As the key idea I regard the stabilization of garrison network, which also includes the recovery of Rakovník garrison and the new exploitation of areas at Ústí nad Orlicí and Nový Jičín.

When talking about the personnel and its support, we must also remember the creation of suitable operational environment and proper equipment which troops need to perform their tasks. We also solve the impacts associated with the implementation of the Amended Act on Career Soldiers. In 2025 we would like to achieve target numbers at the level of 24,600 soldiers, 3,700 civilian employees and 5,000 members of the Active Reserve. It is already clear how the Development Concept of the Czech Armed Forces will be introduced in the coming period? I have in mind particularly the implementation of large projects.

Following the approval of this Development Concept (KVČR) we are now working intensively on development concepts of various types of forces and the preparation of key modernization projects is in progress. Although during previous years we managed to restructure and modernize some parts of the armament, we still have armament that is after the zenith of its technical and technological abilities.
Regarding land forces, it is especially the rearmament of the 7th Mechanized Brigade. Gradually, over the years 2019-2026 we plan to replace the obsolete infantry fighting vehicle BMP-2. It should be a total of 209 vehicles, and after that it will be necessary to solve the modernization or purchases of tanks. The acquisitions of wheeled and armoured vehicles, command-staff and communications vehicles, will take place in several stages during the period 2018-2020. On two chassis platforms, there will be a total of 62 vehicles. One of the main challenges is the ability to obtain general fire support for our own units and targets. Of course, the equipment of two batteries. Of course, we continue to lease the aircraft JAS-39 Gripen and we are going to expand their operational capabilities to destroy ground targets.

The Development Concept (KVÁCR) also includes an expansion in the support equipment, namely the construction of data centres, global data network or systems of tactical and radio communications. There is a continual renewal of transport equipment and other resources. The completion of those projects is necessary for us to strengthen the capabilities of the Czech Armed Forces, so that the military can perform the tasks of defence of the Czech Republic in the context of our coalition duties.

In the last issue of this magazine we paid attention to the development of Czech Armed Forces and mentioned Rampart 2016 (Hradba 2016). What are its objectives?

The purpose of the exercise Rampart 2016 (Hradba 2016), in which there will be gradually participating more than 1,100 members of the Active Reserve of 14 infantry companies, at various regional military commands, and Active Reserve units of Military Police Olomouc, is to check the readiness of active reserves for the tasks of an operational deployment in the Czech Republic and earmarking forces and resources to perform the tasks of the Police of the Czech Republic. The essence of the exercise is the deployment of troops in guarding installations important for national defence and the protection of the state border. The comprehensive exercise will be held from March 3 to April 22, 2016, in a military training area Libavá, also with the participation of the professional units of the Czech Armed Forces.

Regarding air forces, in terms of priority it is the process of acquisition of 12 multi-purpose helicopters to replace Mi-24/35 aircraft. The implementation phase of this project should be completed in 2026. It is also necessary to upgrade the radar technology—airport radars and mobile 3D radars MADR. The end of implementation of these projects is scheduled for 2023. For the years 2018-2025 we plan to introduce a total of 209 vehicles, including necessary equipment, namely the construction of data centres, global data network or systems of tactical and radio communications.

You’ve mentioned earlier that half of the members of the Active Reserve TAI, out of the total number 5,000, are earmarked for combat and support units, and half of them for the territorial force. At what stage is the creation of new AR units?

Yes, it is true that about half of the Active Reserve units are to be in combat and command support units. Generally, we can say that in each battalion or its equivalent unit there will be at least a company of the Active Reserve. For instance we shall have active reserves in brigade staffs or other specialized positions. The interconnection of active reserves with professional force must be maximized in order to achieve the capabilities comparable with career soldiers. Therefore we shall establish in Active Reserve units some positions for career soldiers, whose main task will be the preparation and training of the AR units.

The new organizational tables of Active Reserve units will be established as of July 1st, 2016. However, if we were to recruit reservists for all newly established units, there could be a situation that each unit will be manned by only a few soldiers. Then training and operation of such structures would be, of course, completely ineffective. Therefore, in the first phase we shall focus on a few selected units (NB: listed in the attached table) that we begin to fulfill and the experiences with their building we shall gradually utilize in other units. Each year the total number of active reserves should increase by an average of 300 new soldiers.

