



#12

TACTICA

magazine

READING THE
FIRE WITH
VATRA DORNEI'S
FIREFIGHTERS

DON'T RUN
FROM SNIPERS,
YOU'LL JUST
DIE TIRED

BLACK SEA
ROTATIONAL
FORCE

SAS'S
SNIPERS

SAS
CONSTANTA

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

BEST OF TACTICA MAGAZINE #0-11

www.TacticaMagazine.com

Tactica's story

I loved the army since I was 5-6 years old. I used to salute the soldiers who marched on the town's streets on their way to the firing range, and I always got back a salute and a smile. I wanted to be a soldier when I grew up. But in the communist era, a woman couldn't be a soldier. I gave up telling people that I wanted to be a soldier but never stopped wanting to serve.

Sometimes at the beginning of 2013, at about 3 in the night (or morning for some) I was reading Tactical New Magazine, and I was sad that we, in Romania, don't have a similar publication. I wondered what if I'll try to make one. I talked to some friends passionate about the military and police trying to put together the magazine. Six months later, with my friends still speaking about when to meet, I said to myself that I should give it a try on my own. In the middle of the night, again, I started working and, using articles that I had already and my graphic design skills, I created the layout, and in few hours, I had most of the magazine done.

I still needed to handle some details like the name, logo, color scheme. I managed to do all these the next day and so Tactica Magazine was created. The site and social media accounts came along later.

After two years of making the magazine and learning a lot about publishing and running a magazine, I saw that it could go further, that I can do more and that Tactica can grow. The first step was to make it in English so it can be accessible to more people. That led to me moving to UK to improve my English. The next step is to restart publishing the magazine. I have chosen to do this at Invictus Games in Toronto this September because I am a volunteer for Invictus Romania. The first participation of the Romanian Team to the Games is an important moment for me.

This issue is a compilation of some of the best stories published so far. But this time they are in English so anyone can read them. It also marks a new stage for the magazine, which will be published in English from now on.

Marcella Dragan



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The multinational Black Sea Rotational Force Platinum Lynx 15.1 exercise with troops in the field and live fire signified a prime opportunity for the Romanian Mountain Troops Unit and US Marines to train together.



Black Sea Rotational Force

Platinum Lynx 15.1

text & photo: Marcella Drăgan



The servicemen from the two partner countries trained together for nearly one week, sharing their knowledge of weapons and equipment, combat procedures and techniques required in such an harsh terrains such as forest and mountain environments.

The last part of the exercise involved defending a foothold in which Romanian Mountain Troops and US Marines trained side by side, forming mixed teams that prepared and





led defense operations. The counterattack also involved helicopters from 95 Air Base „Hero aviator Captain Alexander Serbanescu” of Bacau.

The first day of the exercise focused on soldiers becoming better familiar with the respective armies’ military ranks, technique and armament, the second day signaled the start of the actual training in which US Marines were introduced



from 17th Mountain Rangers Battalion, who guided us on the 15 km route. We reached Lala Lake which is at an altitude of 1,815 meters and the servicemen from the 22nd Mountain Troops Battalion „Ciresoiaia”, who made the trail the next day, arrived at Ineu Peak (elevation 2279 meters).

The fourth day of the exercise brought the Romanian and American servicemen in the Rotunda fire range, to conduct



to mountain and alpine techniques. Once in the Rarau Mountains, they trained with equipment specific to military mountaineering and learned from the Romanian Mountain Troops modern methods of free climbing and rappelling, funicular and rope transportation and MEDEVAC of wounded and military equipment.

The next two days were the most intense for both the US and the Romanian servicemen,

as in these two days they conducted the live-fire exercises and the mountain marches, each of the two Mountain Troops Battalions taking half of US Marines.

I accompanied the Mountain Troops from 24th Battalion „General George Avramescu”, with which we went, on the first day of instruction in Rodna Mountains, in a march towards the glacial lake Lala and Ineu Peak. We were led by Sergeant-Major Nicolae Olar





to secure a command point and then install and secure an observation post.

The next assignment was the installation of the support point and fighting devices. Using the horses from the 22 MT Battalion „Ciresoaia” hypo company, the AG-9 grenade launchers and 82 mm mortars were transported to the firing positions, and fire was executed against enemy positions. Romanians were

joined by the 81 mm and 60 mm mortars of the Marines, covering the flanks of the Mountain Rangers Company. Air support was requested, and the helicopters from 95 Base returned to attack enemy positions. During this time, the Marines succeeded in stopping and destroying the enemy's infiltration into the defense positions. After stopping the enemy, the US military joined the Mountain Troops boarded on the MLVM (combat vehicles

a field exercise with troops and live-fire. Following a tactical scenario, a support company executed fire with a 120 mm caliber mortar, joined by the 81 mm mortar platoon of the US Marines. Fighting simulation continued with the introduction of scouts who rappelled into locations from IAR 330 Puma SOCAT helicopters. The soldiers were successful in their mission:



specific for Mountain Troops) for the final counterattack. The last point of the exercise included the helicopters again from the 95 Base, which executed a MEDEVAC mission, evacuating the wounded from the battlefield, action that completed the exercise.

For the Romanian military, training in mountainous areas are a regular task. But for the



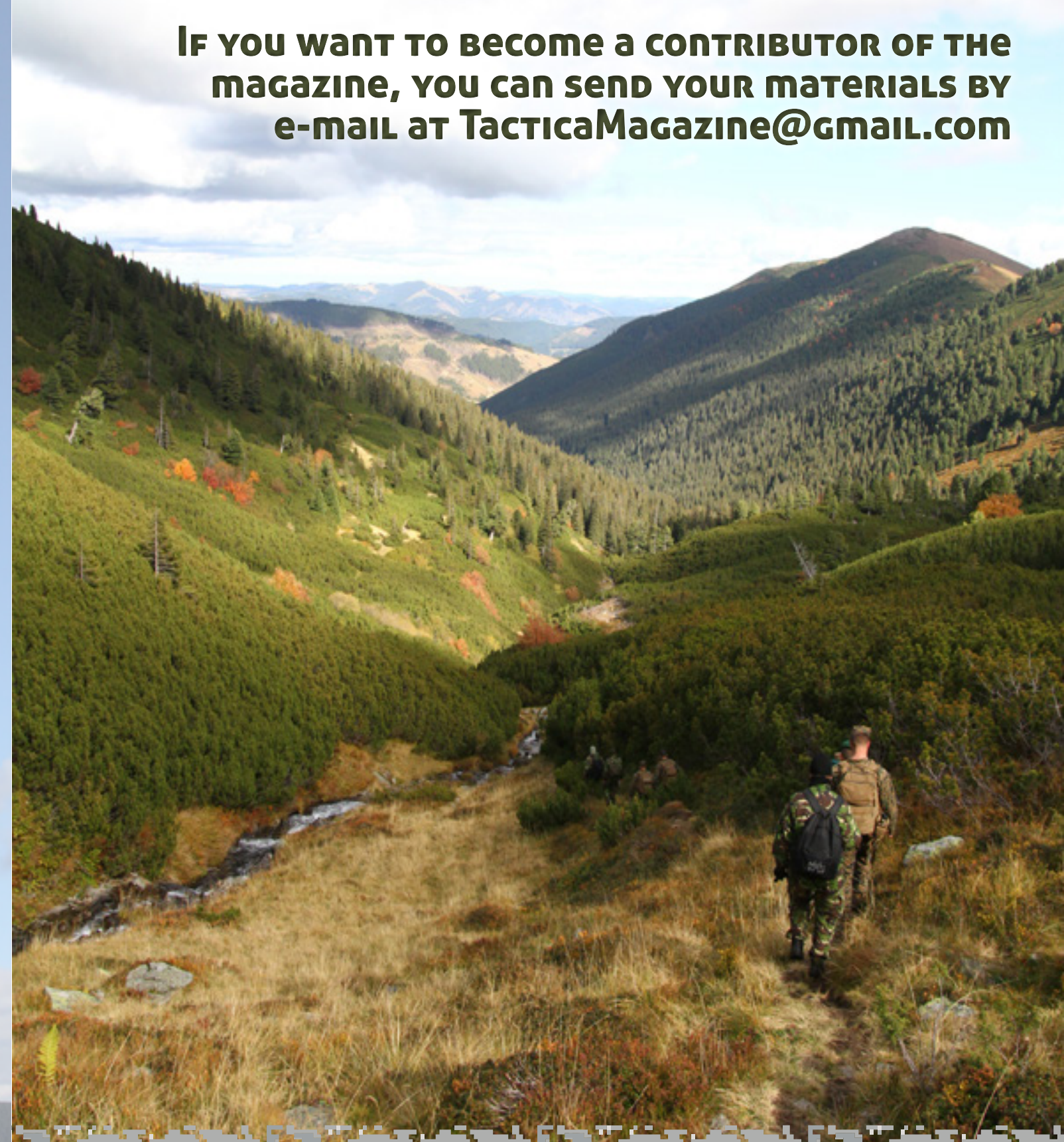
US Marines the simulation was a novel experience that gave them the opportunity to learn new things and share their knowledge. „Many of the Marines learned from Romanian Mountain Troops rock climbing techniques and modern methods of free climbing and rappelling, funicular transport of wounded and military equipment. They also taught us mechanized infantry tactics. We showed them our method of engagement by sharing methods of conducting fire and maneuver,” said Captain Matthew Deffenbaugh, Weapons Company Commander, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, Black Sea Rotational Force.

