



# Practice Makes Perfect

With a new small arms suite, clothing and load carriage equipment, Slovenia's Warrior programme will address additional C4I capability in the future

**Slovenia's armed forces are eighteen years old, a date marking the country's independence from the former Yugoslavia. Unable to access the original suppliers of its armed force's legacy equipment, Slovenia has been obliged to undertake an almost complete revamping of its military equipment, including soldier modernisation. It believes that its future soldier programme, known as The 21st Century Warrior or Slovenian Warrior is now almost complete, with the exception of C4I which they believe is arguably no bad thing reflecting, the speed at which developments are taking place in that field.**

The Slovenian Armed Force (SAF) define its Warrior programme in the context of a unit system consisting of a section within a motorised unit, equipped with two types of vehicle, the 6x6 Pandur and more recently the 8x8 Patria AMV, the latter giving the section greater internal volume and mobility. The first infantry company received the AMV in 2009.

The Warrior programme began with a pre study phase in 1998, quickly followed by a study phase with field trials from 1999-2005 with procurement and integration of a number of equipment categories taking place from 2002 to the present day. The scope of the Warrior programme is 'simply' that it covers all the equipment that the soldier will use, carry, wear and consume during operations. Four key areas of improvement have already been achieved, in the areas of small arms, higher level C2, protective clothing and individual equipment and mobility.

Lt. Col Peter Zakrajsek, former Head of the Doctrine and Development of the Infantry Section, part of the Army's Doctrine, Development Training and Education Command and responsible for controlling the programme's implementation, provided an overview of

progress thus far, "We have already improved our weapon systems. For C2, we have improved many items at the platoon level, and also above the company and battalion level, but since the technology is changing so quickly, I think that for the dismounted soldier, we should delay the state of the art and modernise in the future. The current systems still enable us to train with the modernised C2 systems and for tactical simulation systems for training that's just enough."

Continuing the training theme, Lt. Col Zakrajsek said that C4I was comparable in some ways to mobile phone technology with users often only using the same basic functionality offered in the first phones, even though their latest phones are extremely feature rich. "The same thing happens to equipment you give to the soldier if you don't train them properly. They have state of the art equipment but they use only the primary functions of this equipment. If you want to explore the full potential of the existing C4I systems, you have to train soldiers extensively and properly."

Lt. Col Zakrajsek sees weight as a key issue going forward, "When I was a battalion commander, we once weighed all the individual's equipment and it came out at 95Kg. The Warrior system also covers equipment that is carried inside and outside vehicles and also sustainability for several days of operations."

The programme's acquisition strategy comprises several core priorities, emphasising the purchase of, off-the shelf equipment, ideally field proven with a development path that would allow for future equipment upgrade, supplied by a domestic source if possible.

Lt. Zakrajsek puts the cost of an individual soldier, fully equipped with night optics at around €18,000.

The Warrior programme's most recent achievement has been a complete replacement of its suite of small arms, which has broadly coincided with the full

professionalisation of the Slovenian armed forces, supplemented by a small contracted reserve.

The core of the small arms programme is the adoption of the FN F2000S assault rifle with 6500 weapons being acquired. At the time, Lt. Col Zakrajsek explained, "it took a quite a lot of courage to choose a weapon that was still not proven with other armies but as we tested it, it proved quite reliable and gave us all the capabilities that a modern assault rifle should have." He identified key factors in its favour as the weapon's balance, small size and weight and utility for Military Operations in Urban Terrain. In terms of optics the FN2000 are issued with a mix of the COMP M-2 and Trijicon ACOG 3.5x35 sights.

New sniper rifles are also fielded, including the 7.62mm Ultima Ratio Commando and the larger 8.6mm Mini Hecate with both rifles using Schmidt and Bender sights. For suppressive fire, FN's 7.62 mm MAG and 5.56mm Minimi have been selected. For night operations, Simrad's KM250 and 252 are issued.

Slovenia's new anti-tank capability is represented by the RGW 90 equipped with both fragmentation and anti-tank warheads.

Addressing the new Protective Clothing and Individual equipment sub-systems, Lt. Col Zakrajsek, "For clothing, we have equipped our army with a new vest. It is difficult to equip so quickly. Now we are testing the latest equipment and going on to final trials. The principle is to have many layers that we can combine depending on the environment."

At the beginning of December 2009, approximately twelve months of testing procedures for the SAF's new urban and all purpose uniform, issued to 13 different Army units, was completed. Prototypes of the all purpose uniform have now been tested in all required environments and circumstances: on exercises both

- ▶ international and domestic, during Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn, during daylight, night and while observed with IR devices.

The prototypes for the uniform fulfil all the programme's challenging camouflage requirements including use in all weather conditions from -32C to +49C. Manufactured from 100 percent cotton, rip stop material it also affords complete IR protection. It is also more breathable, easier and more comfortable to wear with greater water protection and more pockets.

The SAF have also developed a new type of military boot which features increased comfort, durability and flexibility, with anatomically designed foot bed, firm rubber and sole protective toe cap, designed to provide extreme rigidity and comfort at the same time.

The Warrior system's modular load carriage system comprises a rucksack, combat rucksack, combat belt

and shoulder belt, carriage equipment and sleeping equipment. For CBRN protection, new protective clothing has been sourced from Saratoga and each soldier carries a personal dosimeter. More capable CBRN detection resides at the battalion level.

The current Slovenian C2 battle management system, reaching down to the squad leader and up the brigade is the TIS C2 project, which will equip the 1st Brigade and 10th MOTB. At the squad level, users are connected via the RF-5800V-HH radio with information, presented on a hand held display. However, Lt. Col Zakrajsek added that in the future a helmet mounted display was being considered. The information available to the user consists of situational awareness information, mapping and reporting and messaging functionality. In addition to Squad Leaders, Forward Observers and Special Forces will also receive the equipment.

Slovenia continues to deploy forces in Afghanistan. Lt. Col Z Zakrajsek said, "Almost ten percent of troops have been deployed. That is quite big operation for such a small army. It is very difficult to do mission specific training and also to train on new equipment. Because of the operational tempo, soldiers tend to adjust the procedures that they are used to and it is very difficult to adapt to other equipment, so you have take into account every aspect such of tactics, techniques and procedures to successfully change and adapt to the new systems."

The near term goals for the Slovenian Warrior programme are not procurement led, with the majority of capabilities now in place. Lt. Col Zakrajsek concluded, "I think that the biggest challenge for us now is to how we can best exploit the potential of this equipment." ■



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