

The Importance and Aspects of Physical Preparation in Contemporary Combat

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The experience from the post-war history shows that modern conflicts increasingly defend themselves against any categorization, due to both their origination and also the composition of fighting forces. Conflicts escalate gradually from isolated demonstrations of violence up to open fighting, without a more-clearly-cut boundary between peace and war, and without a proclamation of state of war. Armed conflicts are made by standard forces and increasingly also by paramilitary groups. Such forces often act with split headquarters and with heterogeneous equipment covering an entire scale of means from primitive arms such as machetes up to the technically most advanced weapon systems; nonstandard methods of conducting actions are frequently used.

Action enterprises are characterized by high mobility and takes place in large territories in a planar manner and without a clear-cut line that would separate the belligerents. These conflicts do not particularly avoid civil population. Rather the civil population are frequently and intentionally used and misused for reaching military goals.

The reasons for the origination of conflicts are often irrational and have religious, nationalistic or racial subtones. Conflicts often have long historical roots and thus they address broad masses of population, in particular at an emotional level. This is the main reasons why to these conflicts some simple and easy solutions do not exist and why even after a period of stabilization such conflicts still threaten with a new fire.

In addition to this, for solving of conflicts a mandate by multinational organizations is mostly conferred on coalition armed forces whose members do not have any or only a much mediated relationship to a given region or its inhabitants. The confrontation with reality is quite often a disillusion for those "international" soldiers that many of them only hardly can cope with.

The armed forces that are to efficiently cope with these type of conflicts must not only be well trained and furnished with adequate modern equipment but they must also be well prepared morally and motivated in the right manner and they must also show a large **extent of physical and psychical resistance**.

Up to now, almost all the wars have been conducted by the principles that resulted from the previous war. The necessary response to changes therefore has always been a collecting of knowledge and experience "on the march", with all the negative impacts. In Indochina it was the French Army and later the U.S. Army that became convinced of this, and several years later the then still Soviet Army found out the same in Afghanistan.. All those Armies had to master a new style of waging war and to adapt to the environment, new circumstances and the enemy itself.

And an especially severe levy for this studying on the march was paid in casualties. The soldiers were not prepared sufficiently for: the guerrilla warfare, the improvised means of demolition, the diverse combat tactics, the principles of survival and maintenance of readiness for action even under extreme geographic and climatic conditions. After a certain time in all the mentioned cases appeared a crisis in the motivation of soldiers as they fought for a matter very distant from them.

On the other hand it showed that the largest successes were won by the units, mostly task troops, who were prepared extraordinarily well from professional and physical viewpoints and who started to use the same tactics as the enemy. This "deleted the advantages of home playground" and the party who had been prepared better from professional, material and physical viewpoints began winning predominance. In spite of a higher exactingness of fulfilled tasks those units showed fewer casualties caused by psychical failures of individuals. This was again given first of all by their higher resistance as a result of their intensive and exacting training and the high bodily ability and capability to survive under extreme condition, which abilities also ensue from such training. And naturally, in general the above mentioned factors showed a favourable influence for the units higher readiness for action.

From this view the war in the Gulf was so much untypical conflict that an endeavour to derive some general conclusions from it would miss any effect. In spite of this, the war can be given as an example from a view of the influence of physical and psychical preparedness upon the units readiness for action. To this effect an interesting element for a closer examination is the long period of waiting for action in the concentration area of anti-Iraqi coalition forces. It is generally known that the long periods of inactivity and uncertainty in waiting areas together with monotonous activity gradually dull the attention and instinct of self-preservation of troops. The equanimity and psychical resistance of soldiers are being lowered and this exerts, as its upshot, a destructive influence upon their readiness to action.

It can be said that today the knowledge has generally been accepted that the very good physical condition together with equanimity are the prerequisite for a perfect work performance. This is reflected in a great number of courses that are orientated toward: special physical preparation, the capability to survive under extreme conditions, the probability of the knowledge of one's own limits of abilities and possibilities. However today such courses are no more an exclusive speciality of armed corps. For instance, managers of top world companies literally get their maltreatment, for large money, to increase their efficiency by at least several percent.

