

Competitive Sport Activities of the Czech Armed Forces Members at a Field of Military Sport

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Dear guests, friends and colleagues,

In my presentation I will focus on the phenomenon which influences and has an impact on a number of spheres of human life. This phenomenon is **sports**. In their entire choice of manifestations - from the performance for a pleasure provided by the activity itself and up to the top, professional performance -sports, in a specific way, enter also our Army. It turns out that sports are an effective measure for understanding and cooperation. The motto "Friendship Through Sport" therefore takes an entirely specific contents.

I will orientate my attention toward the sphere which covers a certain choice of sport activities in the framework of contests of the Czech Army or in those contests which the Army is engaged in merely through support and organizing outside the Army's structure.

We cover such activities under the name SELECTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION - COMPETITIVE. This name denotes the facultative sport and physical culture activities that are exercised on the basis of one's own choice and voluntary decision for the purpose of measuring strength and competing. The term selected physical education - competitive is fully sufficient for contests, competitions and matches. The term, to a very large extent, is similar or related to the selected physical education - noncompetitive orientation. A difference consists first of all in that the competitive orientation prefers expressively the performance aspect.

The main sense of the activities is **an endeavor to gain performance, to compete and to compare efficiency**.

We can generally say that through the performance aspect, fulfilled is the individual or group motivation - **the satisfying of needs, the abreaction and the self-realization of individuals**. The criterion is voluntariness and the realization of performance in the system of official contests and competitions in the Army, or possibly outside the Army.

The objective of the realization of sport activities defined in the Army's physical education system under the name "SELECTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION - COMPETITIVE" is to give individuals, by their own decision and deliberation, a possibility of performing physical-training-and-sport activities. All this in a framework of certain defined conditions, for the purpose of contesting , improving performance, realization of own interests of individuals and satisfying their needs.

First of all it is the following intentions that we regard as targets:

- through contests, competitions, matches an other sport measurements of strength, to create for and offer individuals or groups a possibility of objective strength-measurements and performance comparisons;
- improving performance
- improving and strengthening: health, psychical coziness and optimum bodily ability.

The orientation of activities as it ensues from the above given can define a sphere for such kinds of movement activities, however it can be said that the boundaries between the

activities are movable to a large extent. To put it symbolically, that is a functioning on the principle of communicating vessels.

In a particular case a certain performance is considered a competitive activity, in another case the same performance can be considered a noncompetitive activity. The decisive criterion is the relationship of the performing subject, as the subject is the user and bearer of given activities.

The frequent notions are performance, result, training and preparation for performance, physical and psychical preparedness, aspiration level, frustration and stress, euphoria, pleasure, and also fatigue and pain.

This form of **SELECTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION**, is, in relation to military service physical training (basic and special), regarded as the physical training's certain complement that develops the performance quality: of movement capabilities, and first of all, of movement skills. In simplification it can be said that this relationship means a relation between general and unique.

The military-service physical training as a compulsory form of the professional soldier's preparation realizes the preparation of an individual for the task of mastering perfectly his or her profession's tasks from viewpoints of movement manifestations and further qualities connected with such manifestations.

Selected physical education completes this targeted, utilitarian preparation with a space that allows the realization of individuals as integrated persons and gives them a possibility for the application of his or her needs and interests.

This relationship of military service physical training to selected physical education has, under well- thought-out management and influencing, a bilateral positive impact. It is therefore a matter of the "Army's organism" to create, in the framework of given possibilities, the conditions for optimum functioning of both the forms. The selected physical education generally balances the specific military- service physical training and creates conditions for active rest and a personal development which in turn backward and positively influences the capacity possibilities of an individual inclusive of his or her psychical resistance.

The mentioned organizational form is considered as a service activity and is exercised mostly in working hours.

As it has already been said the domain in this sphere is the activities that first of all prefer performance and its quality. Therefore a necessary element is contests. Such activities, from a purpose viewpoint, can be divided as follows:

- I. those which are organized by the Army itself in the entire complex of operation and support;
- II. those which are organized by the Army, partially or fully outside its own framework, in cooperation with other subjects;
- III. those which are organized by the Army or those where the Army shares in organizing or participates on an international scale, i.e. with the armies of foreign countries.

