

# CROMIL

CROATIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE

Nº 20

YEAR 10

OCTOBER 2018

## INTERVIEW

COMMANDER OF THE RAMAT  
DAVID AIR BASE

## INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EXERCISE

# FLYING SABRE

# SEA GUARDIAN

1<sup>ST</sup> HRVCON TO NATO-LED  
MSO OPERATION

## ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE

"TIGROVI" DISPLAY  
PROFESSIONALISM  
IN LITHUANIA

CROATIAN eFP  
VULKAN BATTERY  
IN POLAND

THE MOST COMPLEX EXERCISE OF THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES TO DATE

# VELEBIT 18

## JOINT FORCE

PRINTED IN CROATIA

ISSN 1847 - 2036

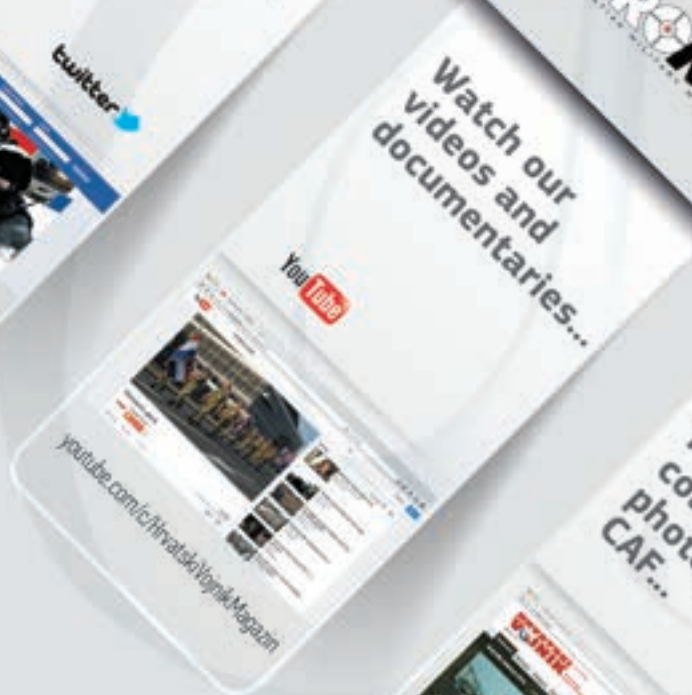
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## CROATIAN ARMED FORCES

THE WIDE RANGING INTER-SERVICE COMBINED EXERCISE OF ALL PARTS OF THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES ENTITLED VELEBIT 18- JOINT FORCE, WAS THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST MILITARY EXERCISE TO DATE, RUNNING CONTINUOUSLY FOR 72 HOURS FROM 13-15 OCTOBER 2018 AT MULTIPLE LOCATIONS ACROSS THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA.



# VELEBIT

## THE MOST COMPLEX EXERCISE OF THE

A comprehensive inter-service joint live-fire exercise entitled Velebit 18-Joint Force was conducted across all training ranges and areas in the Republic of Croatia from 13–15 October 2018. The Exercise was the year's main training event and was conducted on land, at sea and in the air, involving all units of the Croatian Armed Forces totalling some 5,500 personnel and some reserve units. The Exercise was led by the Director of the General Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces, Vice-Admiral Robert Hranj, assisted by Brigadier-General Senad Fejzić, Head of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

The Exercise had a range of challenging objectives – to test the level of capability regarding national defence; to test newly introduced weapons and equipment (pri-

marily the Patria armoured personnel vehicle, the PzH self-propelled Howitzer and the OH 58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter); a capability demonstration of joint operations planning and conduct; to test the application of strategic and tactical doctrines, concepts and processes with an additional aim to demonstrate capabilities regarding assistance to civil authorities during defensive operations. In addition to classic defensive tasks, the Exercise tested the Armed Forces' capabilities in dealing with modern-day threats such as combatting terrorism, urban warfare and cyber defence at both strategic and tactical level, airborne interception, force protection, attacks against military installations, re-installment of communications etc. Velebit 18 brought together a number of





Authors: Martina BUTORAC, Vesna PINTARIĆ, Domagoj VLAHOVIĆ,  
Photos by: Tomislav BRANDT, Mladen ČOBANOVIĆ

INVOLVING SOME 5,500 PERSONNEL AND SOME RESERVE UNITS, THE EXERCISE TESTED THE ABILITY OF THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES FOR NATIONAL DEFENCE OF THE INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA AND PRESERVATION OF ITS TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY...



# 18 JOINT FORCE

## CROATIAN ARMED FORCES TO DATE

inter-service and joint exercises organised by individual commands of the Croatian Armed Forces.

The symbolic title of the Exercise was explained by Vice-Admiral Hranj, who pointed out that Velebit was the longest mountain range in Croatia and the natural crossroads between the north and south of the country, its coastline and its hinterland, which held an important place in the history of Croatia, and in particular the 1990's Homeland War when it assumed critical strategic value for the successful conduct of military and police operations. The Exercise sub-title – Joint Force described its main characteristic – a joint operation in a complex security environment that tested the synergy of the three armed services and branches of the Republic of Croatia.







“JOSIP JOVIĆ” BARRACKS UDBINA

## EXERCISE COMMAND'S OPERATION

“Velebit 18-Joint Force”, a comprehensive, 72-hour inter-service exercise comprising all units of the Croatian Armed Forces went live at the Josip Jović Barracks, Udbina on 13 October 2018.

The launch of Velebit 18 was attended by the President of the Republic of Croatia and Supreme Commander of the Croatian Armed Forces, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, by the Deputy Prime Minister



and Minister of Defence Damir Krstičević, the Chief of the General Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces General Mirko Šundov and other representatives of the Ministry of Defence and of the Croatian Armed Forces. The Exercise was observed by Assistant Adjutant General of the Minnesota National Guard, Major-General Neal Loidolt. The President emphasised that the Croatian Army had been born into the nation's Homeland War, acquiring valuable experience upon which it is building today, and complementing those with new knowledge and capabilities.

The Defence Minister stressed that the integration of the capabilities of the Croatian Army, Air Force, Navy, Special Forces and Support Command and units subordinated to the General Staff was a demanding task, being undertaken for the first time since the end of the Homeland War in 1995.

“By conducting Exercise “Velebit 18-Joint Force” we are conveying a strong message to the Croatian people and to the region that Croatia and its citizens are protected by a strong, modern and well-equipped military, ready to address conventional and non-conventional challenges. I want the public to be aware that there is a force protecting the sovereignty of Croatia, its territory and borders; the Croatian Armed Forces are growing stronger in all areas to ensure peace, freedom and assistance if necessary”, said the Minister.

The President emphasised that “Velebit 18” was a continuation of joint efforts to restore long-neglected defence capabilities and that budget allocations to defence were a sound investment into secure and stable future for Croatia.







## TRAINING RANGE "GAŠINCI" DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS AND COMBATING TERRORIST ATTACK

The Gašinci Training Range hosted a subordinate exercise by the 1<sup>st</sup> Mechanised Battalion "Sokolovi" of the Croatian Army's Guards Armoured Brigade reinforced by a mechanised company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Mechanised Battalion "Tigrovi" of the Guards Mechanised Brigade, elements of the Armoured Regiment and the Battalion "Kune" of the Guards Armoured Brigade, supported by elements of the Intelligence Corps and NBC Defence Regiment – a total of 865 personnel utilising 73 key weapons systems.

The first task involved area defence from attack by an 'enemy' armoured infantry battalion, followed by transition to recce and counter-offensive operations, neutralising mines and explosive obstacles with live firing involving all weapons across the contested territory and pushing the 'enemy' into the destruction zone.

Minister Krstičević added that the integration of capabilities of the Croatian Army, Air Force, Navy, Special Forces and Support Commands was a demanding task being undertaken for the first time since the Homeland War. "By conducting the Exercise "Velebit 18-Joint Force", we are conveying a strong message to the Croatian people, but also the wider region, that Croatia and all its citizens are protected by a strong and modern military, well-equipped, well-armed and prepared for conventional and non-conventional threats. I also want the public to be aware that there is a force that protects the sovereignty of the state, its territory and its borders. The Croatian Armed Forces are growing stronger across all areas to ensure peace, freedom and assistance to the population if the need arises", said the Minister.

The Exercise is an opportunity to test doctrines, strategies, tactics, techniques and processes, to test and integrate new assets and capabilities such as the self-propelled Howitzers, Kiowa helicopters, UAVs and the CIS system. The Exercise was conducted through all four warfare domains – sea, land, air and cyberspace", said Armed Forces Chief of the General Staff, General Mirko Šundov.

In a video conference with Force Command North at Gašinci, Force Command South, Air and Special Forces Commands held at the Joint Operations Centre, Exercise Director Vice-Admiral Hranj explained that the Exercise had opened with a series of co-ordinated activities involving all components of the Croatian Armed Forces, and its scenarios featured both offensive and defensive operations and operations involving protection of key infrastructure.



The assets used at Gašinci comprised M84 main battle tanks, M80 BVPs, Patria AMVs, 122-mm self-propelled Gvozdika Howitzers, mortars, anti-armour and air defence systems, UAVs and other assets.



## TRAINING AREA "GAKOVO"

**RESERVE FORCES TAKE PART IN VELEBIT 18**

Exercise activities included an important role played by members of the reserve forces at the Gakovo training area. The training establishment at Gakovo comprised soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, members of the Special MP Company and the Intelligence Division. In addition to Exercise activities, personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment also conducted initial recruit training for the reserve forces, engaging regular and reserve elements of the Croatian Armed Forces.

The training establishment undertook headquarters command and control tasks and demonstrated its' training of reserve forces. The focus was on showcasing security operations, safeguarding, prevention and neutralisation of a saboteur terrorist group. The scenario predisposed the intelligence corps detecting an infiltrating terrorist cell, reporting it to Force Command North based at the Training Range "Eugen Kvaternik" near Slunj, which deployed the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion's 1<sup>st</sup> Company to isolate the 'terrorists', force their withdrawal and surround them with the aid of infantry weapons and armoured vehicles to prevent the 'terrorists' from escaping. Personnel of the Special MP Company, reinforced by elements of the MP Regiment, disarmed and arrested the 'terrorists' and destroyed mines and explosives. They used military working dogs, were transported aboard military police armoured vehicles and Croatian Air Force helicopters in the conduct of their tasks.

KAMENJAK PENINSULA  
TRAINING RANGE**AIR DEFENCE OF  
MILITARY LOCATIONS**

Simultaneously, units of the Croatian Army's air defence and the Croatian Navy performed live firing drills against aerial targets using their lightweight portable missile systems.

The air defence forces had been deployed on detachment three days earlier to commence their activities, including the establishment of a command post in the Barracks at the northern port of Pula and a tactical operations centre on the Kamenjak peninsula firing range. The deployment was made by land and sea to test the capability of movement, command and control at the firing range.

The air defence units were assigned to the protection of headquarters and infrastructure. Led by the Air Defence Regiment and supported by artillery batteries of armoured combat vehicles from the Guards Mechanised and Guards Armoured Brigades of the Croatian Army, these units deployed their air defence systems Strela 2M, Igla, 107-mm and 128-mm MRLs, 20-mm BOV3 self-propelled AA guns and other air defence assets. This exercise involved 220 members of the Croatian Armed Forces, who successfully completed their objectives.







## “CRVENA ZEMLJA” TRAINING RANGES

### OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS

The first day of Exercise “Velebit 18–Joint Force” saw manoeuvres by soldiers of the 3rd Mechanised Battalion “Pauci” of the Guards Mechanised Brigade, who conducted a demonstration of an offensive operation with the aid of their Patria vehicles, on the “Crvena zemlja” Training Range near Knin.

The scenario consisted of a mechanised company tasked with defeating an ‘enemy’, leading and securing the line of advance, consolidating the captured territory and transitioning into defence.

