



Defence Minister visits Azerbaijan

(18 Jan) Defence Minister Robert Kaliňák travelled to Baku for a series of official meetings with the highest representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan led by President Ilham Aliyev, Defence Minister Col Gen Zakir Hasanov, and Minister for Defence Industry Vugar Mustafayev. Exploring opportunities for cooperation in the political and military areas and discussing the regional and international security situation were among the issues on the agenda of the meetings. In his separate talks with President Aliyev, Minister Hasanov and Minister Mustafayev, Defence Minister Robert Kaliňák outlined the SVK MOD's priorities for modernising the Slovak Armed Forces. He highlighted that Slovakia's defence manufacturers offer several interesting products, most notably, the ZUZANA 2 and BIA SPHs and the BOŽENA demining UGV, whose reliability has already been tested and proven by the AZE Armed Forces. The leaders of both sides all agreed there is space for closer cooperation between the nations' defence industries. As part of the Defence Minister's official visit to Azerbaijan, the SVK delegation laid a wreath at the Martyrs' Lane Memorial in the capital city of Baku.



Tribute to air disaster victims

(19 Jan) Top MOD and Armed Forces officials honoured the 41 SVK military personnel and one civil servant who died 18 years ago in the SVK AF Antonov AN-24 transport aircraft crash, while returning home from the NATO-led KFOR. Defence Minister Robert Kaliňák and CHOD Gen Daniel Zmeko paid tribute to the victims of the Hejce air disaster in a remembrance service at the Slovak Armed Forces Memorial and the SVK WW2 cemetery in the Háj-Nicovô Memorial Park in Liptovský Mikuláš. Family members of the departed soldiers joined MOD and Armed Forces officials and representatives of Hungary, the UK, Germany, the U.S., Ukraine and China in honouring the victims. In addition to a ceremonial flypast by SVK AF aircraft and a wreath-laying ceremony, Defence Minister Robert Kaliňák and CHOD Gen Daniel Zmeko delivered touching remembrance speeches. Háj-Nicovô WW2 Cemetery opened to the public in 1961. 1,370 soldiers of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps lie at rest in the cemetery. The Slovak Armed Forces Memorial in honour of those who have lost their lives on missions and operations abroad was erected at the end of 2018. On the evening of 19 Jan, CHOD Gen Daniel Zmeko attended a remembrance service for the Hejce victims on Borsó Hill in Hungary.

This year's first basic military training gets underway on Martin base

(16 Jan) On 15 Jan for the first time this year, the latest intake of 258 civilian recruits (73 women), including regular soldier candidates of the State Service and professionally qualified officers (PQOs), passed through the gates of the Training and Mobilisation Force Generation Base Martin, based at 4th Czechoslovak Brigade Barracks, to take the first step in the Basic Military Training (BMT) programme. After in-processing – the paperwork and issuance of Army clothing items and equipment at 41 Supply Base Nemšová, the recruits were assigned to training platoons and were turned over to their drill sergeants. They began their training in line with the Basic Military Training Syllabus (BMTS). The focus of the scheduled BMT activities, which take place on the Martin base and on Martin Garrison's Sučany training ground, is on familiarisation with Army life and the Army's core values and standards, physical and mental resilience training, basic soldiering skills, and drilling procedures. On completion of the BMT programme, the recruits will swear the Oath of Allegiance and will mark the end of their military training with a Pass Off Parade on 1 Mar 2024.

- CHOD Gen Daniel Zmeko attended the **NATO Military Committee** in Chiefs of Defence Session at NATO HQ in Brussels on 17-18 Jan 2024, with the focus on strengthening the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence and defence in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In attendance were the 31 Allied Chiefs of Defence, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT). During the two-day meeting, the Chiefs of Defence met in a NATO-Ukraine Council format for the first time.

- During a ceremony marking **Artillery and Missile Troops Day** on 15 Jan, Cdr 21 Sp Arty Bn Lt Col Michal Németh named SSgt Alexander Kovaľčuk and Pte Jaroslav Pálffy Best NCO and Soldier of 21 Sp Arty Bn for 2023, respectively. He also handed out a Letter of Appreciation to all military personnel rated as best military professionals. For their exceptional merit in building the Armed Forces on the occasion of Slovakia's Foundation Day, Sgt 1C Juraj Pálóczi and SSgt Zdeno Kandráč received the SVK Minister of Defence Commemorative Medal 3rd Grade and the SVK Chief of Defence Badge 3rd Grade, respectively.

- Meeting at the SVK MOD on 16 Jan after 12 years, representatives of the Personnel Management Branch (J-1), Staff for Operations Support, SVK Defence Staff, met with a delegation of the **CZE Armed Forces Personnel Agency**. The topics discussed were: the soldiers' skills and performance assessment, career progression, recruitment, manning, service leave rate, stabilisation of personnel, and management of military careers.