The last day of the BSRF brought together all the participants, this time not for training, but for a cultural program that showed them some of the attractions of Bukovina: Cacica Salt Mine, Moldovita Monastery and the International Painted Eggs Museum from Moldovita.



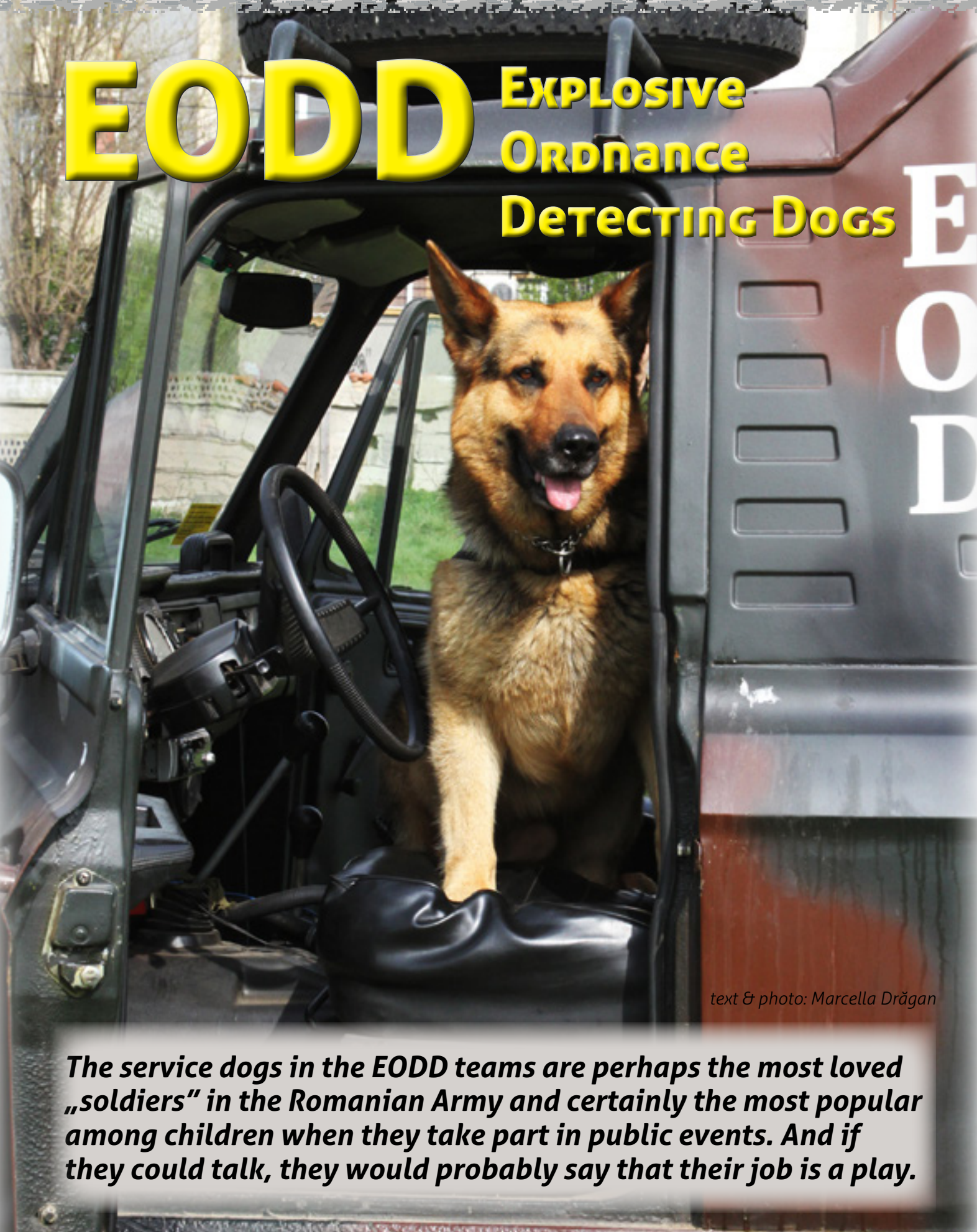
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EODD

**EXPLOSIVE
ORDNANCE
DETECTING DOGS**



text & photo: Marcella Drăgan

The service dogs in the EODD teams are perhaps the most loved „soldiers” in the Romanian Army and certainly the most popular among children when they take part in public events. And if they could talk, they would probably say that their job is a play.



But their role in theaters of operations is an important one, especially in today's conflicts that are so different from classical ones.

A play that I was able to see on the day I was a guest of the EOD Group 2, 1st Infantry Division „DACICA” that includes the EODD (Explosive Ordnance Detecting Dogs - Detection of Ammunition and Explosive Devices with dog help).

There I met major sergeant Dinca Costin and sergeant major Mocanu Robertino, the first being the handler of Lord, the dog who showed us part of the training they do almost every day. Because, as the two soldiers have explained, there are several factors that influence the daily training of a dog, like his physical condition, his health, and energy, weather conditions, the daily activity being adapted to all that, and can include just walk or play, avoiding drills and identifying explosive materials.