The unit manning system of Active Reserve units, of course, could not be accomplished without an active approach of their parent units and even some “self-promotion”, because both current and new members of the Active Reserve will be logically interested to join especially those units of which they will have enough information about which they will know that everything works as it should work. It is the responsibility of commanders to prove that the mission of those new units is meaningful and present their training to the public.
Winter Survival 2016

"Come on. Keep breathing and dig, come on!" could be heard in a ravine above Bělá pod Pradědem, where the water from Studený potok falls to about thirty-meters depth, regularly freezes in the winter and creates an impressive ice wall. Just climb up the icefall was the first attractive task, which the participants in the extreme military Winter Survival 2016 had to meet.

Only one soldier from a three-member team, equipped with crampons and ice axe, could go on the ice wall. Rain in the warm weather of recent days literally melted one side of icefall down and organizers from the Centre for Physical Education and Sports of University of Defense had to cancel the prepared ways on the second side of an ice wall.

Events such as this should prove the readiness and endurance of military teams, which have to travel 60 kilometers with all the equipment for survival on the back in the mountains by foot or by skis during the four days of competition in Hrubý Jeseník Mountains. While soldiers completed many kilometers of transfers between checkpoints in the slush, they struggled with rain and thick fog with strong wind that reached speed up to 90 km/h during the last stage in the climb on Praděd. "This year the conditions were really hard. Extreme weather and penetrating damp was uncomfortable" assessed retrospectively Lieutenant Viktor Novotný thirty-three year old soldier from 7th mechanized brigade team. Even as the top performing cross country skier, who physically trains the whole year, he had problems in the slush.

Tough test of endurance

Sixteen military teams from four European countries came position at the start of the 22nd edition of the International Championship of the Czech Armed Forces in winter outdoor Winter Survival 2016, which took place last week in January in Jeseníky mountains and was again organized by the University of Defense. The most represented were the Czech Armed Forces and within the Land forces, which sent six teams. Specialized mountain troops from Germany, Austria and Slovenia arrived from abroad. Slovenian participated in the competition for the first time.

"Participants of Winter Survival went through a hard test of endurance. Competition examined their level of skill in the field of special physical training, military training and the ability of quick and correct decision making during the tasks," said race director Colonel Milan Marek. Difficulty of military endurance race currently lies in the fact that the tasks required not only physical power and some military skills but also proper consideration of soldiers. The ability to make the right decision under the stress is so important.

The event called "Skalnatý (Rocky)" served that purpose. At first soldiers had to overcome a high rock by using secured climbing roads during it and at the same time had to find clues and write necessary information down from it. Then the soldiers received another assignment at the top of the rock. They made radio message with the exact coordinates of their position and decided which choice of transport. The landing of helicopter is necessary to communicate in English. This activity was carried out by soldiers on the rock hill after exercise, under very stressful situations and under time pressure. The task was fulfilled by the less than half of the teams.

The details were decisive such as the failure of pen. One of the teams dealt with an unusual problem – failure of pen just at the moment when they needed to write clues down. Soldiers tried to remember clues, but they were only partially successful. "Next time we will take a pencil that will not fail" said one team member.

Fighting the thaw

Extraction of large and heavy loads from rugged terrain was, except for long movements, the physically most demanding event of the Winter Survival 2016. Nearby Vidélský sedlo the patrols were tasked to extricate five different sized tires from the slope and transport them to the truck's storage place. During this procedure the soldiers had to quickly decide the way of transportation and picking up at the back of the truck. Because they had only twelve minutes and only climbing ropes, snap-links and slings were available.

"We participated in such military competitions which had varied difficulty. We are here for the first time and we would mainly gain experience for better preparation for the next year. We would like to attend with two teams here next year, "said the head of the Slovenian Armed Forces team Captain Igor Pranik from 122nd mountain regiment Bohinjska Bela.

Competitors spent outside all four days and two nights and literally melted one side of icefall down and greatly affected by the weather. Rain and a significant warming destroyed snow blanket even where they could rely on it. There was enough snow in the top parts of Jeseník Mountains on Monday, but on Thursday’s there just remained mostly grass or pieces of ice.