- As part of intensive platoon-level training phase, 1 Frng Bty, part of 21 Sp Arty Bn Michalovce, assigned to 13 Hvy Mech Bn Grp (under Slovakia's 2017 NATO CT), began its **certification preparation**. Conducting small arms live firing at night, members of 1 Frng Bty fired the CZ P-09 pistol and the Sa vz.58 assault rifle at targets on Kamenica nad Cirochou Training Area on 16 Jan. The training of 1 Frng Bty will continue with the driving of combat vehicles and tactical training on Michalovce Garrison's White Mountain training ground, Kamenica nad Cirochou TA, and at the ZUZANA 2 SPH simulator facility.

- Military Chaplain Lt František Krušínský** has collected clothing and food items from military personnel of NATO's eFP BG Latvia to be donated towards the charity projects of the Missionaries of Charity – Mother Teresa's Sisters in Riga. SLOVCON soldiers welcome such donations and want to continue with them into the future.

- Andrej Bamaš, skier of the **Dukla Military Sports Centre**, won the bronze medal in the men's Super G at the Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics in South Korea.

- Slovakia's 12-time race walk champion **Mária Katerinka Czaková** placed 3rd in the women's 20 walk race at the Open Race Walking Championships in Türkiye's Antalya. She is a step closer to participating in the Olympic Games.

FULL FIELD KIT

Radio Regina's Full Field Kit programme presents an interview with Miloslav Púčik about Czechoslovak Military Intelligence (MI) in 1918-89 on Fri at 21.05 with a rebroadcast at 00.30 on Sat.



ESP soldiers arrive in Slovakia



(21 Jan) As Spain takes over from Czechia as the Framework Nation for NATO MN BG SVK, which is to be re-organised into a brigade-sized multinational task force, the first ESP Contingent team has arrived in Slovakia to

make sure the official handover of command is as smooth as can be.

In the presence of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to Slovakia, Her Excellency Lorea Arrabalza Ceballos, the first group of ESP soldiers was given a warm welcome to Slovakia by Lt Gen Ľubomír Svoboda at Bratislava airport. The entire ESP Battle Staff is due to arrive by July 2024.

Soldiers support SWC Jasná



(20 Jan) Petra Vlhová, skier of the **Dukla Military Sports Centre**, fell and tore a ligament in her knee in the women's giant slalom race at the Ski World Cup (SWC) Jasná. After undergoing medical tests at

the Ružomberok Hospital, it is clear that Petra's ski racing season is over.

From Thursday to Sunday, operatives of 5 SOF Regt Žilina and CIMIC specialists of 57 Ind SOF Det joined forces with the Mountain Rescue Service to support the SWC event in Jasná. The Slovak Armed Forces had an information stand in the ski resort.

New military chaplains



(16 Jan) The 31st Professionally Qualified Officers Course concluded at the Military Academy Liptovský Mikuláš. Among the graduates were four military chaplains for the Roman Catholic Bishopric of the Forces – Lts Alexander

Andrejko, Dávid Šturák, Jozef Kornecký and Marek Olčák – who will provide pastoral and religious support to soldiers at garrisons across Slovakia, as well as two military chaplains for Eccumenical Pastoral Service (EPS) – Lt Katarína Žatková and Lt Lucia Martonová – who have assumed the appointments of Dean of SVK AF HQ Zvolen and Senior Lead Officer - Specialist/Deaconess of Central ESP Office Bratislava, respectively.

Bishopric of the Forces and Armed Corps Pilgrimages in 2024

■ 64th International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes (FRA)

Dep & Rtn dates: 22-28 May 2024

Transport: coach

Price: €210

Reg. closing date: 29 Feb 2024

■ 18th National Military Pilgrimage to Rome and the Vatican (ITA)

Dep & Rtn dates: 22-28 Sep 2024

Transport: coach

Price: €290

Reg. closing date: 30 Apr 2024

■ 31st International Military Pilgrimage from Warsaw to Czeszochowa (POL)

Dep & Rtn dates: 4-14 Aug 2024

Transport: service vehicles

Reg. closing date: 30 Apr 2024

■ 12th 'Sts Cyril and Methodius' Meeting of SVK and HUN Bishoprics of the Forces and Armed Corps in Zalavár (HUN)

Dep & Rtn date: TBC

Transport: coach

Reg. closing date: 15 May 2024

■ 26th National Military Pilgrimage to Levoča (SVK)

Dep & Rtn dates: 6-7 Jul 2024

Transport: service coach

Price: TBC

Reg. closing date: 14 Jun 2024

■ 3rd Slovak Armed Forces Walking Pilgrimage to Levoča (SVK)

Dep & Rtn dates: 5-6 Jul 2024

Start point: Prešov

Price: €20

Reg. closing date: 31 May 2024

■ 21st National Military Pilgrimage to Šaštín (SVK)

Dep & Rtn date: 15 Sep 2024

Those interested in going on a pilgrimage, please contact your chaplain in the Armed Forces, Police, Prison Guard, Customs, Firefighting and Rescue Services. The application form, which must be filled out, signed and submitted to your chaplain/deacon or mailed to the Bishopric if none of them serves in your unit is accessible via the documents/foreign activities section of the Bishopric website at www.ordinariat.sk. Applicants will be notified in due time. In selecting pilgrims, uniformed personnel are given precedence over civilians.