Under the **first group** we classify first of all the **Army Sport Games**, which, as far as the main kinds of sports are concerned, allow to organize the individual kinds of sports and

contests from fundamental levels (company, battalion, regiment, brigade). This group is the carrying element in the system structure, as it touches the largest portion of military population and has a long tradition. The composition and the general organizational structure of the **Games** are being designed by the General Staff Physical Education Expert Workplace. The other levels of command finalize the individual items of a given sports plan. The particular contents and organization of the items are dependent on local conditions and interest. Generally it can be said that every year those sports are incorporated into an updated plan that arose interest in organizing them and have the already created material and space prerequisites. Most frequently those sports are soccer (i.e. association football), volleyball, netball, tennis, table tennis, off-road running, beach volleyball, basketball, floorball, mountain climbing, swimming, orienteering, skiing. As the activities are voluntary, their extent is not defined strictly at individual levels and therefore a certain differentiation exists as far as their contents are considered. By the defined criteria only the best individuals or teams advance to higher rounds. At the final, highest level it is the **Czech Army Championships** whose winners will win the title of the **Czech Army champions** for a corresponding year.

Since this year these top contests have been organized in two blocks of events, as the **Czech Army Winter Games**, and in the other case, as the **Czech Army Summer Games**. The main reason for this concentration was to make organizing more effective, and, in a single place and over the same time, to organize the individual contests that in the past were organized as separate in place and time. Another reason was to upgrade the sport and social level, as the cumulation of sportsmen and sportswomen, organizers and also the invited highest officials of the Army (including Chief of the Czech Army General Staff) directly provoked this intention. Last but not least a chance also offered of showing the civil public the Army in positive light in the places of implementation (i.e. where contests were held). The Czech Army Winter Games mentioned were organized by the Czech Air Force in the city of Chomutov this year at the beginning of March; in their programme the Chomutov Games concentrated skiing contests, floorball, volleyball, basketball and table tennis. The Czech Army Summer Games were organized by the Military Academy in the city of Brno this year in the second half of June. Their programme covered contests in swimming sport events, netball, tennis, beach volleyball, small soccer, orientation running and off-road running. Both the responses from participants and the evaluation by organizers and engaged commanders sounded unambiguously in favor of this method of organizing the final contests of individual kinds of sports. It was the organizational teams of physical education professionals from individual components of the Czech Army who shared in the organization itself. The broad media information campaign found a favorable acceptance with the civil public. Only for the sake of interestingness I would like to mention that the original intention to "rotate" the organizers and places of implementation is being rejected by the contemporary organizers. And this is so because those large contest projects in the given regions also attract the interest of entrepreneurs and public institutions.

However, in addition to these more or less anticipated positives some realities emerged whose solution should be found on the basis of certain bilateral compromises between unit commanders, organizers and physical education personnel. What is basically at issue is that the units and components where physical education and sports are flourishing, no matter whether due to commanders or due to the devoted and enthusiastic personnel, are paradoxically afflicted for that merit. Where is a larger-than-average number of the individuals that show bodily ability and are talented for movement, the commander "misses: such individuals or all sections, as they participate in contests or competitions. Needless to say that the increased expenses (for transportation, mess allowances and accommodation etc.)

are exhausting, often and in a quite fast manner, the allocated financial limits of the particular unit. If the sphere is for the common military population, it is unrealistic to anticipate a permanently raised interests of media or even of sponsors, and therefore it is also unrealistic to anticipate a more pronounced "making of participants more visible", and thus also the parent entities (units, components and schools) to which the participants belong will not be made more visible. An immediate effect for commanders and chiefs is not produced by such sport activities, rather an opposite is produced as it can be understood from the above mentioned description. This also showed itself in the organization of this year's winter and summer games and this situation also asks for a need of a constructive solution. However, from my own long-term experience I can state that where physical education and sports are supported there the problems with discipline are less numerous, working atmosphere is better and the results of the corresponding units are also better.

