

# PSYCHOLOGICAL ABILITY IN THE CROATIAN RECRUITING AND MILITARY SERVICE ABILITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

## 1. Introduction

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia mandates military service and defence of the Republic of Croatia as the duty of all her capable citizens.

Conscientious objection is allowed to citizens who for religious or moral reasons decline military tasks, and who will do the service in the civilian defence system, as regulated by special regulations.

Participation in defence, which is both the right and duty of Croatian citizens, is elaborated in the Defence Act, passed by the Croatian Parliament.

The new Defence Act has become effective in early April 2002, somewhat altered compared to the previous Act, with no changes, though, for the basic system of military service.

Military service comprises;

- recruit service
- compulsory military service (6-month) or civilian service (8-month)
- service in the reserve component

Recruit service commences in the year of reaching the age of 18 and terminates with commencing the compulsory military service.

During the recruit service recruits:

- get filed into the military register
- undergo medical and psychological examinations
- undergo recruitment procedure

## 2. MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS

Organisation of medical and psychological examinations is a co-work of the Ministry of Defence and civilian medical institutions. Medical institutions have to meet the prescribed equipment, space and staff criteria. The Ministry of Defence contracts them yearly.

The new Defence Act envisages establishment of military selection centres of the Armed Forces in the future. In my view, establishment of such centres within the Ministry would enable a more effective system of examinations, selection and classification of military recruits.

Medical and other examinations of recruits are specified by the Regulations of Measures and Procedures of Psychological and Medical Assessment of Aptitude for Military Service.

Following the detailed examinations and procedures, the medical doctors and the psychologists of the civilian medical institutions file all anamnestic, anthropometric, laboratory and other findings in the respective forms, and draft the aptitude assessment.

### 3. METHODOLOGY OF MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS AND ANTHROPOMETRIC MEASURES IN AUTHORISED MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS

1. Anthropometric measures comprise the following: height, weight, thorax dimensions, stamina and endurance assessment
2. Laboratory blood and urine tests
3. ECG (electro-cardiogram)
4. Orthoreter –functional examination of distant and close vision sharpness, phoria, fusion, depth vision and colour discrimination
5. Audiometry – functional examination of hearing in a quiet room, of each ear alternately, at 500, 1000, 2000 and 4000 Hz.
6. General medical examination
  - anamnestic and hetero-anamnestic data
  - analysis of all specialist examination findings, of functional examinations, anthropometrical measures and laboratory findings
  - detailed physical examination
  - insight into the recruits' medical records (for those who have them)

Whenever the prescribed methodology yields the assessment «incapable for military service», the physicians and the psychologists have to refer the recruits for follow-up specialist examinations to accurately determine medical and psychological aptitude of recruits for the compulsory military service.

### 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

#### 4.1. Introduction

Psychological examinations as the binding procedures and aptitude assessment are to a detail described in the Methodological Instructions for Group and Individual Examination of Conscripts.

Group psychological examinations have a dual goal:

- to screen out the recruits needing additional psychological examination to determine their psychological aptitude for military service

- to classify the conscripts found medically and psychologically apt for military service (based on examination results) to determine their aptitude for different military branches, specialties and duties.

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The Ministry of Defence procures and prints psychological measurement instruments for group psychological testing, while the medical institutions provide needed instruments for individual psychological examinations.

#### 4.2. Test batteries used for psychological examination

The battery used in group psychological examinations consist of 4 tests:

##### *I. Test of perception of a datum in field of sight*

This test serves to examine ability of quick and accurate perception, identification and organisation of data in field of sight.

The items consist in geometrical forms placed randomly in two adjacent rectangular frameworks. The respondents are expected to associate each of the forms from the left framework marked with a letter with an identical form in the right framework, marked with a number.

The test comprises the examples, the problems for practising and the items to solve within the 6-minute period.

The test is administered because perceptual ability is important for performing of majority of military duties, especially with surveillance, shooting, warning etc.

##### *II. Test of comprehension of relationships among the words*

This test examines verbal ability, i.e. comprehension of the words' meaning and relationships.

The test comprises a pair of words on the left and suggested answers on the right.

The respondents are expected to identify the relationship in the first pair of words and among the four words on the right (marked with numbers 1,2, 3, 4) identify the word that stands in the same conceptual relationship with the second word outlined on the left. An example:

Sky – Blue	1. table
Grass - ?	2. green
	3. warm
	4. big

In addition to the examples, the test includes two problems for practise and items to solve within a 3 minute-period.

The comprehension test is administered in recruit selection in view of the importance of verbal ability in training for all military specialties, particularly for

receiving, transferring and issuing orders, for communications handling, in-crew communication and the like.

### *III. Spatial identification of objects*

Spatial identification test examines spatial ability, or the ability of perceiving the positions and forms of objects in 3-D space.

Again, the items include a picture of a geometrical body outlined on the left side and four different geometrical bodies marked with numbers on the right.

Respondents are supposed to identify the geometrical body matching the one on the left side if cut out and folded along the dotted lines.

Along with the example, the test includes 3 practice problems and the items to solve within a 10-minute period.

The spatial identification test is administered because spatial ability is critical for successful completing the training on all types of weapons, especially for comprehending of functioning of complex mechanic sets, for repairs and the like.

### *IV. Personality characteristics questionnaire*

Personality characteristics questionnaire examines personality characteristics in the narrow sense, comprising 4 scales:- the extraversion scale, the neuroticism scale, the psychoticism scale and the lie scale.