The offensive exercise consisted of four phases: the alert and deployment to the tactical assembly area; the offensive exercise phase known as “advance to contact”; an assault that broke the ‘enemy’s front line and finally the successful capture of an ‘enemy’ facility in a co-ordinated action by infantry forces with Patria APVs.





## “DUGI OTOK”

## TRAINING RANGE

# NAVAL OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS - SUCCESSFUL LAUNCHING OF RBS-15B

On the second day of the Exercise (14 October 2018) maritime personnel of the Croatian Naval Flotilla and the Coast Guard, reinforced by elements of the Croatian Army, Air Force and Special Forces, conducted naval operations at the “Dugi otok” Training Range on the Dalmatian coast, with artillery and missiles engaging targets at sea and in the air.

The naval exercise scenario featured the successful launch of the Saab-Bofors RBS-15B anti-ship missile from the missile boat RTOP 42 Dubrovnik, engaging target at sea across a 30km range.

Following the launch, two missile boats RTOP 41 Vukovar and RTOP-21 Šibenik were positioned alongside the Dubrovnik facing the main target, a floating pontoon and brought down heavy fire with their 57-mm, 30-mm and 23-mm guns.

After hitting their seaborne targets, the participants engaged high speed airborne targets towed by Croatian MiG-21 fast jets with their 30-mm and 23-mm guns.

The exercise took place at the “Dugi otok” Training Range, where Force Command South – subordinated to the Exercise Command – was based. Force Command South was responsible for the exercise activities of naval, land, air and special forces (including a seaborne landing) at the Kamenjak peninsula, Dugi otok, Žirje, Zečevo and “Crvena zemlja” training ranges, which involved a total of 661 Croatian Armed Forces personnel utilising 18 key weapon systems.



## KUPA TRAINING AREA

## FORDING THE WATER OBSTACLE

The second day of the Exercise featured a major river crossing at the Kupa Training Area. The task consisted of securing access to the riverbank, the construction and maintenance of ferry and pontoon bridge crossings. Core unit was the Engineer Regiment together with a M84 tank squadron, armoured personnel carriers, Patria AMVs and a detachment of Military Police totalling 168 personnel and 14 key weapons systems.

The force's main task was to ford the River Kupa, scene of a major battle in 1991, to allow the movement of a task force battalion of the Guards Armoured Brigade. The scenario featured a destroyed and damaged traffic infrastructure impeding the movement of friendly forces, and threat of an enemy attack against the newly-established crossing sites. As outlined by the Force Commander







## CEROVAC TRAINING AREA

### CIVIL SUPPORT DURING COMBAT OPERATIONS

The second day at the Cerovac Training Area featured a demonstration of Croatian Armed Forces capability regarding support to civilian institutions during combat operations. Activity focussed on CIMIC, including the provision of emergency accommodation, food and water supplies (consisting of a water purification unit) and giving medical assistance to an endangered population.

Led by the Logistics Company of Support Command, the team comprised a Services Platoon, Water Purification Section, a Military Police section and a specialist CIMIC Team totalling 48 Armed Forces personnel. CO of the Civilian Institutions Support Camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Eniz Jakšić explained that assembling the full range of services was completed in two to three days with the Camp providing support to hundreds of civilians. Lt. Col. Jakšić also underlined the importance of the water purification unit, as it produces potable water from various natural sources, a critical factor during combat situations and for civilians accommodated within the Camp.



## VELEBIT18-JOINT FORCE

Major Ivica Miložić, the Fording Task Force was assigned with setting up two ferry crossing sites and one bridge crossing, to allow the movement of friendly forces and their assets across the river.

1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Dario Vukušić, the Fording Task Force Command Sergeant explained that the 93-metre pontoon bridge (composed of 11 floating modules) constructed for the purpose of the exercise enabled the two-way crossing of up to 600 vehicles in one hour. Colonel Alan Srpak, Commanding Officer of the Engineer Regiment praised the conduct of the tasks, adding that the task force comprising a pioneer company, an amphibious bridging company and river flotilla company had successfully established ferry- and bridge-crossing points, enabling armoured forces to cross the river and demonstrate an integrated and effective joint operation.



## "CRVENA ZEMLJA" TRAINING RANGES

### KIOWA WARRIOR NIGHT TIME LIVE FIRING

Crews from the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter squadron taking part in Velebit 18 on 14 October performed a night attack against land targets at the "Crvena Zemlja" Training Ranges near Knin. Four OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters were deployed in two independent and co-ordinated flights, with Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) co-ordinating the operation with land forces.

According to the scenario, the exercise commenced with JTAC guiding the helicopters textbook fashion onto their targets, followed with an 'attack' by the OH-58 flights engaging the targets with suppressive fire. During the 'attack' the Kiowa crews fired their 12.7-mm M3P machine guns. Following successful completion of the live firing phase, the crews evaluated their results prior to returning to their home base at Zemunik.

## MILITARY TRAINING RANGES "ŽIRJE" AND "ZEČEVO"

### SEA- AND AIRBORNE LANDINGS WITH FIRE SUPPORT

The third day of the exercise saw the naval component moving assets from the naval base at Dugi otok (Long Island) to the naval base on the Dalmatian island of Žirje.

The focus of this part of the Exercise, conducted in the training ranges at Žirje and Zečevo on 15 October was on co-ordinated sea- and airborne landings, involving a total of 729 Armed Forces personnel and 25 key weapons systems.

The lead component for this part of the Exercise was the Croatian Navy Flotilla and Coast Guard.

The Exercise scenario was for a joint task force to conduct a seaborne landing designed to break the 'enemy's' defence line, pushing him backwards to create conditions for the movement of reinforcements tasked with continuing the offensive and liberating the island. The seaborne landing was conducted with artillery preparation, electronic countermeasures and air strikes against surface targets to prepare the ground for the disembarkation of the amphibious forces.

In the early morning hours the landing forces, comprising a Naval Infantry Company and a platoon of the Croatian Army embarked aboard a convoy of landing craft-minelayers and transported to the operational area under the protection of missile



boats. The exercise began with an artillery and missile barrage against surface targets by Croatian Army units from the Zečevo training range, with 122-mm howitzers and self-propelled MLRS. The missile boats Vukovar, Dubrovnik and Šibenik also fired their 57-mm Bofors guns against surface targets, enabling friendly forces to make landfall.

Simultaneously, the simulated destruction of a naval mine was conducted, to 'secure' the landing zone. Amphibious forces were then transferred from their landing craft-minelayers onto assault craft and brought into the island beach-head, covered by an air-defence umbrella





Exercise "Velebit 18 - Joint Force" was the Croatian Armed Forces' main training event in 2018, involving around 5,500 military personnel and reserve units, combat and support assets, weapons and equipment from all units of the Croatian Armed Forces.



provided by missile boats. In tandem, elements of the 2nd Special Forces Group performed an airborne landing against a high-value target at the island's highest point. Operating in combination with each other these forces consolidated and fortified their positions on the captured beach-head, providing combat security with continuous patrols and defensive activity. The Exercise tasks were undertaken in full inter-service co-operation, bearing testament to the efficiency and co-ordination of forces in the field and the Joint Staff.

The staff of the Croatian naval component were based at the Coastal Surveillance Headquarters on Dugi otok,



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with direction of the Exercise from the mainland, made possible thanks to the provision of a full array of electronic maritime communications systems. Data from various sensors were integrated into digital imagery produced in real time and passed instantaneously to naval headquarters.

The Exercise involved Croatian Navy personnel supported by units of the Croatian Army, Air Force, Support and Special Forces Commands, the Military Police Regiment, Intelligence Corps and the CIS Division, who demonstrated high levels of capability in a joint amphibious operation. Support for the Exercise came in the form of the Croatian Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Transportation and Infrastructure who placed their vessels at the disposal of the Exercise forces, and also from local volunteer fire brigades.

#### TRAINING RANGE

"EUGEN KVATERNIK", SLUNJ

### EXERCISE GRAND FINALE

The final phase of Exercise "Velebit 18-Joint Force" was held on the "Eugen Kvaternik" Training Ranges near the central Croatian town of Slunj from 13-15 October 2018.

The President of the Republic Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, as Supreme Commander of the Croatian Armed Forces gave permission to begin the final part of Exercise "Velebit 18".

The manoeuvres at the "Eugen Kvaternik" involved over 1,100 personnel and 80 assets; the lead formation was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanised Infantry Battalion "Gromovi" of the Guards Mechanised Brigade reinforced with a mechanised infantry company and tank squadron of the Guards Mechanised Brigade, Artillery and Rocket Regiment elements, NBC Defence and Support Command. The forces demonstrated offensive manoeuvres employing tanks

## CROATIAN ARMED FORCES

and armoured vehicles, Patria APVs, Panzer 2000 Howitzers, self-propelled MLRS, conventional howitzers, OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters, mortars, anti-armour and infantry weapons.

The Exercise concluded, Defence Minister Krstičević emphasised that its main objective had been to test the combined and co-ordinated operations of various military capabilities within all organisational units of the Croatian Armed Forces.

"With the successful completion of Velebit18 the Croatian Armed Forces have demonstrated their full ability to exercise their basic mission - defence of the Republic of Croatia and assistance to the civil authorities: Velebit 18 represents the conclusion of two years' hard work", said the Minister.

The capabilities and effectiveness of the Croatian Armed Forces make it a respected and modern military that continues to safeguard the traditions and ethos of the Homeland War, said the Defence Minister, who announced another military exercise of comparable scale in 2021, to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Croatian Armed Forces, which will by then have the F-16 multi-role fighter aircraft and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters in operational service. Within a 72-hour time frame the Croatian Armed Forces displayed co-ordinated, inter-service joint operational working and the integration of various capabilities of the Croatian Army, Air Force, Navy, Special Forces Command, Support Command and units of the General Staff at training ranges and areas throughout the country.

### EXERCISE VELEBIT 18 - JOINT FORCE OBJECTIVES

**AT TACTICAL LEVEL:** full cycle of combat operations; offensive operations (including battle preparation, advance to contact, establishment of contact, assault and pursuit); defensive operations (including demonstrating area and mobile defence in depth and transition to offensive operations).

**AT STRATEGIC LEVEL:** demonstrate combined operations working (including approaches to the conduct of operations involving the joint planning and co-ordination of various military capabilities and tasks aimed at delivering both physical and psychological results).







## ORGANISATION OF THE EXERCISE

Training activities during Exercise "VELEBIT 18-JOINT FORCE" were conducted throughout all available military training areas and ranges in the country.

The Exercise was directed from the Barracks "Josip Jović" at Udbina, with two subordinated commands at the Training Range "Eugen Kvaternik" near Slunj (Force Command North) and at the Dugi Otok Training Ranges (Force Command South). Force Command North had responsibility for Exercise activities on the "Eugen Kvaternik", Gašinci, Gakovo, Kupa and Cerovac training areas. Its commander was Major-General Siniša Jurković, Commander of the Croatian Army.

Force Command North hosted both defensive and offensive segments of the Exercise, which featured live firing and river crossings, as well as counter-terrorism scenarios, which also involved a reserve company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Regiment, Zagreb. The activities undertaken also demonstrated the capabilities of the Croatian Armed Forces in support of civil authorities aiding the civilian population during periods of conflict (such as accommodation, food and water supplies, medical care, CIMIC, psychological support etc).

Meanwhile, Force Command South had responsibility for Exercise activities on the Kamenjak peninsula, Dugi otok, Žirje, Zečevo and "Crvena zemlja" military training areas. Force Command South was led by Commodore Ivo Raffanelli, Commander of the Croatian Navy. The southern training ranges hosted naval, land and special operations activities, including a seaborne landing and the engagement of air and surface targets at sea.

Velebit 18 was directed from the Barracks "Josip Jović" at Udbina, where temporary accommodation for the Exercise, the Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP) and the use of Croatia-made radio-telecommunications equipment were also deployed.



