

COMBAT UNIT COMMANDERS TRAINING OF THE STRESS MANAGEMENT, APPLIED IN THE ARMY OF SLOVAK REPUBLIC.

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Slovak Republic was founded on 1 January 1993 through the division of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic were also founded with this date. Our armed forces are among the youngest armed forces in the world, but they can draw upon experience of the former common armed forces of Czechs and Slovaks. This is also where historical roots of Psychological service of our armed forces lay. Based on previous experience military hospital psychologists and military school psychologists had their important position.

Military hospital psychologists fulfilled the tasks of selection into the armed forces as a part of the medical attestation about fitness for military service. Moreover, military hospital psychologists worked as a part of a team for the treatment and prevention of psychological disorders. Their tasks were thus selective and clinically psychological.

Military school psychologists performed selection and education tasks. They judged expectations for studies and service as a part of an admission process for selected positions linked to studies. They took part in education in the process of study preparation in the psychological field and they supported the development of student's personal qualities through consulting services.

The Psychological service in the Armed Forces of the SR exists since the independent Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic came into being. In the process of defining spheres and tasks of the Psychological service several alternatives of psychologists' placements were considered. Apart from the fact that we adopted the model for psychologists described above, we also developed the placements of psychologists in combat units. These psychologists concentrated above all on problems concerning preparation and support in the process of training and deployment. his task has a preventative character and at the same time allows for a relatively fast professional psychological assistance up to the level of battalion.

The preparation for the accession into NATO has demanded a far-reaching reform of the armed forces, called Model 2010. Within this conception the Psychological service will have three basic elements apart from the military hospital psychologists and the psychologists in the education system. The concept and control element will be psychologists on J1 Component of General

Staff. Tasks in the area of psychological selection of personnel will be performed by an independent Section for psychological activities of Sociological and psychological activities centre. This section will also fulfil tasks concerned with the preparation for stress resistance and the development and leadership skills.

There is a tradition to call the preparation for the operation at the stress situations as a psychological preparation of the soldiers in the Army of Slovak Republic. This combat psychologists task is actual in the army, consisted of the regular basic service, but any tasks would be actual also after units professionalisation. In this sphere of job it points as very effective procedure with the methods of the social – psychological training. What are the tasks of the psychological service in the process of action?

Pre - Action, or before action – is main question their psychological preparation as a process to improve skills necessary for the accomplishment of tasks and rise of self - confidence .

During action it is psychological support aiming to save life and mental health, but at the same time with the tendency to maintain as long as possible the fighting and action capability of soldiers.

Following action psychological care follows, its aim is to increase group unity and to release stress, including the prevention of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Looking from the view of our experience so far, the best-developed area is the area of psychological preparation. We will specify the tasks in this area by a way of an example:

Group taking part in this is usually in need of developing required skills (unit, staff). Realisation is either up to commander or specialist. The aim is to develop skills needed to fulfil goals (achieving required targets) on individual and group level.

According to Model 2010, there will be no space for psychologists on the level of each combat unit. Professionalisation will make it possible to transfer some tasks from psychologists onto commanders. If we compare these two categories of persons, we will realise that a psychologist is usually a good expert on the methodology of psychological preparation (socio-psychological training), but one significant limiting specification is a lack of experience in managing and the lack of immediate sense of belonging to the unit (platoon, company) in preparation. Commander usually does have experience of managing and control, but he lacks methodical skills in the area of psychological training.

Our main task for the years to come is thus aimed at the preparation of commanders. In this field of work, the methods of socio-psychological training are proving to be a very effective method.

The aim of this psychological preparation entails two groups of soldiers skills :

First group related to the group dynamic processes and their active use in the

unit's task accomplishment. We have called them as a social and we included here increase of group cohesion, enhancement of team spirit, expansion of cooperation and mutual trust.

The second group related to stress, relaxation, self – control and self – confidence . We have called them as an individual and here we included skills supporting stress management and self = control, stress management of fellow soldiers, increase of overall hardiness and self - confidence vis - á - vis obstacles

In all the theoretical composing of the problematic have been most important for us a question of the unit commander's role at the presenting skills development. We have understood, that his role is critical in the process of the unit' s preparation and therefore we have decided to develop soldiers skills / instrumentally / proceeding their immediate commanders and so we have directed the social-psychological training to these commanders. All the preparation got a new dimension with it, because except of this presented skills we deal a questions of the leadership, specifically problems of the measured units management, team build-up, to the motivation of the inferiors, authority sustaining, delegating of the authority and support at the group problems solutions.

When selecting the methods of skill development, we have decided to minimize the theoretical part of the preparation for commanders. We have kept it mainly because we expect a need for a higher level of know-how for commanders. As mediators they must know how individual psychological processes function. The theoretical part of the preparation for regular unit members is not needed.

We have thus designed two scopes of preparation:

For commanders:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| - theory | - 20% |
| - problem solving on a theoretical level | - 20% |
| - practical role-play | - 30% |
| - dynamic exercises | - 30% |

For units:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| - problem solving on a theoretical level | - 30% |
| - practical role-play | - 30% |
| - dynamic exercises | - 40% |

We have prepared a psychological preparation course for the preparation of unit commanders, which we experimentally tested in 2001 and 2002. In 2001 we tested the methodology in the Immediate Reaction Battalion, the result being a

qualitative valuation of the course. In 2002 we adjusted the methodology and used it in the preparation of unit commanders of the Airborne Reconnaissance Battalion. It was aimed at non-commissioned officers - squad and group commanders. Course was run in the length of 60 hours in a two-week block. The method was an active social training directed at the development of communication and solving of stressful situations, training of relaxation, training of debriefing, exercises that develop group cohesion, trust and group spirit. In the end, a six hour exercise in terrain with achieving tasks that require collaboration and high mutual trust of team members.

The course results showed the legitimacy of this form of leader preparation. The subjective fulfilment of participants' expectations in the development of skills reached 75%. We discovered an increase in the quality of required skills during the complex six-hour exercise by more than 30%. Quality gains in the ability to resolve problem tasks using method pencil-paper orientation index in a problem) was judged by t-test between input and output. Statistical significance (t-test) ranged between 2,4 and 7,5 with t-average being 2,6. These results proved the legitimacy of the method selected and its usability in the future leader preparation. An important element was making training more attractive. We expect valuation of the method effectiveness looking from the point of its use by participants in training. Following such test, the method will be modified for individual rank categories and will become a part of career courses for professional commanders.

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