Lord, however, was in excellent shape and did all the exercises



he had prepared for that day. The scenarios of these activities are designed to be as close as possible to situations that may be encountered in theaters of operations. The first exercise was to search a car that might have been at a point of control, entering a forward operating base (FOB) or a military unit. This control is carried out on each vehicle so that it does not contain IED (improvised explosive devices). Then followed a field investigation to find antipersonnel mines. Several false mines were placed

on the ground and only one of them contained a sample of explosives. This is the most used method of dog training, by placing a sample of explosives in different places, such as cars, boxes, bridges, and careful investigation of them by the handler-dog team until the sample is found and then the dog receiving the reward, which most of the time is a small ball and, of course, the love of the handler. The third exercise of the day was the exploration of a bridge, a very common situation in theaters, as in the missions

in Afghanistan, where these objectives were checked with great care.

Once the exercise program is over, Lord has received his ball and he started running and playing, giving us the time to talk about how it is to be a soldier accompanied by a dog in Afghanistan. The biggest difference that the servicemen saw was the reluctance of local people due to cultural differences because there dogs are not pets, and sometimes they are regarded as impure, which made it difficult to

thoroughly check the homes of the locals.

EODD (Explosive Ordnance Detecting Dogs)

The EODD Team consists of a conductor, EOD specialist, and a German shepherd dog.

The teams are formed at the Dog Growing, Training and Training Center in Râmnicu Vâlcea, where the training for the dog is conducted for a period of 4 months, under the direct leadership of the dog's conductor.

The preparation of the canine





team involves both the improvement of the dog's ability to respond promptly and appropriately to the conductor's orders, as well as the improvement of the conductor's skills to act in accordance with the particular circumstances of the tactical environment, namely the proper use of all equipping equipment according to the

specific situation, facing the different types of threats, the dog's correct leadership to operate efficiently, including under the influence of various disturbing factors such as gunfire.

According to a program approved by the unit commander, the training is continued and refined daily,

minimum 2 hours, at the unit where the EODD team is located and is run by the dog conductor. A few more hours are allocated for dog care, maintaining health, feeding, playing and strengthening dog-handler attachment.

Dog training takes place in places, environments, and conditions as close as possible to the reality of the situations encountered in Operational Theaters, but also in various places and situations in the urban environment, such as means of transport, habituating the dog with noises, the presence of foreign persons and other animals, olfactory environment marked by different specific substances.

In the Operational Theaters, the EODD's main mission is to investigate and detect IED as well as other objects containing industrial or artisanal explosives, possibly in suspected parcels, cars, buildings (inhabited, uninhabited or abandoned), control points, open areas and road sections.

These improvised explosive devices (IED) are located in different places, such as: in motor vehicles and suicide bombers, access to military bases, on road sectors used for the movement of patrols and convoys, in buildings and in their vicinity, in crowded areas.

Training also continues in Operational Theaters through a training module with American partners to train dogs to detect new types of explosives encountered in the conflict area and specifically to detect artillery explosives.

EOD (Explosive Ordnance Detecting)

An integral part of the Dacica Infantry Division 2 EOD Group, they are a relatively new element, teams equipped with explosive detection dogs - EODD (Explosive Ordnance Detecting Dogs) - were introduced into the EOD platoons since 2008.

Thus, for the soldiers who chose to be handlers, working with dogs comes as a task in addition to the EOD training. The name of the EOD specialization comes from the abbreviation of Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

Group 2 EOD is a structure dedicated to NATO, subordinated to the Command of the 1st Infantry Division „Dacica“, which has the mission to provide EOD support to the forces of the division in the area of responsibility entrusted both on national territory and in theaters of operations.

The 96th Genius Battalion, 2nd EOD Group, was established in 2005 with the overall mission to eliminate or reduce the dangers of unexploded conventional, chemical and biological ammunition and the improvised explosive devices that threaten personnel, objectives, materials, operations, actions and military activities.

On 01.11.2011, Group 2 EOD was subordinated to the 1st Infantry Division „Dacica“.

The subunit is made up of specialized forces with high operational, mobile, fast response and short response time to emergency situations, ready to meet the





requirements for which they were established, endowed and prepared.

All EOD Group 2 soldiers attended various training courses for EOD operators and specialization in the country, and most of them abroad (USA, Greece, the Netherlands, Germany).

Annually, each EOD specialist, in relation to the function he/she occupies, participates in training and training conventions at the EOD Training Base, completed with tests for competency assessment and certification according to „Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel - Minimum Performance Standards for EOD Operators”.

Since its creation, Group 2 EOD has participated in a wide range of missions and activities. It assisted the EOD during the SUMMIT of the Francophonie in 2006 and during NATO SUMMIT in 2008.

It participated in two practical exercises in the „Post-Conflict Stabilization and Reconstruction Training Courses” organized by the Ministry of Business External in 2010-2011 with participants from different states, training of EOD and C-IED of maneuvering battalions and detachments that were deployed in the Afghanistan Operations Theater, as well as of the soldiers who were selected to participate in UN missions peacekeeping in various post-conflict areas, demonstration exercises on visits of foreign military delegations or festive days.

Equally, Group 2 EOD soldiers have a very good experience



of fulfilling missions outside the national territory, participated in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan's theater of operations in the battalions of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, the 2 Mountain Vigor Brigade, the Brigade 1 Mechanized Argedava and 282 Mechanized Infantry Brigade, 2010-2013.

On the national territory, Group 2 EOD provided EOD support during Artillery and In-fantry Artillery Combat Arms, executed by the Military Units of the DACICA Infantry Division, and provided EOD support to Military Units of the Getica 2nd Infantry Division „And the 4th Infantry Division „Gemina”.

Invictus Romania

Romania has announced the team that will represent it at the Invictus Games Toronto 2017. Participating for the first time at the game, after receiving the invitation in September 2016, the Romanian team will count 15 wounded soldiers and veterans, that will participate in 7 adaptive sports: archery, athletics, indoor rowing, powerlifting, road cycle, sitting volleyball, swimming.

Major Laurentiu Serban, Special Operations Component, Bucharest

Sergeant first class Doru Hamza, 300th Infantry Battalion „Sf.Andrei”, Galati

Sergeant Bogdan Dragomir, 620th Special Operations Battalion, Buzau

Sergeant major Costel Stanciu, 630th Paratroopers Battalion, Bacau

Sergeant major Costinel Slăniceanu, CBRN Defense

Training Base, Campulung Muscel

Master Sergeant Irinel Matei, CBRN Defense Training Base, Campulung Muscel

Lieutenant Ciprian Iriciuc, 17th Mountain Troops Battalion „Dragos Voda”, Vatra Dornei.

Master Sergeant Dumitru Paraschiva, „Constantin Brancoveanu” Training Center for Infantry and Mountain Troops, Fagaras

Major Nicolae Grigore, Protection and Security Detachment of the Ministry of National Defense, Bucharest.

Sergeant major Eugen Mănăilă, 620th Special Operations Battalion, Buzau,

Caporal Eugen Pătru, 84th Maintenance Center, Bucharest

Sergeant first class Ionuț Butoi, CBRN Defense Training Base, Campulung Muscel

Colonel Augustin Pegulescu, commander of the Timis Zonal Military Center

Colonel Dorin Petruț, retired Master sergeant **Ionel Eugen Bida,** Emergency Military Hospital „Alexandru Gafencu”, Constanta.