## COMBAT AND SUPPORT ASSETS, WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT USED IN THE EXERCISE

THE CROATIAN  
ARMY DEPLOYED

146

COMBAT ASSETS

THE CROATIAN  
NAVY DEPLOYED

18

VESSELS

THE CROATIAN AIR  
FORCE DEPLOYED

16

AIRCRAFT AND AIR  
DEFENCE ASSETS

JOURNALISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS OF OUR MILITARY MAGAZINE VISITED MEMBERS OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CROATIAN CONTINGENT (HRVCON) DEPLOYED TO NATO'S ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE WITHIN THE GERMAN-LED BATTLEGROUP (eFPBG-DEU) IN LITHUANIA. AT THE HEART OF THE CONTINGENT IS THE 1<sup>ST</sup> COMPANY OF THE "TIGROVI" MECHANISED INFANTRY BATTALION, PART OF THE CROATIAN ARMY'S GUARDS MECHANISED BRIGADE, WHICH PARTICIPATED IN NATO EXERCISE "SPRING WOLF", INVOLVING THE ENTIRE CROATIAN ELEMENT OF THE BATTLEGROUP AND ITS RESOURCES; THE AIM OF THE EXERCISE WAS INTEGRATED TRAINING WITH THE REST OF THE BATTLEGROUP TO TEST ITS OVERALL LEVEL OF CAPABILITY, COMPETENCE AND JOINT OPERATIONS....



1<sup>ST</sup> HRVCON eFPBG-DEU – LITHUANIA

# "TIGROVI" DISPLAY IN

Our magazine's team travelled 1,600 km from Croatia's capital Zagreb to the Barracks at Rukla to visit and talk first-hand with members of the Croatian Armed Forces deployed in Lithuania and learn about their military experiences far from home working side-by-side with the armed forces of other NATO countries. The 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON (consisting of a mechanised infantry company with Patria 8x8 AMVs) has been deployed to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup with Germany as Lead Nation, alongside Belgian, Norwegian, Luxembourg, French and Dutch troops. The Battlegroup serves as a reinforcement element of the Lithuanian Army's Iron Wolf Brigade. The Croatian Contingent consists of 187 members drawn from the 1<sup>st</sup> Company of the Croatian Army's Guards Mechanised Brigade's "Tigrovi" Battalion. Upon our arrival personnel of the HRVCON were preparing to depart for the Pabradė military training area – some 120 km from the barracks, to conduct a live-fire exercise with members of the German and Dutch forces. The team toured the base housing Battlegroup's Croatian and seven other nationalities (more than 1,200



soldiers) and which serves as a training centre for the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

We were accompanied by STRATCOM Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Mato Kuljanac, who explained each detail of the Croatian Contingent's upcoming activities and tells us of the daily routine and tasks so far completed during their past six months in Lithuania.

On the wall of the Croatian Contingent's accommodation block, a large poster caught our eye – a portrait of the legendary commander of a battalion of the Brigade "Tigrovi" – Lt. Col. Damir Tomljanović Gavran, above his biography written in several languages along with a picture of the place where he lost his life – Tulove grede in Velebit Mountain – in the background.

The present-day battalion is the successor to the wartime 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Brigade "Tigrovi" commanded by Lt.Col. Gavran and are the guardians of its enviable reputation. Staff Sergeant Tomica Cesnik explained the presence of the posters: "We may be young soldiers but the Brigade's fallen heroes are our role models as we continue the tradition of those wartime units and keep alive the memory





# PROFESSIONALISM

## LITHUANIA

of them and their heroic feats". An identical poster is on the wall of the top floor common room, where Croatian soldiers have also set up a small chapel, a wall with children's greetings cards and other "Tigrovi" memorabilia including an engraved motto, "Faithful to our Homeland". The Barracks provides a number of amenities for the soldiers' free time – a gym open 24 hours a day, a volleyball and basketball pitches. Personnel are also afforded the opportunity to organise social and charitable activities locally and participate in sporting competitions.

### TAKING PART IN EX SPRING WOLF

In a remote part of the barracks, soldiers clambering aboard some 15 Croatian Patria vehicles awaited the signal to head towards the Pabradė training ranges to take their part in the Battlegroup's week-long programme of integrated training codenamed "Spring Wolf", watched by the team of our magazine.

The ranges provide ideal conditions for various military activities. The sandy soil present in the area suggests a desert environment, despite the surrounding greenery.





## ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE

The troops of 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON returned home in early July with invaluable experience for themselves and for the entire Croatian Armed Forces. "It is an honour and a privilege to be the first unit to serve in any mission or operation, and the "Tigrovi" already have extensive experience in various Croatian Armed Forces engagements within NATO- and EU-led missions and operations." During their tour, the Croatian soldiers took part in NATO exercises such as Flaming Thunder, Sabre Strike and Sabre Knight. In Exercise Sabre Strike '18 the Croatian Mechanised Infantry Company underwent an In-theatre Readiness Inspection (ITRI) and was declared "Combat Ready" by NATO's evaluation team, headed by a Brigadier-General of the German Bundeswehr.



The constantly blowing wind lifted the sand each time a vehicle passed and it got into our eyes and mouths. Nevertheless, such conditions make for an ideal setting for realistic manoeuvres and for delivering on assigned tasks. From our viewpoint near the Patria vehicles we observed a scenario where the Croatian mechanised infantry company was assigned a defensive task; a live-fire tactical exercise observed by the Battlegroup's German Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Wolf Rudiger Otto and the Commander of the Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Forces (NDVF), Colonel Arturas Jasinskas. The tactical simulation comprised an attack by an 'enemy' mechanised battalion against the Mechanised Company's positions; the defenders deployed their 9K115 Metis (Mongrel) anti-tank guided missiles, RPG-22 single use anti-tank rocket launchers and 40-mm RBG-6 multiple grenade launchers. The Croatians were reinforced by soldiers of the German Joint Fire Support Team equipped with Fennek armoured reconnaissance vehicles who co-ordinated the firing with 82-mm mortars and the 9K111 Fagot. The Croatians were reinforced by a Dutch engineer platoon tasked with the preparation of combat positions.



**The Defence Attaché of the French Republic, Colonel Fabrice Duda highlighted the excellent co-operation between Croatian and French soldiers in Lithuania, where they had operated as true brothers-in-arms. "I know the value of the "Tigrovi", who demonstrated the enthusiasm and professionalism so characteristic of the Croatian Armed Forces", said Colonel Duda.**

It was most impressive to see the Patrias in action and the Croatian soldiers accurately engaging all targets and successfully completing this part of the Exercise but especially to hear the war cry "za Hrvatsku kao tigar" (for Croatia like a Tiger) echo across the ranges once the Exercise was over and the soldiers received praise for their performance.

"The entire Croatian component of the Battlegroup took part in this activity, and the main objective of the Exercise was the combined training with other Battlegroup elements to test the level of integration", said the 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON's Commander, Captain Marko Krpan, who emphasised that there were no differences in operation with other nations, and also that the Croatian part of the Battlegroup was currently the only one judged to be combat ready according to NATO's Combat Readiness Evaluation (CREVAL) prior to its deployment to the eFP mission.

In the forthcoming days the Company would continue to practice defensive military operations including fighting in built-up areas (FIBUA) with German and Dutch units, which is expected to confirm HRVCON's high level of readiness for integrated joint operations with their part-





HRVCON's Commander, Captain MARKO KRPAN



ner forces. This will be followed by the key event, NATO Exercise Sabre Strike '18, concluding the Contingent's seven-month tour of duty.

Cpt Krpan praises the contribution and performance of all the Contingent's personnel. "We have worked really well as a team with a mission to present the Croatian Armed Forces the best we can and accomplish all the assigned tasks. Recognition of their capabilities and professionalism is also evident from the statement of eFPBG-DEU's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Wolf Rudiger Otto, who underlines the Croatian soldiers' discipline, understanding and commitment to duty. Lt. Col. Otto also commended the Croatian Contingent as the fastest and best trained, adding that he was proud to command a Battlegroup comprising the Croatian unit. The Croatians have also distinguished themselves with their indigineously-manufactured equipment and distinctive camouflage pattern uniforms that catches attention wherever they serve.

We witnessed to a new confirmation of Croatian soldiers as the best promoters of their country, and the impressions we left with made our journey back to Zagreb that much more enjoyable.



LT. COL.  
WOLF RUDIGER OTTO,  
COMMANDING OFFICER  
eFPBG-DEU

#### **What is your view of the contribution of units within the Battlegroup under your command, and in particular the contribution of personnel from the Croatian Armed Forces?**

The Battlegroup currently consists of eight countries, with each of them motivated to do its best and it is a real pleasure to work with all of them. The readiness of all units to contribute to the mission is most important. Integration is a matter of attitude and the Croatian Armed Forces are a good example. Like other participating nations they make additional efforts and do their best. This is what NATO is all about. Regarding the Croatian Contingent, I am honoured to command a Battlegroup that has Croatians in it. I have watched several training activities and I can say that they are great.

#### **What activity or event would you like to highlight as the most important so far?**

The Battlegroup has trained a lot over the past three months, but the current Exercise Spring Wolf is certainly the biggest activity undertaken so far here in Pabradė, in Lithuania and is an ideal opportunity to prove we are truly a Battlegroup.

#### **How demanding is it to command a multi-national unit, given the variety of tactics, techniques and procedures practised by the eight nations within the Battlegroup?**

As commander of the Battlegroup I have had the opportunity to command different forces and got to know various nations. And so it is with the Croatian forces that arrived today and will undertake initial preparations over the next two days before they "fight" against German elements in "Force to Force" training; so I will see how they approach this task.

Each nation applies its own approach, techniques and procedures, however we have done a lot of integrated training, as we are now doing in Pabradė and I have had a great chance to observe how each nation works. It is demanding to carry out daily routines in a foreign language and to harmonise the diverse approaches to problem-solving within the Battlegroup; but it is also rewarding to see the staff, units and host country function and make daily progress. We are really learning from each other - this is the largest Exercise at tactical (battalion) level and I am sure that the armed forces of the participating nations will profit from it after their tours of duty conclude.

#### **What are the next activities for members of the Battlegroup here in Lithuania?**

We have some fresh exercises coming up. These will prepare the Battlegroup for the largest final exercise planned for early June - the Exercise "Thunderstorm" alongside the Lithuanian Armed Forces. There is still much work to do, but we will be very proud of everything we have achieved before our rotation ends in July.

#### **Do you have a message for the personnel of the Croatian Armed Forces?**

As I mentioned before, it is an honour to command the Battlegroup's Croatian Contingent. I have observed them in training and have seen their discipline, understanding and the approach to their duties. They are always the fastest, are well-trained and it is a great pleasure to be working with them.



2<sup>ND</sup> HRVCON EFPBG-USA – REPUBLIC OF POLAND

# CROATIAN EFP VULKAN BATTERY IN POLAND

Comprising a Vulkan 122-mm self-propelled MLRS battery, the 2<sup>nd</sup> HRVCON has been at the Bemowo Piskie training ranges in Poland since mid-April, as a part of a Battlegroup serving within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). Led by a US national contingent, the Battlegroup includes forces from the United Kingdom and Romania acting as reinforcements to the Polish Army's 15<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Infantry Brigade. Consisting of 72 members of the Croatian Armed Forces, the Croatian Contingent is commanded by Captain Dario Bilješković. Its personnel are stationed at the barracks within the Bemowo Piskie ranges. We visited them in



one of the training areas where they have been working to reach full combat readiness and interoperability with other components of the Battlegroup. HRVCON's Commanding Officer explained that the Contingent's training plan followed the Battlegroup's schedule; they were at present preparing for live firing in late May as part of the preparations for Exercise Puma being conducted by the Polish Armed Forces' 15<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Infantry Brigade. Planned as an inter-branch live-fire exercise, the aim is to engage units of the 15<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Brigade and all components of the Poland-based Battlegroup, including live firing with Croatia's Vulkan MLRS.





