

# Fully serviced

**Lieutenant General Kersten Lahl, Commander of the German Joint Support Command, spoke to Gwyn Winfield about their CBRN development**

**T**HE Joint Support Command is a relatively new organisation; founded in 2001 it is now one of the pillars of the refocused Bundeswehr. Germany had a purely defensive military for many years, focused entirely on the homeland. With the conflicts in the Balkans – the Bundeswehr has over 3,000 personnel in Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina – Germany began to look at foreign operations, and as that increased post 9/11 it became more apparent that the Joint Support Command was essential. As well as being responsible for the Joint Service Support role, the Command also has – more pertinently – the control of all military operations in the German homeland – including CBRN defence. The full list of the Command's responsibility includes support of operations abroad, national command and control, national territory tasks, CIMIC, psyops, military police, strategic intelligence, strategic mobility, CBRN and basic driver training.

General Lahl went into detail. "The structure changed about six years ago and brought commonality into the three services to enable them to benefit from synergies in logistics, C2, military police, strategic intelligence, psyops and CIMIC," he said. "We also have the lead role concerning the development of CBRN defence. CBRN defence forces are single forces but we want to bring them together within the wider force package. My task is to support missions abroad and 30 per cent of all operations come from my command. My second role is that of territorial commander for operations within Germany. We provide military support for disaster relief, serious accidents or terrorist attacks. Everything is conducted through the Joint Support Command, but responsibility is with the civil powers, we do the civil military co-operation."

## Turning inwards

While the Bundeswehr has previously had a homeland defence mission, it was focused on outside aggressors. One of the legacies of the Second World War was stronger legislation ensuring that military stayed out of civil emergencies and politics. This has slowly changed in the face of the fourth-generation threat, and the recent soccer World Cup ▶





*Joint Support Command will provide support to German civil agencies if requested*

► has been the current high-water mark of this, seeing extremely close co-operation and planning between civil and military forces to prepare for any terrorist action. Yet the overseas operations continue and increase, giving Germany the headache that many nations suffer from in trying to balance “home” and “away” operations, as well as the existing reticence about military involvement in civil affairs. General Lahl disagreed there was a psychological barrier to military involvement inside Germany. “Within German society the Bundeswehr is one of the public services that has the highest esteem, and rightly so,” he said. “Over the past decades our soldiers – many of them conscripts – have performed outstandingly in various fields of operation, including support in national disaster relief operations. So psychological barriers don’t play a role today.

“Disaster relief is regarded as part of homeland security,” he continued. “Although the civilian authorities are responsible for the type and amount of preparations and measures, there are no problems with involving the military as long as the legal constraints and the principle of subsidiarity are taken into account. What is needed is a

request by the appropriate civil offices and approval by the minister of defence. But, at the same time, the civilian administration has to realise some limitations of the armed forces when creating specific plans for disaster relief.

“The core task of the German military is supporting international crisis management operations,” General Lahl concluded. “So our efforts and means are not primarily focused on protecting the population in a catastrophic scenario. We are also in the middle of a general reduction of forces and a period of force transformation – we want to get the best results from limited resources. This is compounded by the fact that we must put the best resources we have into operations abroad, so our ability to support civil authorities is limited; it is difficult to improve that capability when it is being diminished at the same time by operations – but we are doing a lot to reduce shortfalls. It is not enough for us just to have a presence in Afghanistan – we need to protect the civilians at home; though civil security is a civilian role we feel their need and want to support them. Despite this, the Bundeswehr remains an efficient and reliable subsidiary partner in homeland security issues. Many of its capabilities can support the

protection of the civilian population, especially in case of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear emergency situation.”

The military role in CBRN homeland defence generally comes in two flavours: the support role or the total defence role. The former is a “pull” capability, where the civil forces ask the military for skills/equipment during a crisis (this requires an honest realisation of the civilian capability, something that is often lacking), while the latter embeds military forces with civilian forces and gives them fixed goals (which removes these units from traditional military tasks). Despite the pools of manpower and capability that the German military has, they are focused on the support role as General Lahl explained. “The German system could be called ‘assist on demand’ rather than ‘institutional assistance’,” he said. “In Germany the management of civil emergency situations are the responsibility of the emergency response organisations at all civilian levels, from local up to federal authorities. These organisations are equipped and trained for special situations and it is important to recognise this fact, and this approach is generally self-sufficient. The Bundeswehr assistance is only needed when ►

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▶ the civilian capabilities prove to be insufficient in a specific situation. In that case the appropriate means are integrated into the overall conduct of the emergency management. The responsibility, however, remains always on the civilian side.

“Command and control for the support of civil authorities rests with the Joint Support Command and this support is a joint effort. The Bundeswehr does not keep special capabilities to support civil emergencies; to build up organic assets exclusively for disaster relief would be inconsistent with the already mentioned principle of subsidiarity. On the other hand, in an emergency, all available units of the Bundeswehr could be used for support – all military services are potential force providers for the Joint Support Command in this respect.”