The Invictus Games were established in 2014 by Prince Harry. It is the only international adaptive sporting event for wounded, ill and injured active duty and veteran service members, inspired by the US-based Warrior Games. The Games use the power of adaptive sport to help wounded warriors on their journeys to recovery.

The inaugural Invictus Games took place in London in fall of 2014. Over 450 competitors from 13 nations attended the Games to compete in a variety of adaptive sports.

In May 2016, the second Invictus Games were held in Orlando, Florida, and built on the excitement of the London Games with more than 500 competitors from 15 nations.





DON'T BOTHER RUNNING: YOU'LL ONLY DIE TIRED

text & photo: Marcella Drăgan

In Romania, we first heard about the snipers from American movies. Then we start seeing them at different occasions, like a national celebration, an open days' event, or a Police Day.

After some photos from one of those days became known by the policemen and with the necessary press request and 'proof of good faith', I get my interview with the chief of the snipers' team from the Romanian Police Special Actions Service (SIAS).

Out of his ghillie suit, the sniper is just one of us, cheerful, friendly, and open. He answers all the questions with pleasure, and his

voice is full of passion, the same one he had for the job in his over 20 years of service.

I start my interview with the simplest of all questions, and his answer flows for few tens of minutes, covering some of the other questions I had prepared.

Tactica Magazine: Why have you chosen this job, and how you've started?

Sniper: Ever since I was a kid, I like it. I had my first encounter with this 'job' when I was in the fifth grade. I was living close to the border, and in one of those Open Day type of events to the Border Service, I could see and touch a PSL (Pușcă Semiautomată cu Lunetă - scoped semi-automatic rifle). From all the weapons that were exposed there, the PSL fascinated me. I was crazy about it. I think in about half an hour I

learned to handle all the guns the servicemen showed me and that I liked. In summer, during the school holiday, I was all day long on the border dismantling and putting back together weapons. I shouldn't have been given a gun... but this was what I was doing.

That was my first contact with weapons and how I got my passion for them. Later I joined the Army and I used the same type of weapons.

As far as the Police go, I can say that for a long time, the sniper job was as Cinderella. No one looked into it, understood it, or tried to see how the job is done. There was one policeman that was doing that too. He had a rifle with which he was going to a shooting range and fired at 100m. He didn't really know how to calibrate the gun and if he hit 10 (the central point of the target, the higher score you can get with one shoot), he was good. But the reality of being a sniper is so much different. Things stayed the same for a while after '89 (fall of the Communist Regime). Then, having more and more contacts with the forces from West Europe, and seeing what working as a sniper meant, we started researching and learning.

The situation begin to change in 1999 when we were given two rifles that were better than the ones we had. We received two PSG (Präzisions-Schützen-Gewehr), a weapon manufactured by HK (Heckler & Koch). They were bought for us by the Minister of Internal Affairs. That was totally different; it was a huge step forward for us. Then we saw that at long distances and on an open field, we couldn't shoot as we used to. If the wind was blowing or some other things were happening, we didn't hit our target. We asked ourselves, 'why?'. We went and research on the internet. That is how we started to learn and train. We saw that

a sniper has a ballistic program. It's a program that gives you the path of the bullet factoring in the meteorological condition and the distance to the target.

The first contest we went to was a turning point for us. It was an International Championship in Hungary in 2004. To train for it, we went to an open field with our PSG and, for two weeks, we fired, analyzed, and record all the shoots. Where the sun was, what hour we take the shoot, where the wind was blowing from, and with what speed. We wrote down everything. What speed the wind had? 5m/sec. What was the correction? 3 clicks. And we put it down on paper that at 5m/sec wind, I had to make a 3 clicks correction. That was our first ballistic program. I still have those papers even now.

At the competition, when the most experienced shooters saw us there, they've asked us what were we doing there. 'We're competing' we said. 'With those rifles?' 'Yes' 'And with that ammo?' 'Yes'. Ours was the standard ammunition that everyone uses and for snipers the ammo is special. 'If you say so' they told us. We looked at and analyzed those guys that seemed to us like the real deal. They all have carbines, bolt rifles. A carbine is loaded bullet by bullet; the PSG is semi-automatic. The others with semi-automatic rifles were like us, not necessary from East Europe, there were some from the Arab countries, also from the Hungarian Army, some shooting Dragunovs; they were all inexperienced. And in the first year, using the info we had on our papers and adapting it to the situation on the ground, we managed to surpass only those that were using the Dragunov rifles. All the rest beat the hell out of us. At short range, we managed to score some points. But on the first day, we had no point whatsoever. Our boss was black with anger. Later on, when

the speed and reaction shooting probes went on, we scored some good points and is with that that we managed to get in front of the rest of the shooters that were using semi-automatic rifles. Even so, we still only got in 70th place.

For us that competition was good. We learn what being a sniper really meant and how the job is done. We asked around about the ballistic program they were using and they told us that there is a program that is free at the request of his creator, a Swedish mathematician. It's the best program out there. We found it, downloaded it and we made the necessary paperwork to request better weapons. We were given SSG 3000. Is not the best one but is in the first three.

In the following year, we didn't participate in any competition, but we went again to the same championship in 2006. By then we were experts. We had the ballistic program, and we knew how to work with it. We got 5th place, which no one there could believe. There were snipers that we looked at as they were goods that came to congratulate us. It was a huge satisfaction. They remembered the way we were on our first participation, what weapons we had and they saw our evolution and the huge improvement we accomplished.

This is how we started. We were pioneers on ballistics, me and my boss and two other men. One, unfortunately, passed away, the other left the police. It was down to me and my boss to train other policemen for the job. We made a selection and we started the training, the guys following the same schools I did. While at the contests in Hungary, I made some friends that invited us to classes and training. Otto Simonyi, one of the best in the world and a multiple world champion, was one of the ones that called us on

different occasions. He was really fond of me, and he called me Old Fox, cause I use to still the job from him and learn from everything he did. We went to Hungary a couple of times, they came to Romania to train the rest of the team. We worked and we learned constantly. In this field, things are always changing. And is not just the theoretical part, but also the practical part. The most important thing is to feel the environment you operate in. If you don't, all the theory you know is not going to help you. The ballistic program can tell you that at that distance, with that wind you should shoot like that. But then when you take the shoot, something happens, the sun comes out of the clouds, the wind changes. And all your calculations are gone, you must know to adapt, to do all your corrections mentally.

TM: Did you went to more competitions?

S: We are among the first 15. But for my job as a police sniper, the places from the competitions are not important. First, the podium is taken by shooters using customs rifles, with specially made barrels. And the probes that they have there are entirely different from what I face in my everyday work. I will never get to shoot standing and holding the rifle in my arms. But these competitions are like one big family where we get to meet each other and find out what everyone is doing. We see what new weapons are out, programs, training, equipment. We make new friends.

TM: What you have to do as a sniper? What is the 'job description'?

S: The sniper part of my job is extra to my regular police work. I am part of a 'SWAT' team; I do the same interventions as the

rest of them. But I also have this, overwatch, to support the team. I am a sniper, but on occasions, I switch from sniper to fighter. I help them. What I have to do? To train, both as a sniper and a fighter. To train with the intervention team and with the sniper team.

The police sniper has one objective. To eliminate a target, either that target is a human being or an object. This is his final objective. Until then, he observes and provides information to help coordinate the men on the ground. A sniper doesn't just fire. It's a hard job, that requires calm and control. You have to be at peace with yourself. You have to be confident that what you do is the right thing to be done. This is how I see it. And I hope with all my being that I will never have 'that' assignment. But I have to be ready for it if I'll ever get it.

