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Poetry from the Mine Field

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poetry from the mine field

* by Chris North

"What We Do"

With protection on and helmet tight,
Equipment tested and ready,
We cross the line to start the search.
Our movements slow and safe and steady.

Through waist high brush and piles of rubbish
And house after house in a line,
We clear the ground and mark our route
To hunt the hidden mine.
Each day we walk the ground we've cleared
To prove the job's done right.
We check each morning to ensure
No mines were laid last night.

With weather so cold
The prodder burns the fingers of your hand.
Other times so hot sweat stings your eyes;
It takes so much effort to stand
Whatever the weather, be it hot or cold,
No matter what comfort we need to endure,
We search the ground with prodder in hand.
We must be safe, we must be sure.

"The Silent Assassin"

This quiet sentry waits, he doesn't care how long.
He waits alone or in groups for you to come along.
Slowly now with steady hand uncover the mine, don't hurry.

His body of plastic, as good as new, still working, still sound.
Carefully, with steady hand, now comes the vital part:
Gently lift, reach underneath and unscrew this demon's heart.
It's over now, this battle won, another victory filed;
One less assassin in the ground.
One less to hurt a child.

"What Is He Thinking?"

When a deminer steps forward to do his work,
Who knows what's inside his head.
Who knows what he thinks whilst doing this job,
Where just one mistake could leave him for dead.

Does he think of his wife and his children,
Does he think of their future?
If he makes a mistake and sets off a mine,
Who will take care of them after he's dead?

Demining he doesn't think of such things,
Focus on the job instead,
Mind just concerned with finding the mine.
If his thoughts wander, he could end up Dead.
notes FROM the FIELD

poetry

"Who Knows"

It's when I'm alone that it starts to bite,
When I've nothing to do and it's late at night,
These thoughts creep in,
Evoking worry like sorrow,
Will I survive the day or be killed tomorrow?

Will the next landmine I touch
Be the last thing I see?
Will I be killed or maimed,
What will happen to me?

I'm sure it won't happen, but
I know that it might.
These thoughts come to haunt me
Sometimes in the night.

When night drifts away and
Morning seeps through,
My confidence returns in the things
that I do.
Worries recede as the morning turns bright,
I am eager again to get on with the fight.

Those haunting memories
Seem like decades away,
But they return at the end of each day.
Confidence deserts me,
The day draws to a close.
Will I survive or die tomorrow?
Who knows?

“Risky Business”

No matter how much we follow the rules,
No matter how hard we try,
Each time the prodder goes in the ground
We know we could die.

Each time we search the ground ahead
Using tripwire feelers with care,
A blinding flash could be the first we know
That a tripwire mine was there.

That even when we checked the ground ahead
With detectors tuned so fine,
We know when we move forward that
Our feet could find the mine.

We put all these drills together,
Confirm and check and test,
Working hard, constantly improving
To make our drills the best.

So we trust in all the drills we use.
To improve, we continually try.
But demining is a risky business,
And deminers often die.

Poems reprinted with permission from Handicap International.

Chris North is a retired senior non-commissioned officer and EOD operator working for Handicap International. He leads a team of 30 men who risk their lives every day, locating and disarming landmines in Bosnia. His wife, Janice, and their two young children live in Scotland. His poetry collections have been published in two books, "Risky Business" and "War Trade."

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