Another type of organizational activities are the **Sports Days of commanders and chiefs**, which are part of the annual plan of a given unit or component. The Days represent a specific organizational form which allow the commanders of fundamental organizational levels (company, battalion, regiment, brigade) to announce and organize sport contests and physical training activities, by interest in a given place and by commander's own deliberation. The sense in this variant is to allow to implement the habits of a category of troops (the Day of Air Force, the Day of Students, etc.) with respect to local conditions and traditions and also with respect to a particular situation (troops on a training concentration, a period of lowered activity on duty or in training, etc.). The contents of such sport activities are, in addition to the locally or generally popular classic sports, also nontraditional events and contests (tug of war, strongest man contest, marches by tourist routes and signs, ice hockey matches, mountain-bike contests, etc.). The organizer for such events will as a rule be a physical education personnel of a corresponding component who will cooperate with voluntary judges and organizers.

As a rule the Sports Days are organized by a particular level once or twice a year.

The last type of events in the framework of the first group are **long-term contests, one-shot competitions, and tournaments**. This type of activities can be characterized as the contests and competitions that meet the interest of person in a certain place or space. Such activities are also organized for the participants with higher sport ambitions for whom the frequency of existing contests is not sufficient. Under this type of contests therefore also belong the various **unit or interunit leagues**, organized, as repetitive in certain time period periods, in small soccer, netball, tennis, table tennis or floorball. Such contests usually make the supply of sport activities richer and more diversified and through their sound rivalry they, often and in an expressive manner, help keep a good climate even in a common working process. Organizers are beside the professional physical education personnel also the players or contestants themselves and they are often in "their" sports at a very high expertise level. It is typical of such contests that they are often realized even outside working hours, i.e. after hours or during weekends. As an example it is possible to mention the popular league, the **Czech Army Nationwide Runners League**, which runs during the seasons spring and summer, altogether in four rounds (i.e. repetitive events), and associates those who are interested in long-distance running. Some 40 to 60 runners - sportsmen and sportswomen - participate regularly in each of the League undertakings. Long-distance events are announced for the runners (8 - 10km for men, 4 - 6km for women) in three age brackets (up to 30, up to 40, over 40). The applied scoring system (points aggregate) determines the end placing of competitors after the last realized undertaking and the competitors are first of all appreciated morally (recognition in

writing by commanders, publishing in the press). The high level is evidenced with the reality that in the championship contests held in the framework of the Czech Army Championships it was just the mentioned competitors who in the finishing sprint were among the best runners. A series of the contests has been organized by a small group of enthusiastic sportsmen and sportswomen, the officers-organizers from the city of Strakonice.

As an example of **one-shot tournaments** it is possible to particularly mention the tournaments that are organized for volleyball at the premises of the Czech Air Force for instance in the cities Brno or Stará Boleslav. As usual some 8 to 10 teams of local unit and of invited guests participate in such tournaments. Sometimes the tournaments end, planlessly and very pleasantly because of the planlessness, in mutual farewell party of participants. And again in the framework of the Czech Air Force it was the now already renowned tournament in association football which has won a great prestige. Every year this action, held traditionally in the vintners city of Hustopeče, has been an anticipated measurement of strength for six teams as usual. After the playing programme is finished, a social evening party in wine cellars, with music and wine tasting, will also become part of the overall programme. The Austrian Army team of Air Division 1 deployed in the city of Langenlebam is also one traditional participant. A similar tournament is also organized by the Czech Army Air Force in ice hockey and is held in the city of Hradec Králové. Sometimes the honorary guests of the tournament are acquaintances of Czech or world ice hockey (former Czech men or top-league players).

The second group is the already mentioned **common competitions and contests** organized as mutual actions and undertaking in whose organization and support participates, to a larger or smaller extent, the Army. The group is mentioned as separate, because this is a relatively new form of implementation and the necessary experience for the group is only being obtained, first of all in the organizational and legislative support. Under the group we classify the following contests:

- those which are organized by the Army, whose participants however can also be competitors that are not military personnel;
- those which are not organized directly by the Army, however the Army participate through its sportsmen and sportswomen;
- those which have both mixed organization and mixed participants.

A representative of the first type of contest is competitions in mountain climbing, organized by the Army University in the city of Vyškov and utilized for the measurement of strength also by civil competitors. Managing of these competitions is fully in the hands of the Army University Physical Education Department teachers.