Our job is not just the special operations that usually get all the attention. I am also a diver. And I have a lot of rescue jobs under my belt. Not as a sniper, but as a SIAS fighter. Sometimes we volunteer for the missions, sometimes we are called. We get called to save people from floods and other natural disasters.

TM: What does a sniper need to know? What is his training?

S: First of all the person must be very well balanced and stable from a psychological point of view, calm, controlled. This is what I ask from a fighter. Then he needs to know his weapon. To feel it when he fires it. After all these years, if I take a shoot I know if it was a good one or not. I feel that shoot.

Then he needs to know how to use the ballistic program, which is different for each particular weapon system and ammunition. He must have an exceptionally good physical condition. He must

also train with the rest of the weapons and the equipment that the team uses. Because after his role as a sniper is over and the team goes inside the location, he must go in with them to offer support. Maybe they need help. In those situations, I leave my sniper rifle, take the assault one that I have like the rest of the team and I go to help the others. There are missions where the configuration of the land makes it impossible to offer support as a sniper, and so I go in with the team.

TM: Where do you train?

S: There are some fire ranges, but they are too short for me. I see the fact that I don't have a designated fire range as an advantage. If I would have had a 400-500m long fire range for my team and me, what would have happened? We all would have learned the area, and we wouldn't have made any progress. But without a place of my own, I have to go all over the country. I use the Army's fire ranges, the ones belonging to the Protection and Guard Service; they all let me use them. Each fire range is different, and I get to learn from each training session. The wind blows from different directions; I have different altitudes, slopes, or hills. This is a great advantage. The open fire ranges, like the Army's ones, are the ones that are closer to the real conditions under which I will have to work. So I can see if my ballistic program works or not and if the ammo I use fits the purpose. I have ammunition for shorter and longer distances, heavier or lighter, perforating ammo that can pass through a window because the glass deviates the bullet, and I might aim at my target but miss it. Same, from a certain angle, a shot might ricochet from a windshield, and I can injure one of my colleagues. These are things that you learn just from practice, and having

different locations helps me. It is good that the other institutions are open to help, and we can share our experiences.

Also useful are training camps. I can shoot in the morning, midday, evening, and night. I see how the bullets behave in the cold of the morning and how it changes over the day. Then is the light. It's one thing to fire on a target lit with artificial light and one with natural light. You get the mirage that moves your mark on the open field, and you can't see it. The side mirage moves it to the side, and you need to aim at the side of your target to hit it. And each fire range is different from that perspective. Then there are ranges with shear wind, and the settings from one part of the field aren't valid to the other side. All this knowledge is acquired only by working, and not in just a few days. I needed about 4-5 years to say that I am goodish, that I can do my job well. Now I know for sure that I can hit a target 300m away without problems. I recently scored an 8 in a target at 490 m with a 12m/sec wind that I could barely stand on my feet.

We also hit bottles as targets, not to copy the movies, but for practical reasons. On long ranges or strong winds, it's hard to see if I hit or not my target through the scope, and it puts more strain on my eyes. But if I use a bottle or another small object, if I miss it and hit the ground, I can see where the dirt jumps; I know what corrections I have to make. If I hit the bottle, it bounces or shatters, and I know I hit my target.

We also use the buildings that are not used from the ranges to shoot from inside. There's another sensation when you fire from a room. You might have the surprise to have the roof or parts of it collapsing on you. Then there is the noise and the dust that you get. I've noticed that on an open field, at a 150 m shoot, I had a

5cm groupage, but if I was inside a building, the groupage could expand to almost 20cm. Inside a room, you don't always have a stable position or a comfortable one, which influences your shoot.

TM: What is the structure of a snipers' team?


S: Most of the time is a two men team, sniper and spotter. Compared to the similar structure from the USA or West Europe, here only half of the intervention team fighters are also qualified as snipers. Outside, the snipers resolve about 80-90% of the interventions. As snipers, we work in a similar way, offering overwatch and protection to the team on the ground. Up til now, in none of the missions that I was in, we didn't have to fire. But most of the time is faster and safer to eliminate a threat with a sniper than sending in the entire team.

TM: Was there a difficult moment in your career?

S: I don't believe that there are such moments. I don't think I had one. I see a failed mission as a bad moment, but so far, all the assignments I responded to have finished in success.

TM: Who can someone join the SIAS snipers' team? What are the steps he has to follow?

S: First of all he has to be in the force. He has to go through everyday police work to toughen his skin. Then, after few years, when he's around 30 or so, he can come to me so I can see him, - says the sniper with a grin.

Officially the interview is over. A story that started with his beginnings as a sniper and finished with bits of advice for those who want to follow the same path. I still have some small curiosities, and I ask my short answered questions while we are packing our things. 'From all the snipers that you've meet, from whom you've learned the most?' 'Otto Simonyi. Then the Russians. Generally, the ex-soviets are good snipers. They also have a huge tradition.' 'What was the longest time that you stood without moving?' 'From evening until next day at noon; it was the Borsa intervention.' 'How much does you gear weights?' He keeps quiet. 'I can understand if you're not allowed to answer' I say. 'No, I can answer; I was calculating all the things. The rifle is about 7kg. On top of that, I have all the kit that an intervention fighter has, plus the rangefinder, the binoculars, the anemometer (for wind), the telescope...' 



SIAS's Snipers



They are considered to be the best policemen, and a few hours with SIAS's small sniper unit gave me the chance to see why they have been named this way. In spite of the job's reputation, training has nothing spectacular at first glance, and those who expect scenes from some American film will be disappointed because the shooting session is quiet, as quiet as it can be when you are surrounded by gunfire.

text & foto: Marcella Drăgan



The day began with a long drive to a „secret location“, as it would be jokingly called. I'm not offered too much information about the program of the day, but the first clues about what is going to happen appear in the form of few steel plates, a reason for joy and praise for the four shooters I accompanied. They have to be particularly inventive when it comes to their job because traditional polygons don't offer them good conditions for training, so the metal plates with chord pieces were the way they solved the problem of the targets.

The experience of the team's leader speaks out, he chooses the place where the steel

plates are mounted and, as I will see over the course of the day, has taken care not to do the job easy for all the snipers, including himself. Placed in the open field, a little above the grass, the targets are hard to see, and if you do not know where to look, you can hardly spot them in the distance.

Training starts with Glock pistols. The SIAS snipers are not just elite shooters but also have the same duties as the rest of the





aiming for the targets placed at 120, 508, and 740 meters.

Now they really start their training; now even the smallest thing can make a big difference, now they count in a lot of elements: the direction of the wind, its power, the outside temperature, the type of ammunition used, the mirage, the light, even the clouds that pass over us. They rely on the ballistic program that each sniper knows, and the corrections are

fighters, and when their support is no longer necessary or the configuration of the field does not allow the use of snipers, they join the intervention team. For this, they train first with the small arms that the rest of the team uses. The pistol training It is also the first



made according to each of these elements. The paper sheets with the program values are rarely reviewed; changes are made mentally, automatically, each change leading to the restoration of calculations.



test of the new targets, which, through the sound produced when the bullets hit them, clearly confirm that they have been touched. The next firing session is with the HK MP5 submachine gun, but the session is short as the fighters are here to train with the long guns. The pistols are replaced by the SSG 3000, and the snipers occupy their places by aligning their weapons and



However, some elements become true enemies. Now the target is no longer a steel plate but a figurine, a bit larger than a coin, drawn on paper and located at 120 meters. It has eyes, mouth, and nose and must be identified from the other 20 faces on the A4 page and hit in less than one minute, a competition test.