THE TEAM OF OUR MILITARY MAGAZINE VISITED THE MEMBERS OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> CROATIAN CONTINGENT (HRVCON) AT THEIR BASE ON THE BEMOVO PISKIE TRAINING RANGES IN POLAND, WHERE THEY ARE CURRENTLY UNDERGOING INTENSIVE TRAINING TO ENHANCE THEIR COMBAT READINESS AND INTEROPERABILITY WITH OTHER COMPONENTS OF NATO'S ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE BATTLEGROUP. WE JOINED THEM ON ONE OF THE TRAINING AREAS WHERE THEIR SELF-PROPELLED ROCKET LAUNCHERS WERE CONDUCTING TACTICAL MANOEUVRES READY FOR LIVE FIRING AS PART OF THE INTER-BRANCH EXERCISE PUMA WITH THE 15<sup>TH</sup> MECHANISED INFANTRY BRIGADE OF THE POLISH ARMED FORCES, WHICH INCORPORATES THE BATTLEGROUP. THE EXERCISE INCLUDES LIVE FIRING WITH THE VULKAN MLRS IN SERVICE IN THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES...



“Working in a multinational environment is a valuable experience for both the individual soldier and the entire unit. The experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON were very helpful for our successful integration into the Battlegroup.

Commander of the MLRS Battery's Firing Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Zoran Golubović told us that in the week following their arrival in Poland, the Croats began individual training followed by crew-based work-ups; by the time of the first firing scheduled for late May, its personnel are expected to have mastered all standard tactical procedures up to Battery level.



## ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE

**BRIGADIER-GENERAL  
JAROSLAV GROMADZINSKI,**  
COMMANDER 15<sup>TH</sup> MECHANISED INFANTRY BRIGADE,  
POLISH ARMED FORCES

Dear Friends, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Croatian Armed Forces for their contribution to our NATO Battlegroup here in Poland. It is truly important that you are here with us, united under the NATO banner.

You have joined us in the mission of deterring aggression on our eastern flank. Deterrence is very important for us, and we are maintaining it through training and preparedness. We have demonstrated our fully integrated operations within the Battlegroup. One mission means one team.

On the occasion of the upcoming Croatian Armed Forces Day, I would like to wish all the best to all of your brave men and women.

We will soon be embarking upon a series of important exercises (Puma and others), the most important for us being Exercise "Sabre Strike" in which we shall demonstrate the fully integrated capability of NATO's Battlegroups. I know and am sure that the military personnel of the Croatian Armed Forces contingent will demonstrate a high level of competence and professionalism.



Importantly, the Bemovo Piskie ranges offer some outstanding training and practice facilities, with a great deal of successful co-operation and exchange of experiences happening between the various components of the Battlegroup.

The Vulkan Battery's crew includes a young female member of the Croatian Armed Forces, Private Anna-Marie Lemešić. Working as first loader, she is the sole female member of HRVCON's combat element and says that her experience with the training and drills, right from her arrival at Bemovo Piskie has been highly positive and that she hopes to build on them in the coming months of the multinational deployment. Pvt Lemešić praised the co-operation between BG member states, who have shown much interest in Croatia and its Armed Forces. The Barracks provides relatively good levels of accommodation and recreational facilities for the Croatian soldiers, ensuring they can enjoy some quality free time and keep fit.



Bemovo Piskie ranges offer some outstanding training and practice facilities, with a great deal of successful co-operation and exchange of experiences happening between the various components of the Battlegroup

The Barracks also offers base workshop facilities for the maintenance of vehicle and other assets used in the Mission. An experienced NCO and the Logistics Support Commander, Sergeant First Class Damir Šingelberger and his team are tasked with the essential regular maintenance of all HRVCON's combat and non-combat assets. At the time of our visit they were completing seasonal vehicle maintenance, including the Vulkan (thorough vehicle check, oil and filter changes and inspection of other systems), to keep them in top condition. Sgt Šingelberger says his long years of experience leaves very few unanticipated problems and enables his section to deal successfully with any task. He too praises the co-operation with other nations of the Battlegroup, which is characterised by mutual help and support. During their six-month tour in Poland the Croatian soldiers will continue to undertake their daily tasks in the multinational arena and will also be taking part in various charity campaigns and sporting events. We believe that 2<sup>nd</sup> HRVCON will repeat the success of 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON's tour of engagement, making all Croatians proud.







# HRVCON TO SHOWCASE eFP READINESS IN PUMA EXERCISE

Exercise "Puma" was the main training event during the Contingent's current tour, concluding a two-month work-up in planning and training, demonstrating the successful integration and operational capabilities of all elements within the 2<sup>nd</sup> HRVCON.

The Exercise involved five armed forces with 3,100 soldiers, 44 artillery weapons, 272 combat vehicles, 36 attack helicopters and six aircraft – impressive statistics, indicating the combat power of NATO's US-led Battlegroup in Poland as demonstrated by the live-fire Exercise "Puma" in the Bemowo Piskie training ranges in the north of the country, part of a larger international exercise – "Sabre Strike '18", conducted at multiple locations in the Baltic states and Poland, the objective of which was to demonstrate the Alliance's capability for deterring enemy attack.

The participating forces included the Armed Forces of Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom, the United States and Croatia. The Croatian Contingent deployed a Vulkan MLRS Battery from its Guards Armoured Brigade's Artillery-Missile Battalion, providing effective fire support in a test of their individual and joint operational capabilities. Comprising three parts, the first phase of the Exercise saw HRVCON participating in several key training events to practice and align their essential capabilities. The Croatian Battery initially took part in a river crossing, deploying a pontoon and an amphibious vehicle, while the forward artillery observers co-ordinated procedures for calling-in fire support with their counterparts from other participating countries.

A general alert introduced the second phase of the Exercise, featuring deployment of personnel and equipment from the training range to a forward area; having secured the area the troops applied camouflage, undertook de-



**Exercise "Puma" was the main training event during the Contingent's current tour, concluding a two-month work-up in planning and training, demonstrating the successful integration and operational capabilities of all elements within the 2<sup>nd</sup> HRVCON.**

fensive procedures and established communications with HQ. Later on, the Croatians displayed their operational readiness by responding to various threats (infantry assault, hybrid warfare, NBC attack, etc.)

The final phase was attended by the Deputy Commander of USAREUR, Major-General Timothy McGuire and the General Officer Commanding, Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, Major-General Jarostav Mika.

On the first day of the Exercise, the Croatian artillery unit gave a firepower display, followed on the second day with a demonstration of its capability in daytime fire support to the manoeuvring units of the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Infantry Brigade and the eFP Battlegroup. The successful live firing demonstrated that the Battlegroup's units had attained their intended level of combat readiness and commonality. The involvement of personnel from the Croatian Contingent won commendation from other Exercise participants. The Croatian Contingent commander, Captain Dario Bilješković expressed his pride in the excellent conduct and shooting skills of the Croatian troops. "We have demonstrated full operational capability and integration with other NATO nations. In my view we have fully benefitted from the opportunity to co-operate with other members of the Battlegroup and have significantly enhanced the competencies of all the Battery's elements, particularly our Forward Artillery Observers". Captain Bilješković also emphasised that the unity within the Battlegroup was a decisive factor in the success of the Exercise.



COMMANDER OF THE RAMAT  
DAVID AIR BASE



Three F-16 multi-role fighter aircraft landed for the first time at the 91st Air Base at Pleso on 2 August 2018 during a friendly visit by the Israeli Air Force to the Croatian Air Force. Upon entering Croatian air space they were welcomed by Croatian MiGs-21, which escorted them to their home base. As part of their joint activities, Lieutenant-Colonel Christian Jagodić and an Israeli pilot undertook a joint flight aboard a two-seater MiG-21UTI. The visit also provided an opportunity to talk with the Israeli pilot and the Commander of the Ramat David Air Base on their impressions, co-operation and joint activities for the future, in light of the fact that Israeli F-16 C/D Barak fighters will soon enter service with the Croatian Air Force.

**Having had an opportunity to visit Pleso Air Base and see operations here in person, what are your impressions, especially after your first flight aboard a MiG-21?**

Visiting Pleso Air Base I find it excellent and fully capable of integrating the new aircraft. I very much enjoyed flying the MiG-21 and it was a great experience for me. I was particularly impressed by the Croatian pilots. I flew with the commander and two pilots of their Fighter Squadron; they are competent, professional and fully capable of converting onto the F-16.

It has been a unique experience for an Israeli pilot to fly the MiG-21 and I thank the Croatian Air Force for the opportunity.



I AM  
BY

# IMPRESSED CROATIAN PILOTS



## How familiar are you with the capabilities of the Croatian Armed Forces, in particular with the Croatian Air Force?

We have learned much about each other during the establishment of bilateral activities at both government and armed forces level, but we certainly can learn a lot more. This is a step to be taken in the future. Whilst developing our military co-operation, we will need to define areas of mutual development at the level of air, land and maritime forces. This is presently a matter of continuing discussion between the Israeli and Croatian armed forces.

## INTERVIEW

### **You command the Ramat David Air Base. Can you tell us about it and the units based there?**

I have been Commander of the Ramat David Air Base for four years. As a pilot, I flew F-15 and later F-16 fighter aircraft, both models manufactured under licence in Israel.

The Base has two Squadrons operating the F-16C and F-16D. Ramat David is the northernmost air base in Israel, located near Haifa. The F-16 Barak is in operational use flying missions and border protection sorties almost daily. There are a total of four squadrons, based at Ramat David and another base in central Israel.

The squadrons under my command conduct a variety of operations and missions. The Base houses a helicopter squadron, as we also co-operate with the Navy. We have F-16 aircraft and Panther helicopters adapted to naval and maritime missions.

### **Croatian pilots will soon have the opportunity to fly F-16 aircraft. The Decision to procure the F-16 for Croatian Air Force units is a historic one for the country. What would be your message as Commander of Ramat David?**

This is an excellent opportunity for the future of the Croatian Air Force to make a technological leap. We look forward to helping you replace the MiGs-21 with the F-16, which are and will remain operational for the next two decades. It is a chance for your Air Force to lead the entire Croatian Armed Forces into 2030 - the year when they will fully westernise and become a modern force, operating in accordance with NATO standards.

Over the past year and a half, we have discussed the structure and processes for the mentoring of Croatian Air Force personnel by Israeli pilots and staff. The most important aspect is the leap in high-end technology of the platform, which will keep it in use for many more decades, and the leap in doctrine, in learning to fly together – everything the two air forces are based upon.



As I mentioned, I have piloted the F-15 and latterly the F-16. As a former Commander of the Squadron presently based at Ramat David, I believe that the F-16 can adapt to any future challenge faced by the Croatian Air Force. Its capabilities, handling and technology have already been shown to be adaptable and manageable in a changing military environment. This fourth generation jet fighter offers a range of capabilities that will enable you to face any future challenges and this is its main advantage over previous generations of aircraft. This is our newest F-16 fleet – some of its capabilities will be relevant for the Croatian Air Force in the future. The collaboration of our two air forces is unique since it was established a year and a half ago. Brigadier-General Mato Mikić, Commander of the Croatian Air Force, participated in a ceremony marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israeli Air Force and flew aboard our new training aircraft (the Aermacchi M-346 Lavi), which will also be an object of interest for the Croatian Air Force.

My flight to Croatia is a bilateral undertaking between our air forces and we look forward to future partnership working. We have invited the Croatian Air Force to participate in Exercise Blue Flag, a large, two-yearly international event in which Israel provides an opportunity for many participating forces to train and fly together. In such ways, partnership and co-operation can enhance the air forces of both our countries.

### **You have a rich experience operating the F-16. Can you tell us what makes it so effective?**

The F-16 was manufactured in line with a U.S. doctrine - to meet the needs of the pilot. The pilot is of paramount importance, so the aircraft is designed to accommodate







his/her needs. The F-16's cockpit makes you feel as if you are sitting outside the aircraft and you can easily look forwards, backwards, upwards and downwards, whereas the MiG-21 cockpit is narrow with limited visibility for observing an air battle or detecting a target.