In the armies of many countries the motivation for participation in similar courses is, in addition to the above mentioned reality, also based upon the awareness of the prestige and recognition that are won by course participants after they have graduated the courses. On a long-time horizon, one of the most prestigious courses is the **Ranger Course** in the USA. Due to its concept and first of all due to its indoctrination programme the Course is built up for American soldiers and American mentality. It is anticipated that the Course shall create very specific qualities in the soldiers, first of all in the recognition of their own limits, advantages and disadvantages. In spite of this, the Course due to its contents and elaborated methodology fulfills the main targets of special training in physical and psychical resistance.

Similar courses, often designated as **Commando courses**, are also organized in a number of other armies in the world. In spite of differences in the contents and methods and in the environment where they are organized, their targets are almost identical. Without respect to a membership of a certain kind of troops the courses give their participants an opportunity to improve the level of their own physical and psychical resistance and to recognize the limits of resistance and the signs of approaching the limits. Later in practice this allows to in time and optimally respond to the stress load situations; this lowers the probability of collapse in a critical situation. In addition the courses provide the individuals with some specific skills that are necessary for a successful mastering of critical moments in a real conflict. It is for instance

the capability to survive in hostile territory under any climatic conditions, the capability for orientation by makeshift, capability to perform long-distance movements, efficient skills and habits for hand-to-hand fighting, resistance to certain methods of interrogation, capability to escape from captivity, and many others.

Personal experience of say the members of SAS from the action of the B20 team in Iraq or of the pilots that were brought down from the skies over Iraq during the war for liberation of Kuwait and that were held in captivity under very complex conditions for more than a half year, advises of the importance of adequate preparation. Without a preparation for these and other nonstandard situations, which is not a common part of training, soldiers have a much lower chance of survival.

And it is not only the soldiers engaged in open warfare who are getting into similarly conflict situations but it is also the soldiers in Peace Corps who are more and more frequently exposed to such conflict situations. Therefore it shows as necessary to devote more attention to these standard situations at training for not only the members of special units but also for all categories of soldiers.

On the basis of the knowledge from modern history and first of all on the basis of the last war conflicts we realized the importance and meaning that this kind of preparation can give to both individuals and commanders. Therefore in the Czech Army, at first on the basis of empiricism, started was the creation of the contents of specifically oriented physical preparation, which contents should emphasize the diverse character and orientation of the physical preparation.

The application of the term *special physical training* has begun. The training was orientated toward the upgrading of the above mentioned skills and habits. Until recently the training was almost entirely practiced with reconnaissance units and task troops. A significant spreading and development of the training have been observable since the early 90s, when military schools started devoting to the training. This favourable trend has already been reflected in the quality of new graduates from those schools. The overall physical condition of the graduates is in sharp contrast to the rest of population of the same age. This contrast can be seen as the sharpest in the low condition of conscripts. The reality is such that even with the units for which some selection is being made say approximately one half of the newcomers are afflicted with various health limitations that in advance eliminate the new soldiers from usual physical preparation.

In spite of the introduction of the regular compulsory physical preparation for regular soldiers, in spite of the compulsory annual reexamination of bodily ability and in spite of the existence of proclaimed penalties for persons not fulfilling the established requirements, generally the status of bodily ability is unsatisfactory with regular soldiers. At the same time, generally accepted is the reality that officers and warrant officers with good physical condition are only capable of withstanding large physical and psychical burdens during preparations and the proper fulfillment of task in the modern, complicated operations and campaigns. However the levels of command where such burden would be probably the largest are just those levels at which the various drawbacks and exceptions are tolerated as much as possible.

On the other hand it is encouraging that situation is gradually improving with the units where manifested are both the already mentioned increasing level of school graduates and also the gradual introduction of knowledge and experience of the graduates from schools and courses

abroad. The ever-enlarging contacts between the Czech Army units and the armies of other countries, NATO countries in particular, also contribute to the improvement. The contacts extend from the participation in contests through joint mock battles up to the participation of our troops in the system of multinational forces in peace corps. The climate with units, the overall "esprit de corps", has been expressively influenced by the contacts. The confidence in our own capabilities is then being added by the reality that from comparisons it follows that in many spheres our soldiers are not backward and rather they are either equivalent or even better partners. On the other hand the joint working with foreign armies forces internally the participants in such activities that they should avoid the drawbacks that otherwise are commonly tolerated in their own, domestic environment.