In the small group, no one moves; the four shooters are focused on



identifying and hitting the targets. I can hear, cushioned by the earmuffs, each fired shots and the few words exchanged between snipers. There are strange words for those who are not part of their world, short indications of how they fired and how to shoot: MOA, click, deviation, hour one ... but the loudest I can hear is „I hit it, did you heard it?“, referring to the sound produced by the steel



Technical data

Weapons: Glock pistol, HK MP5 / A5 submachine gun, SSG 3000 rifle

Target distance and dimensions:

Glock 17 and HK MP5 / A5 = 15 m

SSG 3000 = 508 m (target 20 cm), 740 (target 40 cm), 120 m (figurines)

targets when touched by the bullet. They keep this position for tens of minutes, despite the sun that raises the temperature to above 30 degrees. Few minutes, compared to the hours spent by some of them on a mission.

On return, once recovered, each target is analyzed, and some traces left on metal are recognized: „here is where I shoot, it was too to the right“. For them, everything is a new opportunity to learn.



SIAS

Appeared in the structure of the Romanian Police in 1993, SIAS was founded within an incipient nucleus to fight against organized crime, becoming an independent and fully operational unit in 1995. SIAS showed flexibility and permanent adaptation to the institution's operational needs, proving its utility in hard cases when the fighters made

the difference between success and failure of a mission. The test of the professional maturity of SIAS was successfully passed in April 2007, when the European vocation of SIAS was established by including it in the elite group of the special intervention units of the police of the Member States of the European Union - the „ATLAS“ Group.

SIAS is the main intervention formation within the Romanian Police, with general territorial

competence. It has intervened in the release of hostages, in cases of kidnapping or illegal deprivation of liberty and for catching and immobilization of persons who oppose legal measures by violence or use of fire weapons, explosive, toxic or dangerous substances, or other destructive means. It also organizes and permanently carries out support activities, guidance and control of all Rapid Intervention Services within the Romanian Police.



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Faces of Romania. A serviceman's PORTRAIT

text & photo: Marcella Drăgan

The image of the saluting serviceman while marching under Bucharest's Arch of Triumph, on the celebrations of Romanian National Day, has become one of the best photographs I've taken. His eyes filled with emotion and the significance of the solemnity of the moment he was attending stuck with me long after I took the photo, and aroused my curiosity: what is in the soul of a serviceman

participating in such an event, and especially who is the man hidden behind the thin layer of camouflage paint.

After some research, I managed to find who that person was and get some inside in his life and motivations.

Major D – for security reasons, I will just call him that – is an officer since 1992, when he was promoted to lieutenant, but he began his military

career seven years earlier at the Military College „Stefan cel Mare”. He then followed „Nicolae Balcescu” Land Forces Academy from Sibiu, and Command and Staff Faculty from Carol I National Defence University from Bucharest.

„I chose this path by curiosity. And more because the rebellious ways of a 14-years-old boy who loved guns and arches and would have wished for his weapon to be real.

Later I realized that this is not just a job, but a way of life. Personally, I think that you can't service unless you truly believe in what you do, if you don't give yourself 100%, and if you can't make your family understand your sacrifice. You are a military 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 12 months a year. You cannot take a leave of absence from your duty to your country.

A choice that comes with good and bad, although the latter is easily forgotten when compared with the satisfactions that are fast to come when you put your heart and soul in what you do. It can be the rewarding feeling of doing your duty and returning home, you and your comrades, without a scratch, at the end a deployment in an operation theater. Or the warmth that fills your heart when you see a

3-4 years' boy applauding you at the December 1st Military Parade, with his little, frozen hands, with a huge smile on his cheeks red from the cold, refusing to leave until the last military from the parade passes, ignoring the pleas of their grandparents to go home”.

And speaking of family, the major stresses the important part the loved ones play in the success of his career. „If they understand what we do, they will help us, they will stand by us, with all their heart. We adapt, we support each other in all we do, and so we overcome all the difficult moments. It's important that we see the good part of all situations, that we are optimists and see the full part of the glass. When deployed, we are trying to think about the joy of the reunion with our family and not at the long months that we are apart, and that makes the time pass faster.”

And the major has had his share of hard times in his deployments, like the one in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the three ones in Afghanistan. „I try not to remember and I think that if I was able to forget, it means the things weren't that bad after all.”

And if the major is not speaking about the hard times, he definitely has his good moments that he cherishes and remembers with great pleasure. The most beautiful moment in his military career was the promotion to lieutenant, a moment that he always keeps dear.

Makings the most beautiful moment's list is also the Military Parade from December 1st, the Romanian National Day, like the one from 2011, when I took the picture. About that day, I wanted to talk to major D, to ask him what it feels like to pass under the Arch of Triumph, and what memories a soldier keeps in his heart and mind.

„I remember the smiles of the kids waving the flags, the applause of the people as we pass them, but mostly I remember the fierce concentration to give the best I can so I honor the thousands of people that bear the cold to see us. In the exact moment of passing under the Arch, I felt on my shoulders the weight of the entire history of the place. But I was so proud. Proud that I can be part of the long line of soldiers gloriously passing under the Arch.”

A moment truly unique for which the servicemen and women prepare for two weeks in advance, with long days of training and rehearsals. But all the hard work and the pain of training sometimes in freezing temperatures fade away when faced with the glory and satisfaction of taking part in the Military Parade.

Asked to end with a message for the Romanians, the major responds with the simpli-city born from a life in the service of the country and the uniform: „May we be healthy! And to those who serve, to keep on respecting our traditions, our profession, and our uniform!”



Thermobaric ammunition

for the 3x40 millimeters grenade launcher



The thermobaric ammunition for the 3x40 millimeters grenade launcher was successfully tested at the "Getica" National Training Center in Cincu by specialists from the Scientific Research Center for CBRN Defence and Ecology (SRCCBRNDE) of the Research Agency for Military Technique and Technologies of the Ministry of National Defense. The experimental model has been tested on

three targets, two car bodies and lightweight construction to see what the effects are. "We want this equipment to be developed and approved, then transferred to an economic agent, preferably from the defense industry, to take over and industrialize the product," said Cezar Stroie, head of the Compartment of Public Relations within the Department of Armaments.

The thermobaric ammunition for the 3x40 mm caliber grenade launcher is now in an experimental phase, with only 28 pieces being made. Until now, the scientists from SRCCBRNDE have been working on finding the right composition for the thermobaric charge, developing the components and testing the effectiveness of the hit in static conditions.



Project Director Engineer Alexandru Rogoz, said, speaking about this type of ammunition: "Starting with the last two decades of the last century, notions such as fuel air explosive (FAE) or thermobaric ammunition have been frequently circulated in the specialty literature but also in the accounts of the conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Chechnya or the Persian Gulf. Given that the destructive effect of these two new weapons categories is the surplus generated by a shock wave, although by different mechanisms, we consider the term "thermobaric weapon" to be the most comprehensive."

What should we know?