Secondly, the HOTAS (Hands on Throttle and Stick) technology allows the pilot to relax and focus on the mission as he does not have to lift his hands off the flight controls and can perform most common tasks using buttons and switches on the throttle and the stick.

The F-16 really gives you a feeling that human beings were born to fly, not walk on the ground. It really is the most advanced aircraft, making the pilot feel as if he was born in the air.

#### **Croatian pilots and technicians will be arriving at the Ramat David Base in Israel for training. How will this be administered?**

Over the past six months, the two defence ministers have discussed the qualifications and training for maintenance personnel. In general, the governments of Israel and Croatia tasked the Israeli Air Force with aircrew and technician training to prepare them for handling the aircraft. Following trial flights, pilots will be allowed to get aboard the F-16 and conduct an air policing mission. This decision will be made jointly with the Croatian Minister of Defence and the Croatian Air Force.

An Israeli-Croatian working group has spent the past two months finalising each area of co-operation and will continue to do so over the next four months.

The main idea is that responsibility for the process will be with the Israeli Air Force and aviation industry. We shall host the pilots and technicians, sharing our knowledge

The F-16 really gives you a feeling that human beings were born to fly, not walk on the ground. It really is the most advanced aircraft, making the pilot feel as if he was born in the air.

and practices with them. Having met the Croatian pilots, in particular Lt. Col. Christian Jagodić and the maintenance personnel participating in the working group, we are sure that the Croatian Air Force will successfully complete the training. We still do not know how long it will take to implement the plan, but it will be discussed prior to the start of the programme.

Israeli pilots have flown the F-16 for 25 years now and we possess a lot of knowledge about the type. This is a great opportunity and we await the arrival of your pilots and maintenance personnel in Israel. We are looking forward to exchanging our expertise and I am sure that the Croatian pilots are more than capable of learning all about the F-16.

It is our impression that the Croatians demonstrate an equal level of professionalism with us: everything is checked and verified, we both nurture a working and reporting culture. Following the meeting of the working group, both sides are convinced that the mission can be planned and successfully achieved within the set timeframe.

#### **You overflew the Croatian sky and saw the natural beauties of Croatia. What is your message for Croatian pilots?**

Upon entering Croatian airspace after a four-hour flight from Israel, I saw a beautiful country and met great people – excellent and professional pilots. The future of the Croatian Air Force looks brighter with the F-16, you can be sure of it. I am thankful for the opportunity to visit your country and am looking forward to our future co-operation.

THE FIRST CROATIAN NAVAL CONTINGENT (1<sup>ST</sup> HRVCON) SET SAIL FROM THE LORA NAVAL BASE IN SPLIT ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2018, TO JOIN NATO'S MARITIME SECURITY OPERATION CODENAMED "SEA GUARDIAN" FOR A THREE-WEEK ENGAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. THE CONTINGENT COMPRISED A CREW AND THEIR HELSINKI-CLASS MISSILE BOAT VUKOVAR. THE FIRST DEPLOYMENT OF A CROATIAN NAVY VESSEL IN A NATO OPERATION, IT IS A CONTRIBUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA TO THE ALLIED MARITIME SECURITY EFFORT...



## 1<sup>ST</sup> HRVCON TO NATO-LED MSO OPERATION

# SEA



The first Croatian Naval Contingent (1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON) set sail from the Lora Naval Base in Split on 3 September 2018, to join NATO's maritime security operation code-named Sea Guardian for a three-week engagement in the Mediterranean. The Contingent comprised a crew and their Helsinki-class Missile Boat Vukovar. The first deployment of a Croatian Navy vessel in a NATO operation, it represents the contribution of the Republic of Croatia to the Allied maritime security effort...

The departure ceremony for the 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON made up of the crew and Missile Boat Vukovar was held in the naval base "Fleet Admiral Sveto Letica-Barba" at Split on 3 September 2018.

Visiting the Base, Croatian Minister of Defence Damir Krstičević stressed that the operation was an opportunity for Croatia, as a maritime country, to demonstrate a capable approach to maritime security and, through





# GUARDIAN

the acquisition of new resources and investment in its personnel, the Croatian Navy had grown into a respectable force, capable of engaging in operations of this kind. The Minister shared his conviction that the Croatian Armed Forces would continue to exhibit a high profile and professionalism. The importance of the deployment of "Vukovar" in Operation Sea Guardian for Croatia's Navy was explained by the Contingent's Commander, Lieutenant-Commander Nikola Bašić, who expressed his conviction that the Contingent would proudly and professionally represent the Armed Forces and the Republic of Croatia. "This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the crew, to showcase their capability, determination and potential. The range and endurance of the ship, its systems and crew will be tested to the limit in weather conditions around the central and southern Mediterranean", said Lt. Cdr Bašić.





## CROATIAN NAVY

The Contingent received much praise for its contribution to the Operation from NATO's Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) Headquarters at Northwood in London. The Contingent was assigned with non-combat tasks, primarily providing comprehensive maritime situational awareness, deterring potential threats and providing support to NATO Strategic Communications. Operation Sea Guardian has significantly enhanced security in the Mediterranean, giving the mission flexibility and helping co-ordinate the use of personnel and equipment from NATO and EU nations in their common security goals. Upon its return from the Operation, HRVCON's C.O Lieutenant-Commander Nikola Bašić said the crew had been fully trained and able to fulfill all their tasks. "The mission has been fulfilled completely, from deployment, force integration and maritime tasks to the return to the Republic of Croatia. We have demonstrated capability, efficiency, sustainability and independent operation

**Operation "Sea Guardian" provided maritime situational awareness, ensured freedom of navigation, supported regional maritime security and counterterrorism, undertook maritime interdiction, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, protecting critical infrastructure and supporting the enhancement of capabilities of partner navies in the Mediterranean.**







The 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON comprised 33 members of the Croatian Navy and the Missile Boat Vukovar, commanded by Naval Lieutenant Ante Uljević, under the overall command of Lieutenant-Commander Nikola Bašić.

The "Vukovar" headed for the central Mediterranean on 3 September 2018 and the following day joined NATO forces in support of counterterrorism, maritime situational awareness tasks and the enhancement of regional maritime security.

Operation "Sea Guardian" combined the forces of the Republic of Croatia and the Italian Republic, one of whose naval frigates served as flagship.

across all phases of "Sea Guardian", said the Commander, who pointed out that the Contingent had been assigned a large area of responsibility and had logged the most nautical miles of all vessels within the tactical flotilla. The Missile Boat Vukovar was responsible for an area of 180 nautical miles (with an average width of 100nm) between the western coast of Sicily and the Tunisian coast towards Malta. "We were tasked with providing comprehensive maritime situational awareness, monitoring and identification of threats and data exchange", said the 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON's commander.

The Vukovar spent a total of 22 days on the operation, circumnavigating more than 4,000nm. Although the captain and crew were assigned a large area of responsibility, all tasks were successfully fulfilled thanks to the great effort of all involved.





## CROATIAN ARMED FORCES INTRODUCE THE

The Sikorsky UH-60M multi-role helicopters displayed at the "Pukovnik Marko Živković" airbase at Pleso near Zagreb on 12 October 2018 belong to the U.S. Army and are set to join the Croatian Armed Forces fleet by 2021, thanks to the donation of two airframes from the United States worth \$53 million and includes support equipment and spare parts as well as the training of pilots and technical crews. Croatia will thus take its place among some 30 countries that have the Black Hawk in their fleets.

"Following the Croatian Government's historic decision to procure the F-16 multi-role fighter aircraft and introduce the Kiowa Warrior helicopter, the Croatian Armed Forces are now re-equipping with new multi-role helicopters, one of the best rotary-wing aircraft in the world both for its endurance and performance. The year 2018 will mark a turning point in the development of the Croatian Air Force's capabilities, to our great pride. In the year 2021, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment, the Croatian Armed Forces will have new ex-Israeli F-16 and Black Hawk helicopters in operational service and will be a strong and modern force. The arrival of the Black



**"The introduction of these helicopters into operational use will enable the development of new capabilities in the Croatian Air Force and the Special Forces Command. It entails a transition from Soviet-made products to a western-based operating platform enhancing its interoperability with allies and partners,"**

said the Croatian Armed Forces Chief of the General Staff, General Mirko Šundov

Hawk helicopter will significantly upgrade both our rotary wing capability and technological level of other services". "The U.S. donation initiates the replacement of existing helicopter assets of Soviet origin with western-made models. A transition to western technology is the only viable and appropriate option for a responsible and credible NATO nation", said Minister of Defence, Damir Krstičević. The U.S. Ambassador to Croatia, H.E. Robert Kohorst added that the Black Hawk was a state-of-the-art combat utility helicopter, supporting the mutual intention of nations to defend one another and co-operate in building worldwide security and stability.

"This donation demonstrates the United States' commitment to the partnership and security goals. These helicopters will boost the Croatian Air Force's progress towards westernisation of its operational assets and enable Croatia's future commonality within NATO", said the Ambassador. "The introduction of these helicopters into operational use will enable the development of new capabilities in the Croatian Air Force and Special Forces Command. It represents a transition from Soviet-made



"THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES ARE NOW RE-EQUIPPING WITH NEW MULTI-ROLE HELICOPTERS, ONE OF THE BEST ROTARY-WING AIRCRAFT IN THE WORLD BOTH FOR ITS ENDURANCE AND PERFORMANCE. THE YEAR 2018 WILL MARK A TURNING POINT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CROATIAN AIR FORCE'S CAPABILITIES, TO OUR GREAT PRIDE. IN THE YEAR 2021, ON THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF ITS ESTABLISHMENT, THE CROATIAN ARMED FORCES WILL HAVE NEW EX-ISRAELI F-16 AND BLACK HAWK HELICOPTERS"...



# HAWK

## HELICOPTER

products to a western-based operating platform enhancing its conformity with allies and partners," said the Croatian Armed Forces' Chief of the General Staff, General Mirko Šundov.

Named after a chief of the native American Sauk tribe, versatility is the essential feature of the Black Hawk helicopter - it is a true multi-role helicopter, which in addition to classic military tasks, is employed for the support of civil institutions, firefighting, search-and-rescue, emergency medical evacuation and other roles.

Significantly, Lockheed-Martin, who took over the Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation three years ago, is marking the Black Hawk's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. The year 1978 saw the successful first flight of a UH-60A, subsequently adopted for use by the U.S. Army. However, the UH-60M model on show at the Pleso airbase and soon to be introduced to the Croatian Air Force is much different from the original UH-60A, having proven itself in combat operations. Furthermore, the UH-60A helicopter allows system and capability upgrades and can be modified to meet future roles and requirements.

### CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UH-60M MODEL

- 2x General Electric T700-GE-701D turboshafts, 1,410kW (1,890hp) each
- active vibration control
- upturned exhaust system
- improved durability gear box.
- dual flight control computer
- wide chord blades
- integrated Vehicle Health Management System
- folding stabilator
- common missile warning system (CMWS)
- Laser Targeting Warning Systems (AVR2B)
- integrated digital cockpit

IN THE FIRST JOINT EXERCISE OF ITS KIND, BRITISH AND CROATIAN FIGHTER SQUADRONS HAVE AIMED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ALLIANCE AND UPGRADE CROATIAN AIR FORCE CAPABILITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS...



# EXERCISE FLYING

NATO Exercise Flying Sabre '18, engaging personnel from the Croatian Air Force and Royal Air Force was conducted at the operations centre "Pukovnik Marko Živković" at Pleso air base from 16-20 July 2018.

In the first joint exercise of its kind, British and Croatian fighter squadrons aimed to contribute to the Alliance, upgrade Croatian Air Force capabilities for international operations and enhance its handling abilities with Alliance aircraft.

A special VIP day was held on 19 July 2018, attended by Croatian Air Force Commander Brigadier-General Mato Mikić and his staff, Commander of the Croatian Fighter Squadron Lieutenant-Colonel Christian Jagodić, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia H.E. Andrew Dalglish, Defence Attaché Lieutenant-Colonel John Carswell Kelly and representatives of the Royal Air Force of Great Britain.