"When it’s freezing the man buries itself into snow, and when it’s icy they just dig it out. "What it’s freezing the man buries itself into snow and everything is fine in the morning. But in recent conditions we are soaking wet. It could be dry. It is a shame that the wonderful winter weather made worst at the moment of Survival" regretted Sergeant Josef Žílmaľ from a team of 73rd tank battalion from Plášťovce.

After the circular march in wet snow the soldiers still had to perform time trial on ski from Vídeľský kôl to chalet Švýcárna and it represented roughly four-kilometer of climbing. Just three days before the end stage the searching for soldiers buried in an avalanche took place in a slope under Petrosy kameny where the snow still held.

After reaching the finish at the Ovčárna pod Pradědem military recreational facility, which regularly becomes an enjoyable home base of soldiers for Winter Survival, competitors were faced with the task to give other colleagues first aid after injury in a grenade explosion in the building. Members of competing patrols had to treat several serious injuries, chest injured by shrapnel, devastating injuries of the upper and lower limbs, arterial bleeding, burns and face lacerations. Patients were marked by professional makeup artists and members of Czech Armed Forces medical service evaluated fulfillment of this task. Injuries seemed very plausible and even influenced the soldier’s psyche.

And the winner is ...from Hranice again

Thursday was the last final stage for the competitors of race, in which continued all sixteen teams. It was all about speed and safe performance of transporting the wounded man. First military teams had to travel several kilometers to the top of Praděd, then one from the three members simulated injury and his colleagues transported him on a sled or a transport stretcher ride UT 2000 to sport hotel Kurzoví. Casualty evacuation route led along the slushy and icy in places of tourist path from the highest peak of Jeseníky Praděd over the saddle and down to the mountain hotel Kurzoví. The winner of the 22nd edition of the International Championship of the Czech Armed Forces in winter outdoor Winter Survival 2016 became the team of the 7th mechanized brigade team. The most successful teams. The ceremony was attended by Sergeant Josef Žílmaľ, Corporal Ladislav Šas and Private First Class Martin Man from the 73rd Tank Battalion in Plášťovce. Lieutenant Michal Pech, Sergeant Milan Menczel and Sergeant Milanov Sidor from the Logistics Agency in Stara Boleslav won bronze medals. And what about international teams? Slovenian soldiers ended up 9th, the German Mountain Troops was 11th and members of the Austrian Mountain Brigade were ranked fourteenth.

The Chief of General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces General Josef Bečvář, commander-rector of the University of Defense Brigadier General Adam Bohuslav Pikýl, commander of the 7th Mechanized Brigade Colonel Pavel Lipka and other representatives of the Czech military and civilian companies handed cups and prizes over to all the most successful teams. The ceremony was held at Ovčárna military recreational facility.
Half a dozen days in the South American jungle passed. Eighty soldiers are undergoing hard physical and mental training, which lasts several hours, preparing them for the four-day test of acquired skills. They meet the strict guidance of drill instructors and then, hand in all their belongings, except for a few necessities—a whistle, compass, machetes, mosquito nets and water treatment pills. Blindfolded, on knees and in shoes without laces they are transported by boat to an unknown location, inside the primeval forest. They have only a small piece of daylight, during which they must build an improvised camp, equipped for survival in an unfriendly environment. Just in three hours the jungle will immerse in darkness and its nightlife begins. If any of the men, scattered around the dying fire, could fall asleep for a while, he will be definitely awaken by a torrential tropicaldownpour.

The following day the weather got better, and so he, along with his team-fellow and eighty “home” Frenchmen, could take over the outfit and moved to the base in the jungle. The successive day was the beginning of the cycle of exercises, obstacle courses and fighting movements. And precisely in this activity, 80 soldiers could apply their orientation skills acquired during the survival races and events, organized at home by Commando group. “In the jungle you can get away just ten metres and you do not see your fellow, that’s why we often used a whistle and we had to proceed with the use of smaller spacing,” says Zbyněk Polka. Along with Martin Hejda he took over the whole process of platoon navigating. “Martin oriented azimuth, I measured the distance, because I knew the length of my step, while walking with a heavy backpack,” Sergeant First Class Polka explains the method by which they brought the platoon at the designated point in time which surprised even the instructors.