According to Mr. Rogoz, "taking into account the experience of the SRCCBRNDE, who since 1983

has been able to control the detonation phenomenon of combustible and air mixtures in a free atmosphere, and in the early 1990s, through its three working research prototypes (the jumping mine, the 100 Kgf aviation bomb and the 99 mm caliber portable thermobaric grenade launcher) had placed Romania among the top four countries in the world in terms of achievements in this field", we can say the following:

- Ammunition with a fuel-air explosion involves a combustible substance, typically liquid and from the hydrocarbon class, and two conventional explosive charges. When the first explosive charge is detonated, the fuel is scattered into the atmosphere in the form of a cloud of aerosols or vapors. The operation of the second explosive charge, after a determined



time, causes the initiation of the detonation of the fuel and air mixture cloud, which behaves like an explosive.

can be very effective in situations where classical ammunition is virtually harmless and vice versa.

the thermobaric weapon is usually cheap and relatively simple to make.

Serbia has offered for sale in the 1990s a 32-liter capacity fuel-to-air jet mines "UDAR-FAE".

Canada holds the FALCON system for FAE demining.

It is true that

- there is currently no means of protection against the action of thermobaric munitions;
- due to the high shock wave area, the thermobaric ammunition (predominantly high capacity) requires less accurate target conditions;
- when fighting in the cities, the thermobaric ammunition is superior to the classical ammunition of similar size, for two reasons. First, when operating in closed spaces the overpressure is increased through successive reflections from the walls and ground. Second, the fuel-air cloud acts „around the corner“;
- if you own the technology necessary to create it,

Certain FAE and thermobaric ammunition owners are currently states like USA, Russia, Canada, Israel, China, India, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Depending on the doctrine, the offensive or defensive weaponry predominates.

The USA owns and had used, in Vietnam and in the two conflicts in the Gulf and Afghanistan, aviation bombs (CBU-55B, BLU -82, "daisy cutter" BLU 118 B), air-to-ground and air-to-air missiles with a FAE warhead, and a corridor creation system through CAT-FAE minefields.

Russia has a full range of FAE and thermobaric ammunition and has used it first in Afghanistan and then in Chechnya: the ODAB-500 aviation bomb; portable launcher of thermobaric grenades 93 mm caliber RPO-A "Schmel" (ammunition in a non-recoverable container PAFS type); multiple missile systems (12 strokes) 300 mm caliber "Smerch" (range - 70 km; mass - 800 kg; FAE load - 100 kg; cloud diameter - 25 m); launcher of reactive missiles 220 mm caliber "Uragan"; TBG-7V thermobaric ammunition for AG-7 grenade launcher.

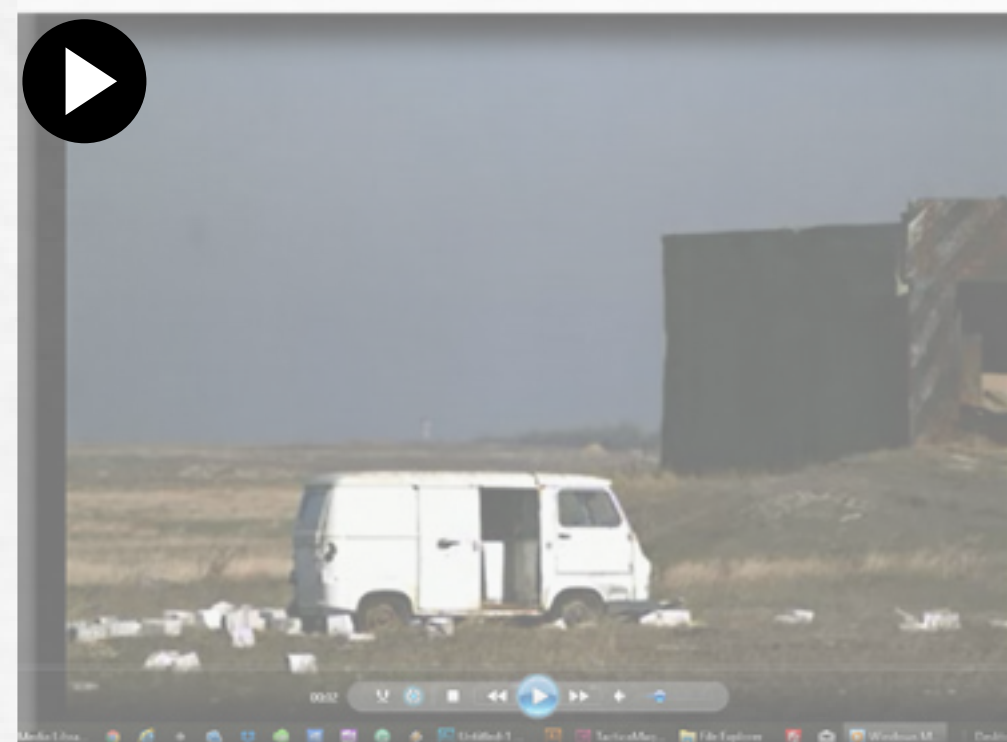
China holds a thermobaric grenade launcher 80 mm caliber PF-97, with a single use.

Bulgaria produces a thermobaric ammunition for AG-7 grenade launcher.

Where are we?

For 20 years, many of whom without sufficient funding, a team from the SRCCBRNDE, based on a SSID program for the endowments of the forces, developed, in different stages of assimilation, the following thermobaric ammunition:

- FAE mine "MISECA" (Product C21) - industrial prototype homologated with Dragomiresti UPS
- portable thermobaric grenade launcher 99 mm caliber "LAPGECA-99" - a certified research prototype
- portable thermobaric grenade launcher 95 mm caliber "LAPGECA-95" (similar to Russian RPO-A) - an experimental model
- 100 kgf aviation bomb "BAECA-100" - experimental model approved for combat
- thermobaric grenade 105 mm caliber for AG-7 grenade launcher - industrial prototype approved with S.C. "Carfil" Brasov.



Special Action Service Constanta



***They train hard,
they fight tough,
and they love it.
This is the truth
that stands at
the end of a day
spent with the
fighters from
the Special
Action Service
Constanta from
County Police
Inspectorate.***

text & photo: Marcella Drăgan



The day starts first thing in the morning with a challenging run designed to increase the fighters' stamina and toughen their resistance to abrupt and extended physical strain. Often this workout comes complete with all the equipment and gear they would carry or wear as if they were in a live situation. The day continues with further physical training in the gym, where a short warm-up session prepares them for yet more strenuous, strength-building workouts that follow. Featuring highly among these are cardio exercises, notably boxing, used not only for the cardio workout but to sharpen self-defense skills, as one fighter explains: „teaches you to hit very well, hard, accurate, fast, combined with a good physical condition and high level endurance.”

The training continues with focus on more technical aspects, such as boxing bag kicking, dodging, pirouettes, endurance competition pertaining to force, and generating high levels of hits. A short break is for equipment change that makes way for the martial arts training kicks and immobilization techniques, aiming for a high complexity of the exercises, putting heavy emphasis on arms and legs. The fighters must be thoroughly trained in defending themselves against all manner of weaponry a criminal may possess, which are frequently knives; therefore the fighters must be able to expediently neutralize the criminal who attempts such an attack. A different instructor commands the exercises and drills in which most expertise and experience has been cultivated.

Once the physical training is completed, they start the tactical training. This is done in a special



place that offers both the space needed for exercises involving vehicles and a replica of a house to achieve specific CQB techniques.

