

THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF SPORTS IN KEEPING VOLUNTEER RESERVISTS “FORGED TOGETHER” BETWEEN TWO CALL-UPS: THE CASE OF HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

There is more and more mention these days of the reserve forces, especially volunteer reservists. History has proven that no armed forces can exist without reservists, equally, no all-volunteer force can exist without volunteer reservists. However, the reservists are on active duty only for a limited time, so they must be kept “forged together” during the remaining time – with professional programmes, both physically and mentally. Moreover, the volunteer reservists are not only suitable for this, but also willing to participate in it. International experience shows that reserve associations are the most suitable for this in their role of connecting society and the armed forces. In our study, we examine how the sports activities of reserve associations can bring positive individual and social benefits.

KEYWORDS: civil-military relations, sports, volunteer reservists, reserve associations

1. Introduction

Today, everyone is aware that sports are the basis of a person’s health and proper fitness. With regular physical exercise, we can maintain our age-appropriate fitness and health. In addition, sport brings people together; it is a proven fact that it instils positive social values such as cooperation and the pursuit of success (Ritz, 2006; WHO, 2022).

Studies have also shown that, in addition to health and fitness, sports give a sense of belonging, self-confidence, and esteem, as well as opening new doors for the development of social bonds, by connecting with other people and

organizations (Gatz, Messner & Ball-Rokeach, 2002).

Such advantages of sports are not based on new discoveries, since service members had been already playing sports when the word sport itself was not known to humankind. Throughout history, the most hardened men have been the best service members (Kyle, 2014). Today, in the age of computers and robots, sports play an equally important role in the armed forces. A modern military still requires at least the same level of fitness as was expected from the service members of previous centuries (Boye et al., 2017; Havenetidis et al., 2022).

In addition, team sports play an important role in the military. Since teamwork can be learned well from these, military subunits can operate with such cohesion that guarantees their success in peacetime and during combat operations (Army & Navy Academy, n.d.).

Anyone can learn the importance of cooperation and experience the power of community from team sports. This is where the motivation that society can rely on to survive difficult times and crises come from.

So the sporting reservists, who are active and formative members of the armed forces and society, if only because of their position, can play a significant role in the development of social resilience and in the creation of social capital (Székely & Ujházy, 2020).

2. The Concept, Development and Interpretation of the Reserve System

States maintain a reserve system so that, in the event of a crisis or threat of an organization adapting to minor challenges in peacetime (be it an armed conflict or a natural or industrial disaster), the peacetime force can be supplemented within a short time with the required number of trained personnel, and the with trained reservists.

The concept of reservists in the modern sense appeared in the middle of the 19th century, and the first great test of the institution was the First World War – or, as it was called at the time – the “Great War”. By 1915, among other things, the reservists took over the place of the fallen sub-unit leaders, just as the Second World War was a test of strength for the reservists on all sides. Even during the Cold War, reservists would have had significant tasks. Since then, in addition to all-volunteer forces, volunteer reservists have appeared, who, based on a contract, undertake reserve military service in addition to their civilian obligations, including participation in training, as well as actual service in military operations, both at home and abroad (Demeter, Ujházy & Vastagh, 2016).

3. What Are Reserve Associations?

Due to its fundamental importance, the relationship between national defence and society has always occupied politicians, military leaders, and theorists. Clausewitz writes: “... *the power of the state, of war, and of the armed forces, is immeasurably increased by the heart and sentiments of the nation*” (Clausewitz, 2010). Recognizing the endless range of possibilities that arise from the double bond of reservists – namely that, in addition to their military duties, they are active as civilians in business, economics, science, education, politics or many other areas of life – some advanced democracies have already before the First World War, the reserve associations uniting them were created. After the Second World War, such organizations were formed one after the other in most Western democracies. These are non-partisan, non-profit civil organizations, where only real reservists are accepted as full members. (Non-reservists can usually be honorary or patron members, so they cannot vote or be elected.) These associations are led by reservists and run for the reservists.

