

Czech Armed Forces are preparing a new selection system.

Libor Soumar

Sports Research Institute of Czech Armed Forces

Podbabska 3

Prague 6, 160 00

Czech Republic

Introduction

Czech Armed Forces are preparing themselves for the fundamental change from conscript army to professional military force. Even though the final decision about the term and scale of professionalization was not made yet, it is already clear that in a few years the conscripts will be scarce in the Czech Armed Forces and we will be forced to compete for new employees with other subjects on free labor market. This situation creates new challenging task: to develop and verify new recruitment and selection system. In respect of this newly emerging situation Czech Armed Forces has created 13 recruitment centers and are preparing methodology for selection. This paper describes our approach to the selection, methods we will use, process of selection and principle for assignment to specific military occupations. Based on experience from other countries the selection procedure consists of following areas: administrative, physical, medical, psychological and academic. This presentation gives an overview over the selection system in Czech Armed Forces as it will be carried out step by step in next three years.

Contemporary state

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.

This situation lays new challenging demands on preparedness of Czech Armed Forces. Czech Armed Forces are already preparing military units of rapid response consisting of professionals that are ready to be deployed and take part in peace-keeping mission within NATO activities. These professionals must be thoroughly prepared and qualified in order to successfully fulfill various missions, therefore the high emphasis must be laid on high quality recruitment a selection system.

Czech Republic as a new member of NATO step by step creates conditions for operation of armed forces comparable to other member countries. Minister of defense decided to develop centralized system of recruitment and selection and created Center for personal marketing (CPM). CPM analyses situation on labor market, investigates the attitudes of young people and their lifestyle and provides them with information about military occupations and career, develops selection method and selection criteria for effective job assignment. In 2000 13 recruitment center were opened and simultaneously experimental operation of selection center was open, in order to verify methods and criteria. In 2003 two selection centers will be officially open.

So far the selection was carried out by commanding officers responsible for functioning and preparedness of combat units assigned for cooperation within NATO structures. This approach did not prove to be effective, so the centralized selection system was approved and Sports Research Institute of Czech Armed Forces (CASRI) was ordered by Ministry of defense to prepare methodology for new selection system.

Recruitment centers

13 recruitment centers are situated in largest town throughout the country. Centers offer information about military occupations, careers and study in military schools. Personnel of recruitment center consists of professionals well educated in structure of Czech Armed Forces and its mission. They inform possible candidates about study programs on military schools, recently vacant occupations. They are required to have personal experience with military. Total number of employees vary according to region, usually is 4 to 5 people. Recruitment centers actively seek for new recruits, they communicate with schools and employment agencies a contact conscripts during their service.

Recruitment centers provide external recruitment from civilian sector. There is also internal recruitment within Armed Forces from conscripts, although this source of potential professionals becomes less and less available because of gradually reducing number of conscripts.

Levels of selection

Czech Republic has a compulsory military service and Czech Armed Forces are composed of conscript soldiers, professional soldiers, Non-commissioned officer, Commanding officers and number of civilians. Number of conscripts is gradually decreasing therefore Armed Forces are searching for new young people in civilian sector, learning how to recruit new soldiers. Selection system will respect differences between occupations of soldiers, NCOs and CO and different methods will be used for each category. Different selection will be executed for applicant to military schools that in present are the main source of NCOs and CO and will continue to provide educated professional for NCO and CO occupations in the future.

Selection areas

Administrative

Age

- Citizenship
- Educational screening
- Military profession and skills (for conscripts)
- Civilian profession
- Moral qualification (criminal record)
- Skills (driving license, etc.)

Physical

- Measurement of muscle strength (push-ups, sit-ups, hand grip)
- Running test
- Swimming test

Medical

- Height, weight, body fat measurement
- Visual and auditory examinations
- Laboratory tests (blood and urine samples)
- Muscle and joint maneuvers
- Submaximal workout test on bicycle ergometer
- Physical examination by a doctor
- Interview by a doctor

Psychological

The main purpose of psychological selection is to evaluate intellectual and personal features of applicants. The main goal is to predict their capabilities and exclude candidates who do not meet the minimal criteria.

- Psychometrics
- Response to visual and auditory stimulus
- Attention maintenance and division
- Psychometric tempo
- Games
- Psycho-physiological reactions
- Determination task
- Coordination task
- Computing task
- Interview by a psychologist

Academic

- General knowledge (geography, history, national language)
- Mathematics
- Foreign language
- Computer handling

Selection procedure

The whole selection procedure for soldiers takes two days. It starts by interview where applicant is required to present necessary documentation (citizenship, education, criminal record, etc.). Then he proceeded to medical examination. It consists anthropometrical measurements, visual and auditory examinations, blood and urine samples, submaximal workout test on bicycle ergometer, interview by a doctor followed by physical examination. Next the applicant goes to physical fitness tests including strength tests as push-ups, sit-ups, hand grip and tests on exercise machines for measurement of maximal strength and fatigue,

then swimming test where applicant has to prove ability to swim, dive and jump into water. Next is an endurance running test.

Psychological testing is based on screening methods. The main goal of this screening is to evaluate the basic personal features and conditions as follows:

- 1) inclinations to temperament types including inherited features manifesting into both conscious and unconscious behaviors and activities,
- 2) structure of psychological sensations and feelings including subsequent subjective discomfort
- 3) influence of social environment to the formation of structure of personality
- 4) reactivity to stressful situations
- 5) intelligence quotient (IQ)

These tests are done by questionnaires and can be computerized. After filling out the questionnaires other psychophysiological tests aimed to psychometrics, response to visual and auditory stimulus, attention maintenance and division, psychometric tempo, games, psychophysiological reactions, determination task, coordination task and computing task.

Psychological examination is closed by an interview with a psychologist. Next is an interview where the applicant is asked about the motivation to join the Armed Forces, preferable jobs, expected career, etc. Then the candidate has to proceed through academic test also done on the computer.

The methods above were selected to fulfill following demands:

- examination of large number of people in short time
- briefness and simplicity which results in minimum time requirements
- possibility of software evaluation of all methods because it gives a possibility of immediate feedback
- possibility optionally include other methods into the test battery

Overall capacity is 20-25 candidates a day, four days a week, which is about 4000 applicants a year per one selection center. The total number of personnel for operation of one selection center is estimated to 25 – 27 persons.

Selection tools and criteria

Certain minimal critical score is defined for most of the tests and the applicant will be rejected if he scores beneath the minimal score. Though this minimum score is generally set very low, so only very few number of participant will actually be rejected. We try to find a suitable job for every serious candidate, therefore the main emphasis is on finding the strengths and weaknesses of every candidate and assigning him to an appropriate occupation. Decision making process is done by a selection board composed of doctor, psychologist and assessor from units. They discuss each candidate individually. The support for their qualified decision is provided by a computer software which evaluates candidates dispositions. Later we hope to implement more sophisticated methods of classification and this way eliminate human factor from finding for each applicant a match with the most suitable job.

Discussion

The presented selection model will be used for soldiers. This is not a final version of selection methods and we might reduce the number of tests for soldiers. On the contrary selection models for NCOs and COs will take three days and more emphasis will be laid on testing of leadership, communicative skill, motivation, decisiveness, etc. These characteristics will be assessed in group situational tasks and structured interviews. Therefore other test will be included in the test battery. Improving of selection battery is never-ending process. In the future work on selection methods and criteria modification will be carried on continuously.