Water in its many forms is an integral part of any visit in a tropical forest. Water flowing in the river, floating in the air moisture, falling from the sky, standing puddles—and water also in your footwear. “Paradoxically, it seemed to me that when my shoes were wet, the feet were less warm than I had dry socks,” describes Master Sergeant Zbyněk Polka adaptation to the new environment: “Actually, I said the first day: That’s how I got to be wet for ten days?” At least there was less water that fell from the sky during the first days of stay, less than reported memories of the former participants. But already mentioned torrential rain at the opening night of the survival test started a virtually constant rain that during a four-day stay was part of the jungle only changed its intensity.

The water plays an important role also in further functional part of the course schedule, consisting of fighting obstacle courses in various forms. The amount of current rainfall changes the water level in the canals, through which some tracks were set. “I was quite fascinated by the level of security. For it was basically zero, recalls Martin Hejda and describes sandbagged under obstacles, whose content during the years changed into concrete. “When you go through such training, injuries can’t be ruled out, and as the drill instructors, we must anticipate an accident,” says in a quiet manner the man, who reached on one of the tracks the best time of all course participants and even he was close to track record. The physical demands in overcoming obstacles and indeed of the whole course we can illustrate by the fact that Zbyněk Polka lost during his stay there 10 kilograms.

“When there was time, the French were trying to translate and explain everything. But sometimes, however, the instructor gave a command at speed that we did not manage to translate and then we just watched, who takes what, where they were running and we tried to follow them, Master Sergeant Hejda describes sometimes a futile effort to overcome the language barrier and adds: “Once the French were trying to gain time for translation, but the instructor only waved his hand and said that in the Foreign Legion there is a lot of foreigners who do not understand, but that is their problem, they must try harder.”

Survive! The already mentioned four-day test of survival in the jungle, with minimal equipment, serves to check over acquired skills and knowledge. In this framework it is necessary not only to overcome the four tough days and three nights, accompanied by continuous rain, but also they had to carry out a number of tasks—to build shelters with beds, hunting stands, set up traps for wildlife and fish, and also to build a raft for the return journey. In the platoon, this task was allotted, among others, to both students of the University of Defence, who learned in the course of events to recognize suitable tree species. “We cut one tree and we verified that it was floating. We cut down exactly the same tree standing nearby and it sank to the bottom like a stone,” Martin Hejda smiles now, remembering the amounts of fruitless hard work.

“You must get it out of your head, I said to myself and I imagined that I was at Libavá or Březina training areas,” explains Sergeant First Class Polka the way he tried to cope with the presence of exotic fauna. But his efforts however served to no purpose. “Especially at night the reality undeceived me, when I was waked up by monkeys, howling all around us.”

Master Sergeant Hejda considers the chance to enjoy a final jump from the deck of the helicopter into the river, winding through the forest, as a special reward for his achievements, which were appreciated both by drill instructors and commanders of the Foreign Legion. “For me, the flight by itself was a tremendous experience, to see how all things work in jungle conditions. We flew in an interesting way, at low altitude, at a large angle, with rapid manœuvres,” describes the future military pilot several minutes of his journey from the camp over the river. His fellow Zbyněk Polka experienced the whole situation from a different perspective, because he flew by a helicopter for the first time in his life. When the helicopter was hovering over the water surface, both of them immediately, after throwing their backpacks away, made a step into empty space and experienced a few seconds of free fall into the murky water. “There was no time to think about something, in that moment we felt only the adrenaline,” Sergeant First Class Polka evaluates the strongest experience of his two-week South American adventure.