From a purely military point of view, the most important thing is that since the reservists are usually only in the active duty for a limited part of the year, the main purpose of the reserve associations is to keep this personnel together for the rest of the time and with their help to form a bridge between the armed forces and society – especially where, with the elimination of conscripts, reservists and their associations form an important link with society. They also form a bridge between regular and reserve forces. These associations therefore help the reservists to stay together between two call ups, and in the framework of professional programmes, they provide an opportunity to increase the military knowledge of the reservists and improve their physical endurance (e.g. shooting, patrol competition, marching, language course, security policy

presentation, etc.). If necessary, they help with recruitment and also take it upon themselves to increase society's defence awareness. The reservists and their associations also reach segments of society where official politics cannot reach, or can only reach to a limited extent. Since the problems of this group of personnel differ in many respects from the problems of career, contract or even retired service members, therefore, in a great number of countries, the priority task of the reserve associations is to protect and represent the interests of the reservists. They do all this in their free time, in the afternoons, on weekends, in the form of a kind of “club life”. In a sense, the “reserve association” as an institution can be considered a form of outsourcing. With sufficient state assistance within the framework of such a social organization – to a certain degree almost “abusing” the enthusiasm of the organization’s members – the above goals can be achieved very cost-effectively (Ujházy, 2018).

4. Sports and Reservists

In ancient times mankind had already realized that physical activity is the basis of health and proper fitness, so since the beginning of history, increasing physical fitness, training, have been a fundamental tool for the physical preparation of service members. Sports later developed from this as a social phenomenon. The military is credited with creating many of the sports we know and love today (Szabó, 2022). In addition to all this, sports always have and will have a special place in the military, but today the proportions and direction have reversed, so today we can see that the military can provide the basis for the defence of the homeland by drawing from a healthy, athletic and physically fit society.

We mentioned that the armed forces of every nation are based on well-prepared and versatile reserve forces, in addition to regular service members. Accordingly,

sports play a particularly important role in the preparation of the reserve forces and in the preservation of the acquired skills. The focus of our study was the analysis of the sports opportunities of the volunteer reservists between two call-ups.

4.1. The Military Competition of the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers

A good example of a challenging international military competition for reservists is the one organized annually by the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers.

The Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers, generally referred to by its French acronym CIOR (Confédération Interalliée des Officiers de Réserve), is a formal NATO-affiliated, non-political and non-profit umbrella organization of member nations’ National Reserve Associations. The importance and prestige of reservists and reserve officers, as well as the weight of the organizations created by them in NATO, is better demonstrated by nothing than the fact that in the sea of parliamentary and non-governmental that promote the cause of defence, the North Atlantic Alliance has a distinguished relationship with only a few of these, one of which is CIOR (NATO Handbook, 2001; Military Decision on MC 248/1). This gives this organization, as well as its national affiliates, a high degree of legitimacy.

CIOR was founded in 1948 on the initiative of Belgian, French and Dutch reserve officers. By now it has become a cooperation of NATO reserve officer associations, representing approximately 1.3 million reserve officers, making it the largest reserve organization in the world.

The organization is structured around a constitution that provides for a rotating Presidency; Executive Council; key Committees and a number of annual programmes that promote training, education and professional development.

The most important of these is probably the CIOR Military Competition.

The event is an internationally recognized competition focused on military skills that highly challenge the leadership and physical skills of the participants.

The successful organization and conduct of the CIOR military pentathlon held annually with the participation of more than 250 reserve officers is the responsibility of the Military Competition Committee of CIOR. The competition was established in 1957 with the aim of providing an internationally recognized sporting event for reserve officers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its allies, providing a real challenge in terms of both military and leadership skills as well as physical fitness. The event is part of the summer congress and recently received NATO accreditation.

The competition is a three-person team competition in which each member of the team must achieve the best possible result together. The three-day event consists of pistol and assault rifle shooting, an obstacle course (on land and water), a patrol competition supplemented with map reading, hand grenade throwing and other tasks (law of war test, military first aid).