Brigadier-General Mato Mikić said that the joint exercise between Croatian and British air forces was further proof

of the two nations' positive and productive co-operation and that all objectives of the Exercise had been achieved. "I am pleased to learn that the Croatian pilots have made such a good impression with their British colleagues. Training events of the kind serve to intensify our co-operation and raise our ambitions for new expertise, especially regards the introduction of the multi-role fighter aircraft into the Croatian Air Force by 2020. From what I have seen during this Exercise I am convinced that Croatian air and ground crews will have no difficulty converting onto the new F-16 fighter aircraft", said the Commander of the Croatian Air Force.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jagodić presented the main objectives and outcomes of the Exercise, emphasising that it had showcased the Croatian Air Force's readiness for transition to western-made fighter aircraft. "Our goal is to maintain peace and we have to be ready to provide the most adequate and effective response. The Exercise focussed on joint planning of air operations, co-ordination





Author: Public Affairs Service, Photos by: Josip KOPI

CROATIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE



# SABRE '18

and interoperability, as well as the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience, the development of friendly relations and partnership working", said Lt. Col. Jagodić. Likewise, the RAF's Squadron Leader Ellis Williams admitted that he had also learned a lot from the Croatian pilots.

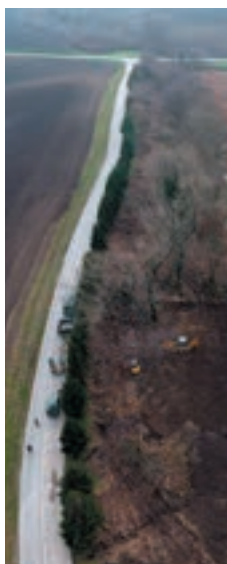
"It has been a great experience to stay here. This has been our first opportunity to train on the MiG aircraft. We have had the chance to exchange experiences with the Croatian pilots, who apply tactics and have expertise which differs from ours. We have gained a rich experience. The RAF has a 100-year history, which is much longer than yours but I have to say that the Croatian Air Force has brave, first-rate pilots, from whom we have learned so much".

Ambassador Dalglish concluded by expressing belief in future co-operation between the Croatian and British Armed Forces that will make a significant contribution to peace and security.



# WHERE ARE THE VICTIMS OF THE HOMELAND WAR BURIED?

Where are the victims of the Homeland War buried? That question has been pursued by the relatives of 1,923 detained, missing or forcefully abducted persons whose fate remains uncertain more than two decades since the end of the war inflicted upon the Republic of Croatia. Despite the efforts of investigating authorities to resolve the fate of more than 80% of persons listed as missing since the beginning of the 1990's aggression on the Republic of Croatia and occupation of its territory, some families are still searching for answers about the fate of their loved ones. In addition to 1,923 unresolved missing persons cases, challenges also lay in the identification of 900 human remains uncovered by investigators. The institution responsible for locating the missing is Croatia's Ministry of Homeland War Veterans, and its Directorate for Detained and Missing Persons, headed by Assistant Minister for Homeland War Veterans Stjepan Sučić, himself a war veteran, who commanded the defence of positions at Sajmište during the 1991 siege of Vukovar.



The Directorate works to establish the fate of all detained and missing persons from the Homeland War – its primary responsibility – in addition to searching and tending the graves of victims of the Second World War and post-1945 period.

“The Directorate for Detained and Missing Persons has during its mandate made progress in all areas of its investigation, as evidenced by the results it has achieved. We have collected and compiled data regarding 114 likely unmarked locations of individual and mass graves in 12 counties; trial excavations have been made at 89 of these locations and the remains of 85 persons exhumed. In recent years, we have undertaken 14 definitive identification programmes, confirming the identities of 107 persons from their remains.

During its mandate the Directorate has undertaken additional work involving the processing of remains with state-of-the-art chemical reagents, collecting additional blood samples (both in Croatia and abroad) and





SINCE THE ARMED AGGRESSION ON THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA – THE HOMELAND WAR OF 1991-5 - INVESTIGATING AUTHORITIES HAVE RESOLVED 80% OF CASES AND YET THE FAMILIES OF 1,923 DETAINED, MISSING OR FORCEFULLY ABDUCTED PERSONS ARE STILL IN SEARCH OF THEIR LOVED ONES AND FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR FATE...

embarked on further joint identification projects with international organisations. I should stress that all these results ensued following a radical change in the Directorate's methodology and operating processes, as well as the engagement of new staff", said Deputy Minister Sučić. In order to assist families of the missing to exercise their rights regarding the fate of loved ones, the Ministry of Homeland War Veterans published a Missing Persons Register, which has been through four editions due to the need to keep the public informed and updated, with the fifth edition expected by the end of the year.

"The Missing Persons Register aims to appeal to the public to share information that could aid the search for the missing and resolve their fate. Its use in the search demonstrates the continuing effort and commitment of the state authorities and international humanitarian organisations to resolving the missing persons issue", says Sučić.



## PROCESS COMMENCED DURING THE HEAVIEST CONFLICTS OF 1991

The search for the missing was initiated during the heaviest fighting back in 1991, when negotiations were undertaken with the authorities in Serbia to exchange prisoners of war and interned civilians and since 1995 that co-operation has continued, based upon the bilateral Agreement and Protocol on Co-operation and Search for the Missing, which was signed shortly after the end of the Homeland War.

"Given that this legal framework has been in place since the 1990s, we deemed it insufficient for present-day requirements. Consequently, a Croatian governmental Commission met in Zagreb in February 2018 with Serbia's Commission for Missing Persons, which led to an agreement that existing legal frameworks would be adjusted to the current situation and that a new document would be issued, hopefully during the current year", says



the Head of the Directorate, pointing out that 1,131 of the 1,923 cases of missing persons from the Homeland War were Croatian soldiers and civilians unaccounted for during the forceful expulsions from the enemy-occupied territories in 1991 and 1992. "The chief obstacle is the lack of information about unmarked individual and mass graves in the formerly occupied territories of the Republic of Croatia, as well as secondary graves where remains were officially and systematically moved and re-interred", says Sučić, adding that major progress could only be expected with full co-operation on the part of the Republic of Serbia, as it has both full documentation regarding forceful abductions during the war at its disposal and a number of key witnesses residing within its territory. The basic request by the Croatian side have been the return of essential documentation from the Hospital of the formerly occupied town of Vukovar and from the nearby emergency medical centre beneath the former Borovo shoe factory; access to Serbian military archives, as well as the request for a more proactive approach towards the investigations of mass graves and individual disappearances on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, for continuing exhumations of unmarked graves and the identification and exhumation of further grave sites.





"The very fact that repeated requests have been made since 1995 proves that Serbia has not made progress with regard to resolving these open issues with the Republic of Croatia," says Sučić.

Investigative data regarding missing persons and concealed mass graves is collected from every available source. Primary responsibility lies with the authorities in the Republic of Croatia – the Directorate for Detained and Missing Persons, the Ministries of Defence and the Interior, the State Attorney and national security agencies. "Furthermore, the Directorate works alongside the relevant agencies of foreign countries. Following a thorough review of ongoing work processes, we identified a need for more intense co-operation that had not been happening prior to this term of office. Agreements have since been signed with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, involving the exchange of requests for missing persons searches and we have also deepened our co-operation with international and humanitarian organisations", the Assistant Minister adds. The Directorate also works in partnership with the Federation of Associations of the Families of Detained and Missing Croatian Defenders".

## DATA SOURCES AND SEARCH METHODS

The citizens, whether as direct eyewitnesses or third parties are a source of information and their knowledge is invaluable; the Directorate is conducting a campaign to promote the missing persons issue, with public lectures organised for the first time during the current government's term of office, aimed at discovering the truth about missing Croatian soldiers and civilians, aided by a telephone helpline for anonymous reporting.

Field searches for the missing have been conducted at all suspected locations of individual and mass graves, employing state-of-the-art geophysical and forensic methods and technology.

"During our term of office a field investigation of 375.5m<sup>2</sup> near the mass grave site at Ovčara near Vukovar was conducted. Field investigations are underway at locations in Vukovar-Srijem County containing suspected mass graves, as well as in the counties of Sisak-Moslavina and Lika-Senj. We have conducted investigations at 100 possible locations of individual and mass burials to date", says Assistant Minister Sučić.

## INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

In order to collect data on missing persons and unmarked graves and to publicise its work, two years ago the Directorate for Detained and Missing Persons undertook an information campaign. The Ministry of Homeland War Veterans and the Ministry of Defence have jointly participated in marking anniversaries of the military and police operations throughout Croatia, with particular emphasis on Croatian Armed Forces Day, which is commemorated through various activities at the Jarun recreational complex in Zagreb. For the second consecutive year the Directorate and its partner agencies have publicised their work to tens of thousands of citizens. The ministries have outlined their progress and results of field investigations, searches, trial excavations, exhumations, identification and funeral services for the victims of the Homeland War, World War II and the post-1945 period; they have distributed promotional material and collected new and additional data regarding the missing or possible hidden grave locations from people on the spot.





The Ministry of Defence has been an indispensable partner to the Directorate for the Detained and Missing, providing much-needed additional resources for field searches, trial excavations, exhumations and identifications. "The Ministry of Defence, Support Command, the Guards Armoured Brigade and a team from the Military Intelligence Company have assisted us with the valuable expertise and skills of their trained personnel and infrastructure, without which complex field searches would not be possible. To advance the search, experts at the Ministry of Defence have continuously developed new field search methods, using ground-penetrating radar and drones (UAVs). Furthermore, experience from peacekeeping missions and the possession of various skills such as cartography have proved essential for the search", says Assistant Minister Sučić.

As a result of its decades-long investigation into the fate of the detained and missing from the Homeland War, Croatia has developed an advanced methodology for missing persons searches, so effective that it has won recognition from other countries faced with similar post-conflict challenges.

"Our unique methodology has been upgraded and extended using state-of-the-art technical and organisational solutions adapted to meet our present-day needs, allowing closure for the majority of victims missing from the Homeland War and is also being applied to discover the fate of victims of World War II and the post-1945 period.

As head of the institution responsible for searching for the missing, I can say with great pride that we have created a globally recognised model of search for missing persons applicable to all armed conflicts and other

**The search for the missing was initiated during the heaviest conflicts back in 1991, when negotiations with the authorities in Serbia were undertaken to exchange prisoners of war and interned civilians and since 1995 that co-operation has continued, based upon a bilateral Agreement and Protocol on Co-operation and Search for the Missing, signed shortly after the end of the Homeland War.**

events resulting in mass casualties, such as large natural disasters, terrorist atrocities and the like. Croatia as the EU's newest member and the only one with a recent war history is passing on its rich experience to other countries in need".

The search model consists of five disciplines: human source information, aerial filming and field analysis, biodetection and specially-trained cadaver dogs, geophysics using ground-penetrating radar and excavation.

### AERIAL SEARCH OF TERRAIN

The operation of each discipline in the field is explained by Major Mario Maslov, the Commander of the Military Intelligence Company of the Croatian Army's Guards Armoured Brigade, which has been intensively engaged assisting the Directorate for the Detained and Missing to discover the fate of those victims who remain unaccounted for.

"With the reorganisation of Recce Company into the Military Intelligence Company, we acquired new capabilities and methods that we have applied to the Croatian model of terrain scanning and search for the missing. One of these is the examination of terrain using various systems, such as aerial filming. If an area of land is suspected of holding a mass grave, it is filmed and searched from the air. The existence of a mass grave or remains can often be deduced from the altered colour of vegetation," says Major Maslov. Human disturbance of the soil structure, through digging holes manually or by machine to covertly dispose of human remains changes its composition.

"The soil becomes crumbly and develops air pockets. During periods of rain this area stays damp for longer;



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when crops such as cereals ripen and turn yellow, in the disturbed area they remain greener, in contrast with the rest of the crop field. This isn't visible from the ground but it is from the air", says the Military Intelligence Company Commander. In addition to the differences in colour, a rectangular planform will also indicate human disturbance of the ground.