As a valued symbol of the completion of the French Foreign Legion course both Defence University students brought from with them from South America the insignia with an image of jaguar. "To top it all, as regards the individual assessment, Master Sergeant Martin Hejda reached the second highest score, with a minimum interval behind the winner, in the competition of eighty course participants."
Motivation for Joining the Active Reserve

If you ask a member of the Active Reserve Component, what led them to join the reserve, you will get different answers. Those who serve more than a decade, induced all above the need to make use of a certain way, become the part of the team. Financial motive was never in it, at least not at earlier stage. Often on the contrary, many of them paid extra money for better outfit or equipment. The medic invested thousands crowns in top-equipped backpack, but no regrets. Being a part of the Army, assist, be useful, sands crowns in top-equipped backpack, but no regrets. Being a part of the Army, assist, be useful, but also under articles in discussions concerning offenses of youth or adolescents. The order, a certain degree of humility, but especially autonomy and respect for authority accompanied “rookies and later old hands” through life and allow them to break free from the yoke of parents and especially to become a man from a boy. “I did not serve the conscription, I avoided it thanks to the study, but I felt duty-bound to become at least a reservist,” said many of those for whom the end of conscription or compulsory military service was something missing in their lives. However, the absence of the conscription is not the only reason. It develops with the changing world and the changes of security situation.

Necessity to be able defend the homeland

“...I decided to take this step under the influence of events in Europe, because I am not disinterested in the security situation of our country, hence in our city too, and I believe that I will make good use of the basic military training in the next tenure as Mayor,” said Private Michal Polubek. He is the mayor of Frydek-Mistek in his civilian life. Like many others he was not able to operate the gun, did not know the ways of survival in the winter or inhospitable conditions but even he was not used - despite its sports talent - long marches with combat gear. These all he learned in the Active Reserve and he is ready to help at any time, not only during natural disasters where „the reservists“ have been necessary but in case of threat to his country, his close relatives, home and place where he lives. Although the refugee crisis actually does not affect too much to us, we are a transit country. Our soldiers are helping to guard the borders with our neighbors now, with the construction of protective border fence, but they are also deployed to the field hospital, where dozens or hundreds of refugees with a variety of health problems every day come to. All this means a lower number of troops on our own domestic territory. „Security in Europe is not indifferent to me, and I also want to help,“ said Private Lucie Bulisova, who sees its use specifically in the possible completion of the shortage or for unexpected events.

Airsoft was at the beginning

A not insignificant percentage of people interested in joining the AR are also among airsoft enthusiasts. They often share not only interest in the military, weapons, tactics and no undergoing of basic military training, but also the course of the security situation. A number of clubs organizes big „battles“ in which some old military equipment is often used in the form of armored vehicles, but also tanks. An area (e.g. Milovice), where the barriers, tent cities and villages are built, becomes a gaming environment - and the certain rules are given here. It is often based on available knowledge from the real military environment. Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq but as well as World War II are gaining the fans across the country. Military history clubs (MHC) are also frequent connection of youth. A common phenomenon is the interest just of the members of MHC or airsoft clubs. They keep drill and obedience within the scenarios, knowledge of military ranks too and the opportunity to participate in a real training and shooting training is also the enticement. The Active Reserve is not solution or goal for all but wide base can be just there, and therefore there is the need not to underestimate the possibilities of promotion and recruitment during these events.

And what about employers

Several weeks of training and regular exercises, it means absence from a job, are not for everyone. Most of the AR members state that they do not have any problems at work, the employer let them go (which is a legal obligation) and supports their efforts. However, everything is a matter of agreement. It is usually bigger companies or manufacturing firms. Their interest is not only to fulfill the law, but in some extent also the prestige of having a professional at workplace who in addition to his craft commands a number of other skills acquired during training in the AR and during regular exercises. There are, of course, exceptions and there was the only way for a few individuals - to find for another job. The job which will tolerate exercise and in particular will not endanger the operation of the company as a whole. Aside from its statutory obligations it cannot be assumed that e.g. a small readiness locksmith company, of three employees including the owner, will not feel the absence of one of them.