5. The Case of Hungary

Sports competitions of reservists is not a new element in Hungary's history either, since, as in most European countries during the Cold War, conscription was mandatory, accordingly, the country had a large number of reservists. In the period following the Second World War, new organizations based on the Soviet model were created. The pre-training of those who are about to be called up and the post-training of those who will join the reserves after conscript service was organized by the Hungarian National Defence Association (Magyar Honvédelmi Szövetség – MHSZ). Founded in 1948 the MHSZ was a national paramilitary organization that organized sports and leisure activities (Bötkös, 1988).

5.1. MHSZ Reserve Competitions

Since the MHSZ was tasked with national defence education, as well as military pre- and post-training, departments and clubs were formed in almost every city, village, several factories and schools, where, in addition to the reservist, shooting, modelling, radio, light diving, parachuting and the very popular driving classes operated.

Based on our research, the dimension of the organization can be expressed with the following numbers:

By 1989, in addition to 145 built indoor shooting ranges, the MHSZ owned 216 outdoor ranges and 162 shooting pavilions, of which 37,000 small rifles, 2,800 sporting rifles, 10,500 sporting pistols, and 67,600 air rifles served the mass of shooters, the organization's assets at the time were over HUF 10.5 billion put out (Simicskó & Szabó, 2022).

These were the two largest MHSZ competitions organized for reserves:

5.1.1. Reservists National Defence Competition

From 1969, the National Defence Competition of the MHSZ Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers became a prominent event of the reserves. This 3000-meter patrol-type competition made it possible for a significant number of reservists to prepare for military theoretical and practical tasks (general military, manpower training and terrain tasks).

The preparation for the competition was a priority task of the reserve clubs, so it was connected with the conclusion of the voluntary information training for reserve officers and non-commissioned officers and the mandatory military sharpshooting.

More than 50000 people, in two age groups, regularly participated in one of these competitions, which, in addition to their military training tasks, were also intended to promote national defence sports among the personnel and the population (Mehesán, 1969; Garai, 1980).

5.1.2 The Reservists' Shooting Competition

Pistol and assault rifle shooting exercises were held every year for the reservists as part of the post-military training outside the armed forces, which quickly turned into a competition. The purpose of this was, on the one hand, to increase the reservists' interest in the execution of shooting exercises, to maintain them at the same level or to improve the shooting results, and on the other hand, the live shooting with military weapons maintained the reservists' sense of belonging to the armed forces, thereby the idea of responsibility for the defence of the homeland.

Teams of 4, each performed assault rifle and pistol shooting practice. The military leadership spoke highly of the competition, as the reservist's weapon handling safety and shooting performance improved to a great extent (Garai, 1975).

5.2. After the Cold War: The Association of Hungarian Reservists

It became obvious after the Cold War that a paradigm shift was needed in relation to the reserve forces in Hungary (Ujházy, 2022). On 14 July 2001 the Association of Hungarian Reservists (Magyar Tartalékosok Szövetsége – MATASZ) was founded. With this, a reserve association in the modern sense was created in Hungary. In accordance with common practice in NATO member states, MATASZ is an independent, non-political, non-governmental, non-profit-making organization, which operates on the basis of a constitution and organizational and operational rules and regulations. Membership is voluntary. Its membership covers the entire branch and service reserve spectrum of the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF). It is open to both other ranks and officers, thus it can reach the widest strata of society, since MATASZ also starts from the premise that national defence is a matter for society as a whole (Bognár, 1998).

One of the most important objectives of the association – like all reserve associations worldwide – is to keep reservists “forged together” between two call-ups. As a forward-looking organization, another outstanding aspiration of MATASZ is to be a constructive partner of the national defence leadership in reserve matters, to help view the relationship between the armed forces and society from the perspective of reservists, as well as reservist-related issues in the narrow sense.