A representative of the second type of contest is the Mutual Championship of the Czech Army and Triathlon of the City of Tábor, which is organized by a civil physical culture organization; the Army shares in the management staff and sends its contestants to participate in the contests.

One of the representatives of the third type of contest is the Open Winter Survival Competition, which to this effect is a pioneer in the combined support and organization of contests. This year the five-days contest has been organized by joint forces of: the Brno Military Academy Physical Education Department, the Military Spa and Recreation Facilities company and the General Staff Physical Education Department. The contest itself was realized in the surroundings of the Military Recreation Facility OVČÁRNA ("SHEPHERD'S") in the

Jeseníky Mountains. Through sponsorship some further civil institutions and companies share in the support of the realization of the action. The participation was open for both civil teams and military teams, including those from abroad (Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Slovakia). Media information campaign was provided by Czech TV Station NOVA and by Czech Radio Broadcasting Corporation.

Another and similar action was the tennis tournament “**Military Cup**”, held in the city of Mariánské Lázně in mid-June 1998. The organizers of the tournament were the General Staff Physical Education Department and TENNIS AGENS company. The Army input was the “organizational know-how”. The civil counterpart input was the logistical support. The participants in this tournament were also the main personalities of the Army Headquarters (commanders, chiefs and physical education personnel, Chief of the General Staff was also present) on the one hand and the representatives of civil companies on the other hand. From the above mentioned it follows that the intention was not only the sport activities but also a recruitment of new work contacts and counterparts for bilaterally convenient cooperation.

Responses to both the mentioned actions confirm our conviction of the rightness and need of organizing even such sport and social meetings.

A certain problem in the second group of activities, and especially in the last, third type of contest (Winter Survival, Military Cup), appears not in the organization and course of contests but in the accompanying programme - in the social presentation of the Army and in the work meetings. It occurs not infrequently that the accompanying programme, through its (material, financial, and organizational) exactingness, sidetracks the importance of the contest or competition. Therefore the issue is to find a balanced status that would, said symbolically, respect the interests of all parties concerned. We realize that in organizing the actions that are large by extent and importance we cannot do any more without a support from subjects outside the Army. If the cooperation between counterparts is led correctly without any endeavor to parasitize on a given undertaking, then everything is O.K. However, the subject concerned that frequently have very little in common with sports have their own ideas on what they should require in exchange for the means and services provided. And therefore we have to ensure that their ideas should be in accordance with the ideas of the organizers of contests or at least that the ideas should not be in contrast. However not always this is as natural as this should be. For instance some signs of the Winter Survival 1998 Competition could serve as a certain warning. For instance I bear in mind the accommodation of competitors and further conditions of their stay that not always corresponded to the importance of that action. However we take this experience as a precept for the future.

By our scheme the competitions and contests that are organized in an international context belong to the **third group**. To this effect a more detailed structuring of those activities can be adopted, as follows:

- those activities which are directly connected with contests in the framework of CISM;
- those activities which are organized outside the framework of CISM.

Our Army was taken as a member of the organization CISM in 1991 and gradual integration into its activities has been taking place since. Under current conditions in our troops (i.e. in units and at schools) basically two sport disciplines incorporated into CISM contest system are practiced.

These are **Military Pentathlon (M.P.)** and **Aeronautical Pentathlon (A.P.)**, whose military practical orientation, it can be said, selects them, in a certain manner, from classic Olympic sports. However this in now way lowers their sport value and rather reflects the specific mission of the Army as such.

Both the contests originated under the conditions of the Czech Army in 1995. In addition to the enthusiasm of their founders it was our colleagues and friends from abroad who contributed very much to making us familiarized with the contests - from Austria in the case of M.P. and from Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands in the case of A.P. The very good cooperation with our friends has still been continuing. Both the disciplines have been practicing their "baby steps" with the same or similar troubles and problems. The problems are additionally complicated with certain objective or subjective difficulties. The reality that we in our Army still don't have the standard obstacles track with parameters compatible for CISM contests can be regarded as an objective difficulty. Another objective reality is the problem of lack of material and outfit for trainings and contests (this concerns the rifles for M.P. and pistols and fencing outfit for A.P.), which, to a certain extent, limits the further development in further places of the Czech Army. Under the subjective difficulties we can classify a reality which also exists in foreign countries. This reality is the "balancing on the edge"- a conflict of interests between professional responsibilities and requirements on the one hand and personal ambitions and the endeavor after self-realization of individuals on the other hand.