Quality military gear

The AR member’s military gear is in compliance with standard L - 10. It determines what all „reservist“ is given. Most of what he gets is lent, however, all the time throughout its inclusion, or work load. It is usually signed every three years. Most are entirely coincidence with what gets soldiers. The rules are the same. In case of damage a part of the gear is replaced or repaired (mended) and it is a matter of some benevolence what authorizes each Regional Military Headquarters commanders, resp. units above the stated norm. There is mentioned the number of accessories or pouches, which are occasionally seen in the exercises. Currently the main problem is the lack of backpacks. Warehouse in Vyskov is issued earlier model 85 field kit but which obviously cannot be considered to be a part of modern gear with comfort and ergonomic and cannot fill full current needs. The situation is being solved, the tenders have to provide enough quality gear accessories. Also shoes, which were often criticized, are undergoing a number of changes to improve the level of comfort, variability and durability. The recruits learn use particularly gun CZ 85, model 58 assault rifle but also modern CZ 805 Bren during shooting training. There is probably only difference in comparison with the model CZ 85 and CZ 75 Shadow used by military professionals.

by Michal Voska, photos by Michal Voska and Jan Kuba
The first military helicopters arrived in the Czechoslovak military sixty years ago.

Under the rotor blades

Various types of gliders carried out most of the activities in the service of the Czechoslovak People's Army (CSLA) until 1956. They were no longer sufficient, and many of them were damaged after a heavy storm that hit Czechoslovakia in 1956. And for that reason it was decided to commission helicopters into military service. A similar attitude to put helicopters into service prevailed in other Eastern Bloc countries.

But the main reason was that since the late fifties US helicopters had begun to fly along the Czechoslovak border. Czechoslovak propaganda marked such flights as provocative. Flying over the state border was made by the helicopter pilots of the German army Bundesgrenzschutz, sometimes by the helicopters of the British Rhine Army. Czechoslovak Air Force aircraft patrolled along the border on the Czechoslovak side, however, adequate helicopter border guarding in the former Eastern Bloc was missing.

Looking back into history

The first four pieces of Soviet-made helicopters Mi-4 (designer Mikhail Mila) arrived on our territory in March 1956. By that time, however, there were no pilots in Czechoslovakia pilots who would be able to fly the machine, so helicopters were grounded for some time and at the beginning they were not immediately introduced to service. Other helicopters from the total number of 155 had arrived in May 1956 to 1st Air Transportation Regiment (DLP) in Klokošov. Soviet instructors Capt. Lokoshko, Maj. Popov and Capt. Novikov arrived with the helicopters to Kbelí airbase.

Helicopters in Kbelí

Upon acceptance of the helicopters by our engineers and technical preparation for the next flights instructor Capt. Lokoshko started training of first three Czechoslavv pilots - Capt. Z. Naul (Regiment deputy commander), Capt. F. Jindra (Glider squadron commander) and J. Némecík (Glider squadron deputy commander). Maj. Jindra graduated his first flight on June 27th 1956 with instructor Capt. Lokoshko.

Helicopters aroused considerable curiosity among the pilots and ground personnel from the moment when they arrived at the airpot. The instructors could not complain about a lack of interest. The first helicopter pilots were Bažák, Bartoš, Bendik, Čermák, Cervíček, Havlík, Chyplý, Rejhoř, Spousta, Sedeč, Vítríka, Zahradka. They were mostly former pilots of cargo gliders. Their retraining lasted until the end of August 1956, including an instructor's flight.

Today, those about which we are talking, as well as their helicopters can be seen as an era of rich aviation history. The memories of them remain especially skills and experiences which these people pass on their followers during their active service.

All-purpose machine

"Helicopters, that was something completely new. Nobody was really familiar with it and probably there was not a pilot without an interest in the new technology. Retraining was not easy. We lacked experience, but when we really familiarized ourselves with the helicopters, it was clear to us that they have an incredible range of applicability. Of course, we did not come to this fact alone, but many civilian organizations too. The demand increased our options. There were just so few helicopters and trained pilots... So often, instead of on the military training we fought in civilian clothes." Colonel Bohumil Rejhoř recalls. "Our biggest rescue mission" says pilot Major Pinter, "was flooding in the southern part of Slovakia. We had to fly over the floodwaters to lift heavy supplies. I was already on my way back to the base area and the helicopter was almost to the last seat filled with people. Still, I decided to board the woman into the helicopter. I hovered over the house and the flight engineer hoisted the woman and the boy aboard. She cried that she had other family members somewhere in the area. We found her husband moments later in a forest tree; grandmother was pulled from the water a few kilometers away, we convulsively held a thick tree branch. It saved her life..."

