



The Close Air Support (CAS) Seminar and “Tungsten Sword” Exercise organised under the auspices of the Air Operations Co-ordination Centre took place from 31st March to 11th April 2008 at the Baltic Barracks and the Air Live Firing Range in Nadarzyce.

Seminar on Close Air Support

It was the idea of the Air Operations Co-ordination Centre (AOCC), an air unit collocated with the Multinational Corps Northeast, to organise the Close Air Support (CAS) Seminar. The expression CAS refers to an Air Operation when own troops in contact receive weapon support from the air. Then aircrafts will employ their weapons while remaining in close contact with the troops. CAS has to be part of proper planning of a campaign, however, in some cases it might also become an emergency request.

Altogether, there were 71 people from nine nations including 53 external guests that participated in the CAS Seminar. The academic part scheduled for the first week was followed by the exercise codenamed “Tungsten Sword” that took place in Nadarzyce training area the following week.

“Closing the loop”: planning, directing, executing

“We plan ahead and then go to war, and not the other way round” – Colonel Peter Hauser,

Chief AOCC, explained the motto of the Seminar that stated "Victorious fighters win first and then go to war while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win" (Sun Tzu).

The exchange of experiences gathered in Afghanistan and the lack of information and training when it comes to Forward Air Controllers (FAC) were the main factors that encouraged the AOCC to organise the seminar, Colonel Hauser added. The controllers are the ones who direct air strikes requested from the units, in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Besides, for those participants from the Corps down to the brigade level who would also take part in the exercise Crystal Eagle, it was a kind of a jump-start into the exercise scenario.

Additionally, the Seminar provided extraordinary opportunities for FAC, pilots and planners because they not only got knowledge from different experts, but they could also talk to each other and exchange experiences. In the real life planners, controllers and pilots do not necessarily know each other.

More than a seminar

This free exchange of experiences was what made this Seminar especially valuable. Colonel Hauser explained that even the academic part of the first week included the so-called Map Exercise (MAPEX) – a generic exercise, during which the participants were divided into syndicates and actually planned a campaign after receiving a given task. As a matter of fact, the task was based on the scenario of the exercise Crystal Eagle. It might have been for example the mission to support the battalion or brigade to secure the advance in Auriga, a fictional country existing in that scenario. The participants simply received a map to practice CAS planning, requesting, tasking and execution.

"Tungsten Sword 2008"

The CAS Seminar was followed by a practical part. Aircraft flying over the range area hit various targets during a flying exercise "Tungsten Sword 2008" that took place from 4th to 11th April 2008 at the Air Live Firing Range in Nadarzyce.

Real hot air strikes

In the area of about 1,500 hectares different kinds of training and tactical targets were placed. They included among other things simulated radar sites, columns of tanks, fighter aircraft or tank platoons. It is important to notice that although aircraft F-16 only simulated bomb drops, SU-22 fighter-bombers did it for real. Bombs up to 500 kg, rockets and guns were used to hit the targets. The cooperation between Forward Air Controllers (FAC) who directed the air strikes and pilots who dropped the bombs could be effectively practised. It seems that any occasion to train and practise these types of air attacks is very valuable. In a real operation coordinating actions of ground forces, air-defence and air forces is the most difficult task, said Maj. Rogiński from the Polish Land Forces Command who trains and supervises Polish Forward Air Controllers – or in the American terminology Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTAC). It is simply crucial for both a soldier on the ground and a pilot in the air to feel safe.