To fit such requirements that are many times with opposite polarities is a problem whose analysis does not give unambiguous solutions. I will try to present a hard life example as a very simplified illustration.

A good pilot who is also a good sportsman and at the same time an A.P. contestant devotes much time to the preparation for contests in both personal spare time and working hours (trainings, concentrations, contests). It is logical that his presence at workplace is therefore lower than the presence of the pilots that are not sportsmen. This contestant feels as a discrimination that his commander, openly or in a hidden manner, prevents him from the mentioned increased absence. However the commander in his commanding position is responsible for the fulfillment of exacting tasks and feels any problem that prevents the workplace from the fulfillment of tasks as an obstacle. The pilot (generally, professional soldier) is being prepared by the Air Force for the fulfillment of certain duties first of all as a soldier and is paid by the State for such work. If the pilot is good in something else (sport), we will create certain conditions to enable him a realization, however only on the proviso of the fulfillment of duties and tasks for which he is in the Air Force! This critical moment now basically limits further sport development for a number of contestants.

This also shows the difference between the top/representative's (i.e., Czech (wo)men's) sport and the representative's (i.e., Czech (wo)men's), militarily practically orientated sport whose basic means, motivations, tasks and objectives are diverse. Whereas top sports are dealt with by professional contestants and trainers orientated solely toward performance, in the case of the described sports of military practical orientation it is professional soldiers, talented and willing, in addition to their profession, to practice a selected sport as their hobby. Sport with them preserves, to a large extent, its original function of recreation with practicing for pleasure from the activity itself. We can say that the professional soldiers feel other aspects, such as social contacts, individual friendship, and mutual professional and interpersonal recognition as important as the performance aspect of their sport. And therefore we cannot

mechanically compare and evaluate the two spheres which are so different by their conditions, objectives and tasks.

In spite of the existence of obstacles we can say that M.P. and also A.P. have built certain positions, over the almost four years of their existence under the conditions of the Czech Army, and we look at their future optimistically. Some successful presentations in contests abroad have been helpful in this. After the years of "mutual probing and gleaning" in contests and competitions, this year the Military Pentathlon team contestants finally started to collect partial successes in the competitions "Newcomers" in Dutch EDE. In individual competitions of men and women they took several forefront places including medal places. The recognition that they can be equivalent rivals gives these contestants, coaches and trainers new impetuses and motivation for further work.

The Aeronautical Pentathlon contestants can boast of a little bit better balance as they succeeded in winning the team contest in Belgium in 1996 and the contests of teams and individuals in the Netherlands in 1997.

In spite of partial problems, more and more persons interested have been joining in the CISM contests in the sphere of military practical sport, and it is also a cheering phenomenon that even our military schools are getting their fixed positions, because the military schools are hatcheries for the future contestants in both the mentioned sports. This year, for the first time we took courage to organize by our own force the contest that we have not yet organized - the Winter Aeronautical Pentathlon. Thus for the first time we have tried the organization of such contest, including the participation of foreign teams of Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. We wish to continue in the started tradition of new contests.

Another type of contest that we classify under this group is the S.H.A.P.E. (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) **Basketball Tournament** in the Belgian city of Mons. Last year for the first time and together with eleven more NATO and PfP countries we were invited to this tournament, which is regularly held at the beginning of December. On the relatively successful start, which is the seventh place out of the twelve participating teams, we anticipate that we will succeed in continuing our further participation.

From the mentioned cross-section of contests and their classification it is possible to judge that in the mentioned sphere most countries apply a similar way of approach and organizing. Some diversities are given by the traditions in orientation, some diversities are given by a system of directing physical education and sports in individual armies. As a conclusion it can be stated that the usefulness of mutual contacts is unquestionable and has its substantiation.