"A rectangular, greener strip of ripening wheat or barley probably overlays an area of human intervention and may contain a mass grave, human or archaeological remains, which is then uncovered by the other disciplines used in the Croatian model for missing persons searches", says Major Maslov. Each suspect location is scanned beneath the surface to a depth of 15 metres using ground-penetrating radar and, if an anomaly is identified, the biotector or cadaver dogs are brought in.

## CADAVER DOGS - SPECIALLY TRAINED FOR DETECTION

"Croatia is a pioneer in the application of the cadaver dog method; cadaver dogs are specially trained to search the terrain and detect the scent of human remains. Croatia has four or five dogs, and there are few of these in the world. The precise locations indicated by the cadaver dogs are searched using trial excavations. During this phase, the look of the soil structure, which consists of several layers of different colour is examined in detail, with mixed or dislocated colours a further indicator of human intervention. Searches are currently underway at several locations throughout Croatia, dating both from the 1991-5 Homeland War and from World War II.



**The operation of each discipline in the field is explained by Major Mario Maslov, the Commander of the Military Intelligence Company of the Croatian Army's Guards Armoured Brigade, which has been intensively engaged assisting the Directorate for the Detained and Missing to discover the fate of those victims who remain unaccounted for.**

"Locations from the Homeland War are concentrated in the Croatian Danube Basin, and throughout all formerly occupied areas. It is believed that all the missing persons are still to be found there". Major Maslov adds that in 2017 members of the Company radar-searched more than 375.5km<sup>2</sup> in Vukovar-Srijem County and made over 2,500 multi-rotor drone flights.

"A team of military intelligence specialists is engaged in these activities on a daily basis. We have spent hours analysing the imagery to locate and identify the potential locations of graves. Some families of the missing have finally found peace", says Major Maslov as we walk across the fields at Ovčara, the site of one of the worst massacres committed during the Homeland War.

The Military Intelligence Company has made a significant contribution to resolving the missing persons issue but Major Maslov stresses the mutually beneficial co-operation between the two Ministries.

"We provided expertise in aerial filming and field analysis, whilst the Ministry of Homeland War Veterans provided ground-penetrating radar, which we hadn't used before. It is a highly useful technology for Armed Forces providing humanitarian support to civilian agencies in the event of fires or floods.

Ground-penetrating radar can also be used for monitoring earthen flood defences to prevent fissures in embankments. We provided assistance during the recent floods in Jasenovac, which is a new capability for the Croatian Armed Forces acquired through its partnership working with the Ministry of Homeland Veterans", says Major Maslov.



## THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

GIVEN THE EXTENSIVE  
MINE-CONTAMINATED AREAS AND  
SERIOUS SECURITY CONCERNS,  
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BODIES  
RESPONSIBLE FOR DEMINING IN CROATIA  
HAVE SUBMITTED A NEW REQUEST  
FOR A DEADLINE EXTENSION TO THE  
OTTAWA CONVENTION'S ARTICLE 5  
IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE...

the 1996 estimates  
of contaminated  
areas =13.000 km<sup>2</sup>



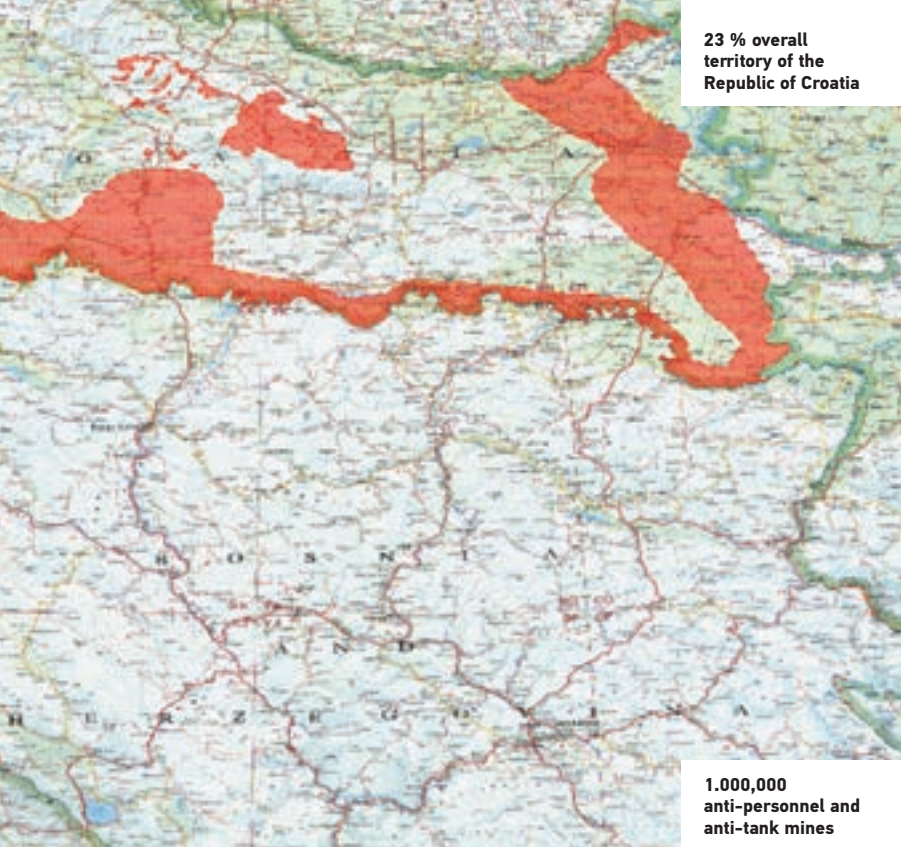
14 out of 21  
counties with  
contaminated areas

# CROATIA FREE

At the end of the Homeland War, the Republic of Croatia was faced with one of the hardest residual challenges of war - minefields. In the period 1998 – 2018 landmines killed 123 people and injured 206 more. Post-war estimates indicated a total of 13,000 km<sup>2</sup> lay contaminated, nearly 23 % of the nation's territory. This extraordinarily serious issue posed serious implications for Croatia's economy, so a Mine Action Centre was established in 1996 and in 1998 Croatia signed up to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction (typically referred to as the Ottawa Convention), committing the country to clearing all mine-contaminated areas within a 10-year period (by March 2009). However, given the challenging nature of demining and the continuing detection of new mine-suspected areas, Croatia has fallen behind with its implementation and in 2008 requested a deadline extension from the Convention signatories. Although significant progress has been made since, a significant portion of Croatian territory has not been completely cleared. Therefore, in early June the representatives of those services responsible put forward a second Formal Request for Extension of the Demining







CROATIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE

Author: Martina BUTORAC



# F MINES BY 2026



Deadline to the Convention's Article 5 Committee.

According to Hrvoje Debač, acting Director of Croatia's Office for Mine Action, the request was both needed and justified, according to the initial opinion of relevant international institutions and organisations. There have been several reasons for the delay, explains Debač, among which has been the insufficiency of resources, due mainly to the global financial recession. Consequently, the implementation of humanitarian demining in the period 2008 – 2013 was 37% less than planned.

"We believe that the signatories will recognise the Croatian Government's overall efforts and that of the Croatian demining system towards a safe Croatia and that the request will be approved at the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ottawa Convention in Geneva in November 2018", says Debač, who added that the new request entails an extension of seven years (1 March 2019 – 1 March 2026), which is seen as a reasonable and attainable goal.

Mine-suspected areas in Croatia presently cover 389.2 km<sup>2</sup>, across eight counties (Karlovac, Lika-Senj, Osijek-Baranja, Požega-Slavonia, Split-Dalmatia, Sisak-Moslavina, Šibenik-Knin and Zadar), including 56 towns and municipalities.



## THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

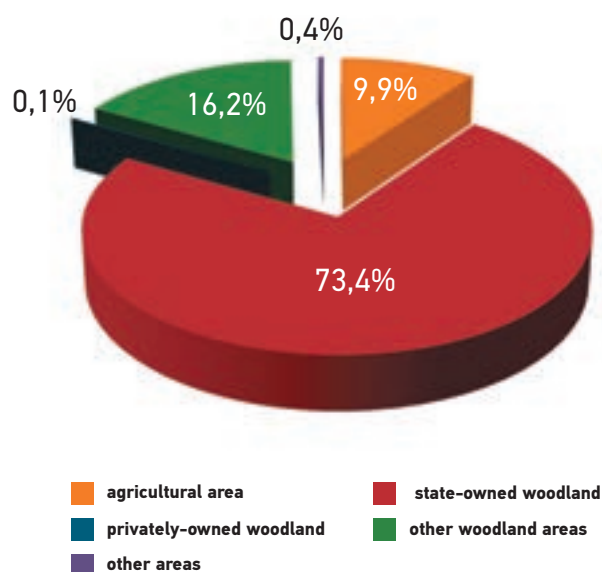
"The largest mine-contaminated area is in Lika-Senj County (129.7 km<sup>2</sup>), and the smallest in Split-Dalmatia County and Šibenik-Knin County (20.0 km<sup>2</sup>). The entire area, consisting of 95.3 % woodland, 4.3 % agricultural land and 0.4 % other is marked with over 13,000 warning signs", says Debač. The Director of the Croatian Mine Action Centre (HCR) Zdravko Modrušan says the first UN estimates indicated that mine-contaminated areas were present in 14 counties. The first to be cleared was Zagreb County, followed by Bjelovar-Bilogora, Dubrovnik-Neretva, Virovitica-Podravina, Vukovar-Srijem and, in early July the Brod-Posavina County.

The most contaminated counties were Lika-Senj and Sisak-Moslavina covering 65 km of contaminated area, followed by Osijek-Baranja with 55 km<sup>2</sup>.

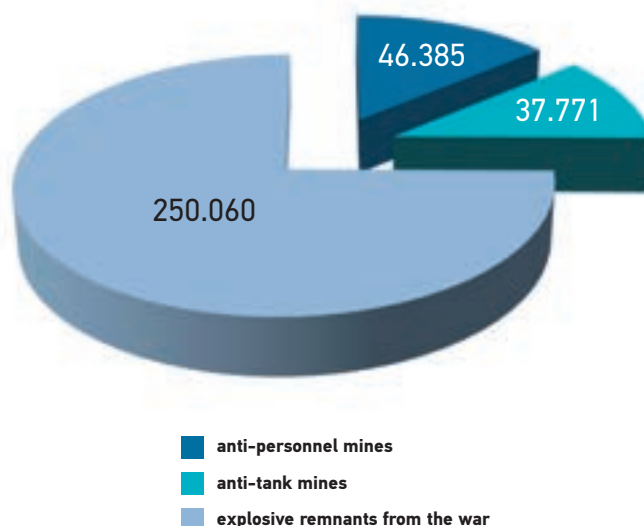
"In compliance with the Act on Humanitarian Demining and the Ordinance on the Conduct of Humanitarian Demining in the Republic of Croatia, we apply several methods: manual detection of mines, the machine processing of areas and mine detecting dogs. We also combine some of the methods such as the machine processing of areas to facilitate manual mine detection or detection by dogs, as well as manual detection of treated areas to clear pathways for mine detection dogs", says the Director of the Croatian Mine Action Centre, who also pointed out that the Centre was faced with the challenge of insufficient resources in some of its organisational units, mitigated to some extent following absorption of personnel from the MUNGOS DEMINING company.