The questionnaire comprises 90 items, which respondents answer with *YES* or *NO*. The recruits whose score on the neuroticism or psychoticism scale reveal psychological disturbances are referred for individual psychological examination.

The extraversion and the lie scale (as the control scale) constitute an additional source of information on recruits, completing their psychological profile and facilitate the assignment of recruits to a military specialty.

#### 4.3. Scoring

The scoring of conscripts' performance in the battery comprises:

- points scored on each test (scale)
- categorised raw result on each test
- category of general intellectual status
- the need for individual psychological examination

The results of the cognitive tests are converted into categories, and the 10 % of recruits with the lowest score are referred for individual psychological examination.

The system of categorising enables classification of recruits with the highest score to more demanding specialties.

The results of the personality questionnaires are converted into categories, and 5% of recruits are referred to individual psychological examinations.

#### 4.4. Individual psychological examinations

Individual psychological examinations serve to establish the psychological status of conscripts and their aptitude for military service.

Individual psychological examinations are obligatory for:

- the conscripts with deficient education (uncompleted elementary school)
- the conscripts below the norms of group psychological examination
- the conscripts displaying indications (e.g. anamnesis data, behaviour in group, medical indications) calling for individual psychological examination

Individual psychological examination comprises:

- collecting and analysis of entire documentation of a conscript
- administration of additional psychological instruments
- psychological interview
- drafting the assessment of aptitude for military service

Where the individual psychological examination reveals the presence of psychological difficulties affecting the aptitude for military service, the recruit is referred obligatorily for psychiatric examination.

The conscripts whose condition requires extensive psychological observation and psychiatric survey are referred to the hospital for differential diagnosis. Both psychologists and physicians may draft the assessment of aptitude for military service based on conscripts' original medical documentation, but only psychologists may draft the "inapt" assessment for the individuals scoring poorly in general intellectual status.

#### 5. RECRUITMENT BOARDS

The definite assessment of aptitude for military service (treated as an administrative procedure allowing appeal) is concluded by the recruitment boards.

The recruitment boards are appointed by the decision of the Minister of Defence, and include a chairman, a medical doctor, a psychologist, a secretary and a typist. The boards are based in a number of towns within the government administration structure, but directly subordinated to the Department of Military Service of the Human Resource Management Directorate of the Ministry of Defence.

Aptitude assessment categories are 3:

- capable for military service
- temporarily incapable (category valid for a 1-4 year period)

incapable

Along with aptitude assessment, the boards assign the recruits (as a rule in the year of their turning 18) to the respective military occupational specialties, based on their health and psychological status, knowledge and skills and on the needs of the Armed Forces.

The recruits assessed "temporarily incapable for military service" will be referred for new medical and psychological examinations following the expiration of the first assessment.

Croatian regulations allow postponement of compulsory military service for education reasons, but not later than the age of 27. A recruit's military specialty can be altered following his graduation on the account of new acquired skills and knowledge and his own will, if it is compliant with the needs of the Armed Forces.

The recruitment boards also assess the aptitude for young servicemen (i.e. recruits already serving and the reserve component members):

- at their request, with the personal medical documentation enclosed evidencing change in health condition
- at the request of the unit's medical doctor or psychologist having found an injury, illness or deterioration of health condition occurred during the military service

The recruits assessed "capable for military service" and assigned to the appropriate branch or service in the year of reaching 18 will have the right and duty to report any change in their health condition and to be referred to the respective recruitment board for a review of the assessment of aptitude.

Under the Defence Act, the recruits who for some physical malfunction or serious illness are obviously incapable for military service will not be sent for medical examinations, and on the basis of their personal medical documentation, not exceeding 6 months, or the original medical documentation dating from occurrence of the malfunction or illness, the recruitment board will confirm "incapable" category.

It is also under the Act that for the recruits assessed "incapable for military service" twice on the same grounds the decision of the board at the 3<sup>rd</sup> recruitment round has to be a definite one.

Recruits disagreeing with their assessment by the recruitment boards may appeal to the Appeal Commission of the Ministry of Defence, also convened by the decision of the Minister.

## 6. THE ROLE OF MEDICAL DOCTORS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS IN THE RECRUITMENT BOARDS

As cited earlier, medical doctors and psychologists make the regular "staff" of the recruitment boards.

In addition to reporting to the respective authorities, providing expert advice to authorised medical institutions and local defence offices, their basic tasks include the following:

- verifying up-datedness and the composition of the documentation from civilian medical institutions
- supervising the correctness of the procedure and the methodology of medical and psychological examinations
- ascertaining the compliance of aptitude assessment with the Regulations on Measures and Procedures used for Assessing Psychological and Medical Aptitude for Military Service
- requesting additional medical documentation or referring the conscripts for additional examinations whenever the documentation does not suffice for a definite assessment
- advising the chairman of the recruitment board on the specialty best matching the medical status and psychological profile of individual recruits
- specifically indicating the military specialties least appropriate for individual recruits

At recruitment, all members of the board will take into account the recruits' desired specialty if that fits the needs of the Armed Forces, and if their health or occupational status do not suggest differently.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Military service being a Constitutional duty of all capable citizens of Croatia, the Ministry of Defence was faced with the need to design an effective system examining, assessing, and assigning to an appropriate post a considerable number of people in a relatively brief period.

Psychological examinations for assessment, selection and classification proved to be a time- and cost-saving, and unbiased segment of the system of assessment of medical and psychological aptitude for military service.