My distinguished audience, I would now like to seize an opportunity of presenting my opinion which to some extent escapes from the given framework of subjects. I anticipate that the Czech Republic as a future member country of NATO will be integrated into the corresponding structures and into a certain standardized system of preparation. This means that **anticipated are**: a certain level of compatibility in managing the individual elements in the process of preparation and a certain harmonization of the elements, or said in other words, a certain unification (of: system, contents, methods, and evaluation/rating criteria). Basically the objectives should be certain similar optimal outputs required, or said in other words, the results obtained in the specific spheres of individual professions and kinds of training. On the basis of such outputs, meaningful cooperation can be erected and the strength of individual participating units of NATO member countries can effectively be boosted. If for instance a

pilot is to be prepared to fulfill tasks to this effect, no matter whether in the time of peace or during local conflicts, the contents and also the form of necessary training must be, to a certain extent, same in all individual NATO member countries. This relates not only to the method proper of air pilotage and the tactics for dogfights, but for instance also to the situations after the aircraft has been abandoned in an emergency - therefore, to survival activities. I mean I do not need to persuade anybody that proper bodily ability and psychical resistance play a key role here. I think I am not wrong if I say that not in the structure of all kinds of training is included and coordinated the sphere of military physical education and sports. In civil sphere, particularly at the **COUNCIL OF EUROPE**, a body exists that coordinates and deals with this problem area. The body designs inter alia alternative tests for bodily ability (the **EUROFIT**) for individual groups of inhabitants of the European Union's countries. Therefore I put a question to myself why in the military environment no institutionalized body exists that would deal with the problem area of physical education and sports and that, for instance on the basis of professiogram, could: compare and evaluate the individual methods for the development of movement and psychical qualities of an individual, and recommend an optimum solution. I will be specific - we know that say the pilots from Belgium and the Netherlands exercise a "philosophy" of physical training roughly the same as our philosophy in our Army. This means that we use tools and forms of training that are roughly similar to one another. However just this term means a reserve in that we could say very similar or almost same! Through mutual visits we have come to finding a certain similarity and we have been providing certain expert information and advice to one another. However, this has up to now been made without coordination and rather on a basis of personal contacts and conjunctures. For instance we know that the mentioned countries have their own specialized workplaces which deal with a very similar problem area - testing of bodily ability and efficiency through a combination of physical-education methods and medical-physiological methods. The mentioned workplaces are in the Dutch Medical Center SOESTERBERG, in the Belgian Military Hospital in Brussels and in PRAHA (the workplace CASRI). By the way the US Army, if I know, has already had a similar programme for a longer time. In the sense of what I mentioned at the beginning of this deliberation of mine, in my eye it would certainly be beneficial for this matter not to deal with this problem area separately and to utilize the positive experience instead and to propose say a joint modular programme that, by the significance of definition, could be realized in simpler or gradually more detailed versions under the same methodology. This would ensure the prerequisite for comparisons of results and possible rating of the effectivity of training of individuals. I can see the same as realistic in the sphere of the contents of physical training, applied disciplines and rating criteria with all regular soldiers. If I know, up to now nowhere are comprehensively processed the information and data on how the problems of physical training are dealt with in either army. Therefore, many times such situations can occur that some partial problems are being dealt with in one army while in another army such problems have already been resolved and the results of solution function, and thus the only question is how to effectively interconnect the mutual communication of information. However, in order that the depicted problems could obtain a system solution, it is obvious that the element to solve the problems should be institutionalized.

Therefore I propose that for instance a small coordination group for physical training and sports at the Headquarters of NATO should be created.

The targeted activity of such workplace shall be, on the basis of cooperation, to collect and evaluate information from the basic spheres of physical training and sports.

The objective shall be to prepare standardized recommendations for the basic contents and methods of training for individual categories of troops or professions. Another objective shall be, in accordance with possibilities and conditions, to prepare standardized methods for the finding and evaluation of psychophysiological resistance so that the outputs could be comparable. The last objective shall be to coordinate cooperation in the sphere that is spoken about in this part - or a coordination, mediation of contacts and preparation of a sports calendar for a certain period.

Will you consider, please, this proposal of mine as an opinion held by a person who has dealt with the sphere of military physical education for more than 24 years but who surely does not assume the right of making you wiser. Rather I would like to invite, those of you who may co-determine or present the mentioned problems, to try to think over the needfulness and realism of my proposal.