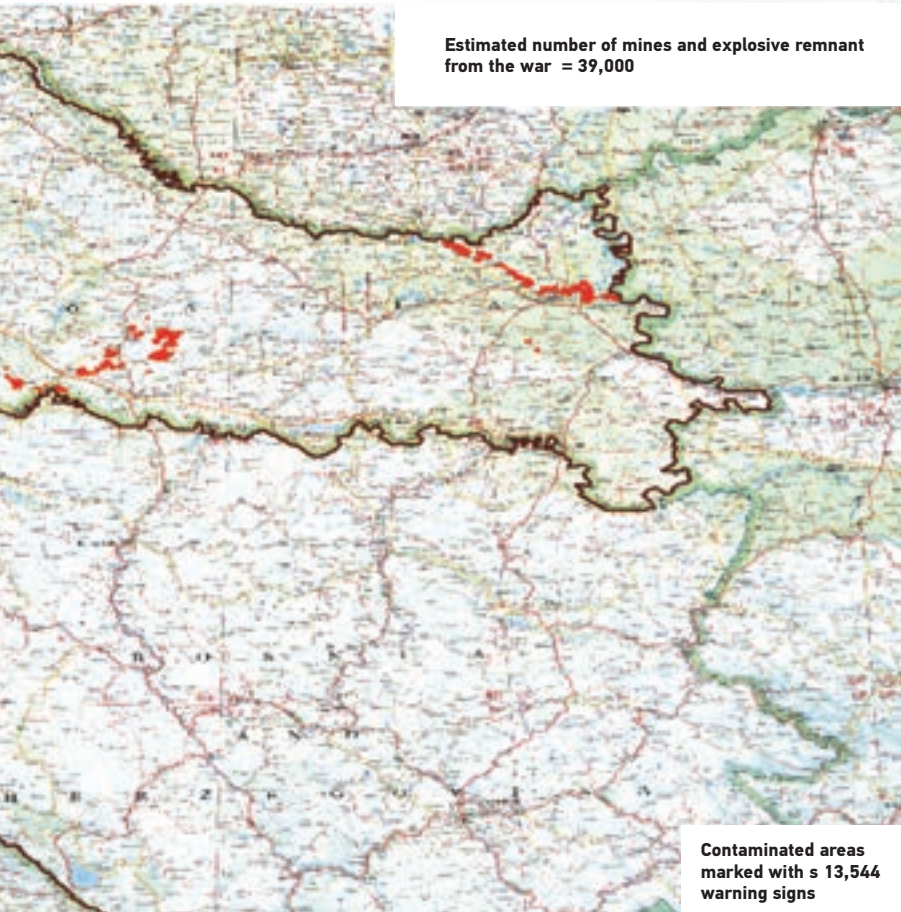
### STRUCTURE OF CONTAMINATED AREAS



### DETECTED AND DESTROYED MINES AND EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS IN THE PERIOD 1998 - 2018





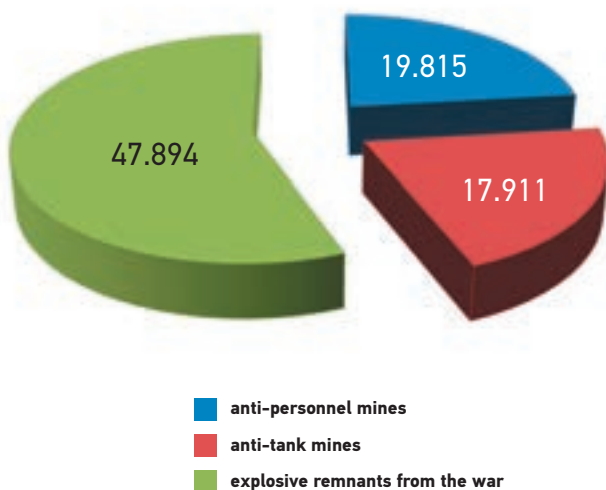


And there is another challenge affecting the demining timeline: "The inaccessible nature of much of the mine-contaminated terrain in mountainous areas has been a problem, because it precludes the use of the processing machinery; however the Croatian Mine Action Centre and other stakeholders will reach a solution to continue the swift pace of demining in the Republic of Croatia and return it to the civilian community", says Modrušan.

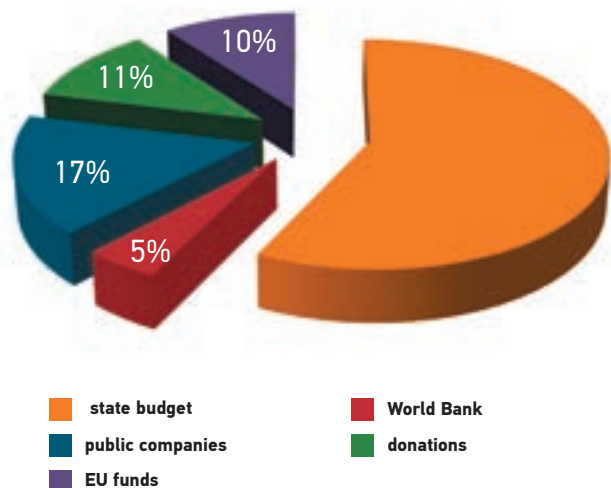
Croatia has opted for free market humanitarian demining, which is why over the years the largest share of the funding (circa 60% of the overall budget) has come from the EU. However, in compliance with the Act on Demining, responsibility for demining of locations and facilities under consideration for future use by the Croatian Armed Forces sits with the Ministry of Defence and is undertaken by the Pioneer Battalion of the Croatian Army, whose personnel have been specialist-trained for the task according to the highest UN standards. It should be emphasised that demining of locations earmarked for military use is funded exclusively from the defence budget, confirmed in a 2013 agreement with the Croatian Mine Action Centre on human resources support and equipment regarding the demining of specifically challenging areas.

"The Croatian Armed Forces' main objective is demining locations and facilities earmarked for future use by the military, the removal of mine hazards in urban areas, facilities accommodating military personnel, ordnance depots and training ranges.

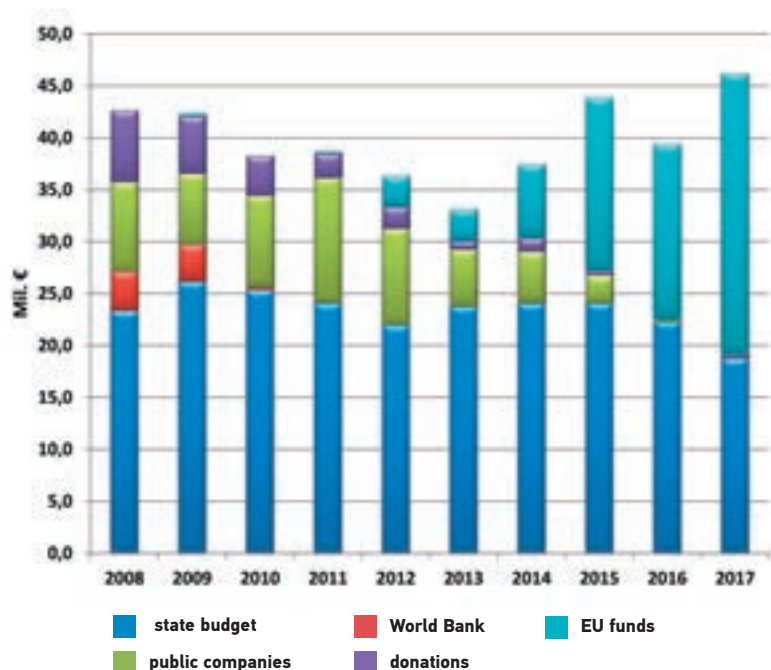
DETECTED AND DESTROYED MINES AND EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS IN THE PERIOD 2008 - 2018



DEMINING INVESTMENTS IN THE PERIOD 1998 - 2018



## DEMINEING INVESTMENTS IN THE PERIOD 2008 - 2018

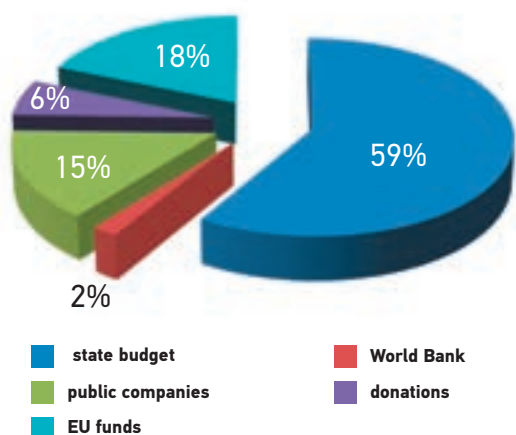


The period 1998 – 2018 saw the clearance of 5,664 km<sup>2</sup>, the destruction of 84,156 mines and 250,060 items of explosive ordnance remaining from the war. Between 2008 – 2018 a further 3,397 km<sup>2</sup> were made safe.

The funds invested in mine clearance in Croatia during the period 1998 – 2018 amounted to 727.3 million EUR, most of which (417 million EUR) came from the national budget, whereas in 2008 – 2018, 400 million EUR was invested: 235 million EUR from the national budget and 74 million EUR from EU funds.



In accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction, the Republic of Croatia has removed all stocks of anti-personnel mines (a total of 199,000 items) before the expiration of the term set by the Convention, retaining only a prescribed quantity for research and training purposes and for further development of the overall Croatian mine action system. The last consignment of mines was destroyed on the "Crvena Zemlja" training range near Knin in December 2002, attended by international observers.



Members of the Croatian Armed Forces have destroyed 4,460 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines and 160,372 items of explosive ordnance left over from the war in and around military facilities", says Lieutenant-Colonel Nevenka Kovač, Senior Advisor for Non-Conventional Weapons at the Ministry of Defence, who added that the clearing of mine-contaminated areas was one of the last battles of the Homeland War.

"It is important that civilian authorities, the armed forces, private companies and NGOs work together, and we see that this is the case. It should be emphasised that Croatia has paid attention to the safeguarding of people too and we are especially proud of the fact that in 2017, no victims of landmine explosions were reported", says Lt. Col. Kovač.



# Our video products



## EXERCISE "VELEBIT 18 - JOINT FORCE"

The joint inter-service exercise of all components of the Croatian Armed Forces "VELEBIT 18 - JOINT FORCE" is the largest Croatian military exercise organised to date. It was conducted for 72 hours in continuation, in multiple locations throughout Croatia from 13 - 15 October 2018, and engaged ca 5,500 members of the Croatian Armed Forces.



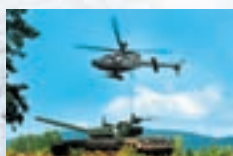
## MILITARY POLICE - FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT TO THIS DAY

Nowadays, Military Police is specially equipped and trained to provide support to the Ministry of Defence and to the Croatian Armed Forces, by exercising peacetime and wartime military police tasks, performing combat tasks in wartime and taking an active part in international peace support operations. The video is a brief presentation of the establishment, wartime and peacetime operation and the present-day specialties and tasks of the Military Police.



## THE CROATIAN ARMY DAY AND THE 27<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

On 28 May 2018 the Croatian Armed Forces marked the 27 anniversary. The video presents briefly the achievements in the domain of defence and the developed military capabilities of the Croatian Armed Forces and the plans for the future.



## KUNA 18 - A JOINT LIVE-FIRE EXERCISE

The Exercise "Kuna 18" conducted in the Training Range "Eugen Kvaternik" near Slunj in mid-June 2018 showcased the first integrated, synchronised and joint operation of the OH-58 D Kiowa Warrior armed reconnaissance helicopters and live operation of the PzH-2000 Panzer Howitzers.



## 1<sup>ST</sup> HRVCON TO EFP BG IN THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

The members of the 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON have been engaged in the Republic of Lithuania for six months already as a component of the Battlegroup within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. The backbone of the Croatian Contingent is the 1<sup>st</sup> Mechanised Company of the Battalion "Tigrovi" which during our visit to Lithuania was conducting a days-long live-fire exercise "Spring Wolf" in the training range "Pabrade". The Exercise engaged the entire Croatian component of the Battlegroup, with its Patria AMVs. The main objective of the Exercise was integration training with other Battlegroup members, to test the achieved level of interoperability, trainedness and joint operation.



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Public Affairs and Publishing Service  
The Croatian Military Press Publications Dept.

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Print Office Zelina

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P.P. 252, 10002 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

**CROMIL**  
CROATIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE



The views expressed in this Magazine are not necessarily those of the Ministry of Defence.