The situation in the sphere of physical and psychical preparation is not at an adequate level. In spite of the theoretically and practically work out and prepared system of special physical and psychological preparation, the system functions unwell in units. However these elements are introduced and implemented with some units, in an isolated manner for the time being, without uniform methodology and evaluation, mostly from the initiative of young and enthusiastic officers. In this connection the more particular outlines are being taken by the idea of creating a Czech analogy to **Ranger** or **Commando course**, adapted to our conditions and to our mentality. Such a course would be a precondition of service with special brigade and with some other units of special orientation as well as with some professions in all kinds of troops, in accordance with the Career Code. In my eye the existence of such course in the Czech Army would raise, quite certainly and in a step by step manner, the motivation of the members of the Army toward improving physical condition. The successful graduation from the course would become for its students a question as prestigious as today this is with foreign courses about which, in addition to their prestige, a number of unsubstantiated myths and legends circulate.

The existing experience of the Czech Army soldiers from the UN missions are limited, except for minor exceptions, to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The character of individual missions from the UNPROFOR through IFOR to SFOR is static to a large extent, and therefore such events of participation contain the same elements of problem as it was in the initial phases of the war in the Gulf. This means that throughout the period of their mission the units are deployed in a single location and fulfill such tasks that mostly do not change too much. After a certain time such tasks are becoming a repetitive routine which together with the life in a limited area and the limited possibilities that follow from this of motion outside camps creates preconditions for the emergence of interpersonal conflicts and other negative demonstrations. Thus during a short time the signs of "submarine disease" can appear that such troops often cannot cope with. Then the soldiers are trying to find an escape in alcohol and intellectually simple pastime such as watching chronically video programmes or, in worse cases, drug addiction or even say criminal activities. This danger increases inter alia with increased count of nonorganic members of a given unit and with increased count of reservists.

And just therefore it is desirable and necessary that for maintaining optimum readiness for action and for maintaining a favorable climate of the unit the condition should be created which limit and eliminate the above mentioned negative phenomena. Among such condition-creation activities, undoubtedly, rank: the creation of conditions for sports activities, and a targeted directing of the members of the units toward practicing the sports activities. From this view it is not only maintaining merely the physical condition but first of all: an active fill for spare time, and a degrading or lowering of psychical strains and stresses to which the soldiers on missions are exposed more than anywhere else.

The experience of the short history of our participation in those missions allows us to claim that an unambiguously positive influence exists of the physical training and sports activities implemented with respect to given specifics under particular conditions. These specifics can be characterized in brief by that all the activities can only be performed in a certain, relatively small space, with equipment and conditions that are very distant from what the practicing individuals are accustomed to in their standing garrisons. This reality gives, in advance, the choice of possible activities and the quality of practicing the activities. From the areas of deployment, first of all from the territory of the former Yugoslavia, utilized also are the knowledge and experience that were collected by physical education personnel who directly participated in some missions.

To establish body-building centers and locations for simple activities, such as "rides" on bicycle ergometers, appeared as purposeful and relatively popular, and in addition to this, as simple and not exacting. Ball activities such as small soccer, netball and volleyball also found their friends. In the form of small tournaments or mutual matches and in an unexpectedly expressive manner, some of the ball activities varied pleasingly the monotonous life in the locations of deployment of the units. Surely the sports level and the value of performances are far from being top, however under those conditions this reality is definitely nonessential.

The limited possibilities of organized and regular training define, in advance, the reality that soldiers must join the missions already perfect trained and prepared. On the missions themselves the soldiers must maintain themselves more or less independently and for this, at least basic conditions must be created, first of all those material. Therefore I recommend to provide, as a necessary component of equipment of each unit, material to the following minimum extent: balls, nets, rackets (for slow tennis, badminton), weights, simple body-making benches and stands, boxing gloves and suspended training sacks, in case of possible utilization also basic mountaineer's equipment.

At the conclusion of my presentation I would like to mention an interesting, rather psychological knowledge of that for some soldiers the participation in mission is a milestone in their lives. They apply for joining the mission, target being to fly from cheerless reality no matter whether personal life or working career. Through this dramatic change in their style of living they intend to turn their own lives upside down. The conditions under which they then live and work, displacement and emphasizing of other values, all this causes that the soldiers become just the prototypes of sound style of living. They devote a large portion of their spare time to sports activities, they start to be interested in their appearance and physical condition. They are getting rid of unnecessary kilograms and thus, through physical training and sports activities, they build up their self-consciousness and generate vigor for changes for better. And even this can be meant by sports.

This paper of mine, dear audience, was elaborated from the positions of knowledge and experience of commander, as collaborator, organizer and user of activities of my colleagues, physical education personnel.