

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

30th ANNIVERSARY OF THE MODERN CZECH FIELD HOSPITAL: FST FOR UNPROFOR

The era of modern Czech field medicine began in 1994. At the request of the United Nations, the Czech Republic undertook to build a field medical facility to support the mission UNPROFOR in the insurgent area of the so-called Krajina. This territory is today part of Croatia.

At that time, the Czech military medical service did not have any adequate resources and was not prepared to take up a similar task. The extensive stock material was morally and technically obsolete, and there was no modern organizational structure of independent field medical element either.

The task was undertaken by a group of doctors from the surgical department of the Central Military Hospital Prague under the leadership of Colonel Miloslav Matoušek, MD. Gradually, a professional group was created and after the enlargement of medics who were bestowed military ranks (Fig.1), the unit was formed at the level of an extended surgical team.



Figure 1. The founders of the Czech hospital.

Within four months, this team compiled the requirements, purchased and sourced everything the small hospital needed to do its job. From hammers and nails, washing machines or radios, to equipped ARO beds, operating room equipment and endoscopy tools. The unit also received modern vehicles for the field.

It seems absurd today what efforts the surgeons had to make to provide a blood supply. The expert recommendation was that colloid and crystalloid replacement solutions must be enough for them.

On March 15, 1994, the unit became part of the echelon and was sent south by train with all its equipment. Contrary to the plans of the army, the train stopped before the line of contact of the warring parties and the equipment of the entire small hospital had to be transferred to vehicles. The convoy then traveled another 300 km to the town Knin, which was the final deployment.

The hospital facility was planned from containers, and UN teams were responsible for the construction. Therefore, instead of a prepared small hospital, only a pile of sand was waiting for our medics. Drawing the plan of the entire complex, arranging the delivery of the necessary components and forcing the UN to build a medical facility quickly, it became the next task of the Czech team.

The complex of accommodation, ambulatory and inpatient medical facility was built within one month. Among other things, it included an operating room, 2 ARO beds, inpatient room, laboratory, X-ray and more (Fig.2). At the start of the operation, 5 doctors (3 surgeons, 2 anesthesiologists), 6 medics (including 2 AROs and 4 instrument technicians), 2 paramedics, 1 technician and 4 drivers worked in the facility.



Figure 2. The front view of the hospital.

Full operation of the facility started on May 15, 1994. The first team was gradually replaced during the autumn of the same year. The hospital then served the needs of international units for the following 5 years. It survived the offensive of the Croatian army in 1995 and was then moved north to Slavonia. Czech participation in the facility ended in 1998, after which the facility was financed by the United Nations and intended for further use within this organization elsewhere in the world. Over the years, the hospital has treated and cured hundreds of acute and chronic illnesses of soldiers and civilian workers on the UNPROFOR mission, operated on dozens of emergency conditions, including war injuries.

The operation of the FST in the Balkan conflict was a major turning point in the history of the new Czech military health service and had an immense impact in several directions. At the international level, it demonstrated the high level of the Czech healthcare system, and the work of the healthcare team was also related to the establishment of professional contacts with foreign colleagues. This was very important in the ongoing geopolitical changes and in the underestimation of countries from the East.

The impact within the military health service was very significant. There was a real deployment of a medical team as an independent unit in action. Czech military healthcare has not experienced this since the Korean War.

The entire history of the Czech FST was published in *Vojenské zdravotnické listy* 1995, 64(3), 96–127. ISSN: 0372-7025. The experience from Knin subsequently became the starting point for the construction of a large Czech field hospital of level 3 and the subsequent establishment of the field hospital base.



Petr Chmatal
The Institute of Aviation Medicine, Gen. Píky 1, 160 00 Prague 6-Dejvice, Czech Republic
chmatal@seznam.cz

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