## Practice on the pitch

The Bundeswehr generally, and Joint Support Command specifically, had one of the best exercise opportunities available when the FIFA Soccer World Cup arrived in 2006. This forced the pace and ensured that the world's gaze would see a united, comprehensive approach to CBRN terrorism. General Lahl was keen to point out that the Joint Support Command contribution to the World Cup was not just CBRN defence – and

that this was true of their role in homeland security generally. “It depends on the situation – it sometimes seems that so-called ‘high visibility events’ are becoming the bread and butter of daily national, and multi-national, operations,” he said. “For the World Cup we drew up plans for emergency situations – medical support, transportation of wounded, CBRN defence, etc. For CBRN defence specifically we were there to offer an advisory, recce (with the Fuchs) and decon role; in the vicinity of every stadium we put two Fuchs to deal with any CBRN emergency. But we also provided engineers, military police, general transportation support and also – not high profile, but most used – people on the ground to help in any way. It is dependent on the situation and the force – where are the gaps we need to fill?”

“The floods, for example,” continued General Lahl, “needed far more engineers and helicopter assets than logistics. For terrorist attacks we need to hold a CBRN defence capability, and this can make our relationship more complicated. During the World Cup we had plans to forward-deploy to critical infrastructures – places we thought would be hotspots. It is hard to forward-deploy when you don't know where and when the terrorist is going to attack! For the World Cup we also had the advantage of working within twelve cities; we were able to concentrate our assets rather than disperse them.”

“The concept proved to be very successful overall, and the fact that military

forces where not called upon can be seen as evidence of the success of the national prevention policy. The experiences gained from supporting the World Cup were very similar to the experiences already gained by the Bundeswehr in Kuwait as part of the Task Force Consequence

Management for Operation Enduring Freedom. These can be summed up as follows:

Civil and military planners need to get together as early as possible in order to know each others' capabilities, procedures and above all limitations (often the civilian side believes the military has much more at its disposal than is the case in reality).

Military personnel with sound understanding of both the capabilities as deployed and first responder procedures need to be integrated in emergency response staffs at all levels.

Detailed information on limitations must be provided at all levels in order to allow sufficient time to come up with “practicable work-arounds (SOPs)”.

Commanders at all levels must be trained and practiced in first responder procedures, understand first responder mentality (safe lives first), adapt their own procedures and accept the secondary role the military have to play in first responder situations.

Liaison at all levels of command is essential.”

Unlike many other nations, the Germans treat CBRN defence in much the same way that they do cavalry or artillery – it is a recognised pillar of the force, rather than just a “skill”. Yet the German army has taken a great deal of time to move away from its heritage as the armoured force focused on homeland defence. As more nations move towards fourth generation conflict, with the emphasis on lighter, more agile ground troops supported by air assets, this means a change from heavy armour. Will this transition be happening to the CBRN defence units – will they be changing from Fuchs to Dingo (or equivalent) and be looking to rely more on dismounted troops? General Lahl suggested that it required a mix of units, but that there would still be a need for the Fuchs. “The German approach to future developments on CBRN is driven by the necessity to ensure a system of graduated CBRN defence capabilities across the whole spectrum of possible operations,” he said. “The first level of this system is achieved by individual CBRN protection for each service member – the basic level of proficiency. This is supplemented by the next step – an enhanced proficiency level – comprising CBRN defence tasks conducted by trained personnel in a secondary role aimed at hazard mitigation while ensuring protection regimes are still in force. The third level is the highest level of proficiency and is established by qualified ▶





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overall survivability and protection philosophy adopted by the armed forces. We have to increase our capability to manage so-called “low-level situations” including symptoms like potential long-term effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. We are going to establish a comprehensive modern “operations and training management for CBRN defence and protection tasks” in connection with the capability of early recognition and evaluation of hazard potentials in missions abroad. Beyond these high-level requirements, we are also going to be fielding a biological reconnaissance system, introducing a modern and safe decontaminant and establishing a CBRN defence knowledge management/ competence network.”

*Gwyn Winfield, editor, CBRNe WORLD, greets Lieutenant General Kersten Lahl, Commander of the German Joint Support Command, at the CBRNe World stand in Gothenburg*

▶ personnel. The aim is to ensure the best protection possible and to minimise hazards to a degree where the effects on mission accomplishment are negligible.

“Given the spectrum of possible missions, this can only be achieved with an appropriate mix of capabilities. Although the requirements for thorough decontamination or sensitive site reconnaissance remain the same, the operating procedures differ depending on the existing operational environment. The CBRN defence capability planners of the Joint Services, together with their single service counterparts, are currently developing a balance of highly mobile and flexible elements and well proven and reliable specialist CBRN defence capabilities. The DEU Fuchs reconnaissance vehicle will still have its place in the future in concert with other units; for example, the new light army CBRN defence companies, the army special CBRN reaction platoon, and the medical CBRN protection task force of the Medical Services.”

The new CBRN doctrine is at the heart of the future developments of the German CBRN force, as General Lahl explained. “At the end of last year we finished developing a new CBRN defence concept for the German armed forces. Currently we are in the middle of the process of defining the capability requirements in

order to harmonise the capability plans between the military services. So our current objectives are to finish that work, which will hopefully be done by the middle of the year, and then to further develop CBRN defence in the Bundeswehr; essentially involving the integration of CBRN defence in the



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*The renaissance in German NBC troops is focussing on speed and mobility*