"We cannot omit search missions for people lost in the mountains, which were in them a lot harder, arduous and sometimes dangerous. People who work in the mountains tell us that ordinary romanticism. "You would not believe what it does with the helicopter in the mountains," said Lt. Col. Antoní Sedek. "You fly into basin with the required engine revolotion (rpm), and yet suddenly beg to fall about three to four meters per second. You make the descent as you are used to, and then adapt to the optical illusion of the mountain terrain, the speedometer needle abruptly shifts over the speed limit. We were terrified of what it did to us on the ledge side. It knocked us straight down... Today the rescue crews are trained to work in a mountain range and they have the necessary expertise. We were not..."

Helicopters and military

Helicopters in military service were in most cases used for aerial monitoring of the state border and in cooperation with the counter air defense (PVO). In the beginning they flew over the state border with the blackened fuselage markings on the side wings to the state border with military reconnaissance people overseas. Because the side door of the helicopter is on the left, it could fly only from the southeast to the north west. After the Hungarian uprising, three Czechoslovak's Mi-4 had monitored also the border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Drop of reconnaissance groups was trained at night right areas near the border. Helicopters even represented a backup for ground tank or cavalry divisions.

The most commonly used option of the machine was the transportation (Mi-4) or power line. Helicopter guys came of assistance. In eighteen flight hours, three helicopters transported 85 tons of construction material. Older mountaineers were open to say that they were able to handle such delivery in a few days.

Bohumil Rejhoř assisted with helicopter on archeological survey of southern Moravia, on carrying of gasholder on fire in Prague Michalovice and sugar refinery in Statkary. "I still recall the positioning of a giant cyclone on treatment of light-fume gas. We placed on a high fac - ade of old hotel a lneworks in Králův Dvůr. It weighed eight tons in total. All of us involved in that operation were sweating all over. The first at- tempt in the history ended up successfully. TUC Rejhoř recalls."

Life saving

Transportation of an injured by Mi-4 helicopter from "Terezin" to Central Military Hospital in Prague-S�evínna on 27 August 1956 was a new experience. The aircrew landed directly in front of the hospital.

Among the rescued were also many children. At that time the girl was only four. A hop gard- den lay fell on her during a storm. The injury was bad. She was unconscious and doctors did not give her much hope. After some time military base received a letter from her parents, which they were reading with envy. "Everyone in our unit was very happy. So happy that we raised the money and bought both teddy bear and sent it to hospital," said one of the first Mi-4 flight engineers, Major Minšol Pivutek.

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Transportation of an injured by Mi-4 helicopter from "Terezin" to Central Military Hospital in Prague-S�evínna on 27 August 1956 was a new experience. The aircrew landed directly in front of the hospital.

Among the rescued were also many children. At that time the girl was only four. A hop gard- den lay fell on her during a storm. The injury was bad. She was unconscious and doctors did not give her much hope. After some time military base received a letter from her parents, which they were reading with envy. "Everyone in our unit was very happy. So happy that we raised the money and bought both teddy bear and sent it to hospital," said one of the first Mi-4 flight engineers, Major Minšol Pivutek.

"Our biggest rescue mission" says pilot Major Pinter, "was flooding in the southern part of Slovakia. We had to fly over the floodwaters to lift heavy supplies. I was already on my way back to the base area and the helicopter was almost to the last seat filled with people. Still, I decided to board the woman into the helicopter. I hovered over the house and the flight engineer hoisted the woman and the boy aboard. She cried that she had other family members somewhere in the area. We found her husband moments later in a forest tree; grandmother was pulled from the water a few kilometers away, we convulsively held a thick tree branch. It saved her life..."

"We cannot omit search missions for people lost in the mountains, which were in them a lot harder, arduous and sometimes dangerous. People who work in the mountains tell us that ordinary romanticism. "You would not believe what it does with the helicopter in the mountains," said Lt. Col. Antoní Sedek. "You fly into basin with the required engine revolotion (rpm), and yet suddenly beg to fall about three to four meters per second. You make the descent as you are used to, and then adapt to the optical illusion of the mountain terrain, the speedometer needle abruptly shifts over the speed limit. We were terrified of what it did to us on the ledge side. It knocked us straight down... Today the rescue crews are trained to work in a mountain range and they have the necessary expertise. We were not..."