The first operation is conducted as if the officers are acting on intel about a suspect in the house, but without any other details to go on; not knowing whether the perpetrator is or is not armed, or if he is under the influence of alcohol or other substances and what is his hiding position inside the house. For the training to be as close to the real situation encountered in the field, one officer will be armed with a knife and act out the role of aggressor.

Leaving their car and on approach to the house, the officers organize themselves in an intervention squad, the fighters taking cover behind a shield. „The team enters the house and combs, crawls while taking the necessary security measures, until the suspect is found, immobilized, handcuffed, and given to the officers in charge of the missions,” said one of the policemen briefly describing the exercise. Field demonstrations transform what appears to be a simple mission into a fast and flawless series of actions that concentrate tremendous attention to details, thus showing that the fighters practice these scenarios on a regular basis and that each fighter knows what to do and his role in the team. Silent hand signs often the sole means of communication, the whole house is checked, rooms are cleared and the offender who attempts to attack the police is rapidly immobilized and disarmed.

The second drill follows in full force, this time held outside, recreating an interception in

traffic. With one officer to play the offender's role, it goes on the scenario of the one person in the car, but the same rules apply if more people are involved. The suspect vehicle is blocked and the team approaches in formation, always paying maximum attention to the suspect's movements to ensure the fighters' safety. The suspect is extracted from the car, restrained, handcuffed and searched.

In the third exercise, the scenario is the same, but the SAS team is joined by the K9 unit, a shepherd dog named Nun. The dogs are used in general when they are going after dangerous criminals to prevent any attacks against the law enforcement unit members. No matter how aggressive the person is, they quench fast enough in front of a police trained dog, reducing the risks the fighters are exposed to.



Constanta Special Action Service has the following attributions:

- * Executes, independently or not, interventions and time limited police action, in areas and environments with high crime rate or criminal potential to prevent and combat violence offenses;
- * Participates in strengthening the security measures in communities with high criminality rates;
- * Intervenes in areas and neighborhoods where serious crimes were committed (kidnappings, murders, armed attacks, escapes), completing the initial steps of the municipal police;
- * Participates, alongside other police forces, in police raids and hold-ups.



Reading the FIRE

with Vatra Dornei's FIREFIGHTERS



I have, like any person, a normal fear of fire, so the idea of entering a closed room where a fire is burning raised my pulse. It was an experience that made me respect more the work the firefighters do and understand the effort and risks assumed each day by these people so they can be better prepared when they are needed.

text & photo: Marcella Drăgan



Those who welcomed me into their team and taught me the secrets of fire were the firefighters from Vatra Dornei Fire Department, whom I accompanied during their everyday training.

The day started with a preparatory technical meeting, a daily routine which aims to show to all the personnel of the subunit exactly how a fire manifests itself, the phases it goes through, from the initiation phase to the widespread burning and all the other phenomena occurring

during the fire. The information is used primarily for the firefighters' personal protection and to better fight the fire. The theoretical part is followed by the practical study conducted in the fire study room, where the entire evolution of a fire is recreated, from initiation to regression.

Together with the team that I accompanied during the day, I attended the technical meeting, where the plan of the fire study room was presented. The locations of the materials to be burned were presented, also the places of each firefighter or, in my case, journalist. One at a time, the place, role, and actions of each serviceman were explained, and also of those offering support, like secondary teams and SMURD (paramedics). Given the fact that several objects were placed at different distances from the fire, so we can see all the phenomena occurring during the fire, their places were also marked.

Once the presentation of all the objects and personnel inside the fire study room was concluded, the explanation of the rules to be followed by all the participants at the exercise started. As I saw later on the field, only one person gives the commands during the training session, the leader on the training session. Everyone has to listen to him and no one on the field commands over him. Were explained to me the commands used during the exercise, how to move inside the fire study room, the communication methods between the members of the team, and how to react to different situations, different types of teams participating in the intervention and the evolution stages on the fire, that we were to encounter in the fire room.





also known as angels of fire. At around 400° C temperature, the gases from the pyrolysis arose and start lighting up and I could see on the ceiling as tongues of fire appeared. The flames grew in intensity and began to unite, to blend together, coming up above us, appearing in the form of waves of fire, a phenomenon known as rollover, and a stage of a fire that firefighters were studying very carefully.

This is the last step before the most dangerous phenomenon



After completing the theoretical part, we started the practical part, which for me began with donning the protective suit and the rest of the equipment consisting of a mask and oxygen tube and helmet. Once in the fire room, I could see all the stages that were presented to me in the theoretical session. After initiating the fire, the next step that I could see was vaporization that occurs at around 100° C, when water contained in any material vaporizes. I could see after that

the layering the smoke, which, from the top of the room, started to descend, arranging itself in layers and stabilizing at the height of 80 cm from the ground, called the neutral zone, where the best visibility is.

Pyrolysis or decomposition of the material into gas was the next phenomenon that I have seen, which occurs around the temperature of 200o C when the materials break down into gases. These gases create the next phenomenon, flame over,



The first thing the firefighters notice when they arrive at a fire is the smoke, by its color they can know how much it's loaded with unburned gas, of pyrolysis, which provides information about the amount of fuel inside the fire and the degree of risk to which the firefighters expose themselves. Another thing the firefighters learn to read is the color of the fire, indicating the level of oxygen and temperature of the fire. They also look after the number of openings (windows, doors) and their location, and the firefighters will try



of a fire, the flashover, which is the transition from the localized burning to the general one when the whole room catches fire and the room is engulfed in flames. The phenomenon occurs at temperatures above 600° C. Because the transition from rollover to flashover is very short, ranging between 5 and 15 seconds, knowing each phenomenon is very important, and firefighters can anticipate these steps by „reading the fire“. For that, firefighters must take into account five elements.



not to create new openings during the intervention to don't supply the fire with oxygen. Another element to consider is the heat, which can be determined according to the fire's stages and specific phenomena observed. Another indicator is the sound, each fire is accompanied by a series of sounds, such as cracking, which indicates the degree of danger.

By reading these elements firefighters can predict the stage in which the fire is and plan ahead for its extinction. For example, if the firefighters reach the fire at the stage of flame over they can intervene offensively by starting the attack on the fire to put it down. If they have reached the stage of rollover they will act defensively, with more caution, acting with water jets to cool down the fire and respecting more safety features.

In addition to preparing for interventions to fight a fire, the firefighters prepare for other types of interventions that they are called at, the most common being the rescue of persons (and of various animals) fallen in wells and other confined spaces. The rescue teams work in three teams of two men each - one coordinating team consisting of a rescuer and the coordinating firefighter (that coordinates all the teams participating in the intervention and whose commands are obeyed by all participants), and two teams for lowering and retrieving the rescuer and the victim.

Also during the daily training, firefighters exercise how to save themselves in fires in tall



buildings, when the stairwell is collapsed or filled with smoke, and the only way out is through a window. Using ropes and harnesses that each firefighter carries, they have to rescue themselves and help their colleagues. They practice rappelling, rope recovery, and the funicular descent technique that is used in interventions where the victims cannot be evacuated using the stairs.





In addition to firefighting training, the firemen also have a daily routine of physical training, meant to increase their capacity to cope with long-term interventions, especially when using a breathing apparatus in order to dose the effort and use an oxygen tank as long as possible.



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