The association acts as a bridge between the HDF and Hungarian society, as well as between the regular and reserve component of the Hungarian armed forces. Due to its social embeddedness, the association has unique opportunities in promoting the defence of the homeland, as well as in strengthening the social support of the reserve system and in promoting patriotism. The association also helps maintain the social integration of service members, since it is fully aware, that the well-prepared, motivated and satisfied reservist is one of the best diplomats of the armed forces.

Its scope of activities includes organizing security policy and security theory events, programmes that develop military knowledge and skills. It provides information on the international activities of the HDF and the possibilities of voluntary participation in them. The association organizes conferences and publishes publications on topics related – primarily reserve-related – to defence and operates its own website (<https://matasz.com/hun/>).

MATASZ maintains a continuous, wide-ranging relationship with the units of the HDF. It conducts regular consultations with political actors: the parliament, the government and the leadership of the armed forces, as well as with other non-governmental organizations, mainly with a similar profile. It mostly has cooperation agreements with them. The most significant of MATASZ's multifaceted relations

system is the cooperation agreement concluded with the Ministry of Defence, which was accepted by the two parties in the framework of a contract based on mutual benefits after the establishment of MATASZ.

The most successful activity of MATASZ is probably its international activity and its sports activity. The association organizes sports events, competitions regularly (shooting, patrol competitions, etc.). These sports programmes promote the preservation and development of the good physical condition of the reservists, as well as the expansion of their military and professional knowledge. They contribute to increasing the self-confidence of reservists and strengthen team spirit. Many of these events take place in an international framework, which promotes a better understanding between nations and, not least, contributes to the promotion of – the so often mentioned – interoperability. From 1999, Hungary has already participated a few times in the selection competition for the CIOR military competition of the Association of Reservists of the German Federal Armed Forces (Verband der Reservisten der Deutschen Bundeswehr – VdRBw) in Hammelburg, for which a national selection competition was organized (“Tartalékosok versenyé,” 2000). In 2000, Hungary already nominated a team at the CIOR Military Competition itself, held in Berlin (Ujházy, 2011).

6. Conclusions

Overall, we can see that in the post-Cold War period, instead of conscripted mass armies, smaller, more professional all-volunteer forces came to the fore. In these forces, the proportion of physical training during military service accounts for almost half of the time spent on training. The goal is for service members to find a way to maintain an active lifestyle with the help of physical education during the entire period

of service until leaving the reserve. It can be seen how important a role sport plays in the life of the armed forces and its reservists, especially if we think about the maintenance of physical and mental abilities in the period between the two call-ups of the reservists.

In the military, the main purposes of sports are to develop teamwork, leadership and fitness; promoting health and instilling the armed forces’ core values and standards to enhance the operational effectiveness of all service members.

Sports make a significant contribution to efficiency, fighting spirit and personal development. Through the public and group cultivation of national defence sports, society recognizes them as a characteristic of service members, thereby playing an important role in shaping the duration of service, and supporting national defence education, recruitment and retention. Sport, as a social phenomenon, has a very broad role, but primarily it specifically ensures physical development, contributes to fitness, teamwork, leadership, self-discipline, determination, coordination, courage, competitive spirit, individual and collective flexibility, in fact the for the social strengthening of military spirit.

The broadest possible exploitation of these positive effects is given priority in many forces, and in accordance with the requirements of the age, they often support the training, physical preparation and competition of service members with applications adapted to individual needs.

Acting as a bridge between the armed forces and society, reservists and reserve associations can amplify these effects and authentically display these military values and the spirit of national defence in almost all segments of society. Through sport, in addition to increasing the level of training, the strengthening of reserve communities and their social role can be realized at a higher level, which is of great value in today's changing geopolitical environment.

In this complex task, sports play a significant role, since those who regularly do sports are motivated, physically trained and better able to withstand physical and psychological stress in their military tasks and in their private life. The events taking place in our immediate environment, the

war raging in our neighbourhood, make the regular assessment and development of the training of reserve service members a priority in the development of the HDF, because no armed forces can be successful without an effective reserve component.

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