

Southeast Asia

Air Combat Data

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Tom Smith details the United State's efforts to create an informational and relational database for mine/UXO identification in Southeast Asia and its importance in targeting landmines.

by Tom Smith,
*Defense Security Cooperation
Agency, Office of Humanitarian
Demining*

One of the greatest challenges in the global effort to remove the deadly debris of war and conflict is the collection of records kept by the combatants from either side in the conflict. In that regard, the United States has realized the importance of, and is making available, data from a variety of sources to assist with the survey and clearance work in Southeast Asia.



Since 1994, the humanitarian demining offices in the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and U.S. Pacific Command, in conjunction with the Federal Resources Corporation and MRJ Technology Solutions, have been developing an informational/relational database derived from the separate declassified tapes of allied air combat and combat support operational activities conducted during the war in Indochina. The output of this analysis will provide nations in the region with accurate target and ordnance data so that host countries can set priorities for UXO clearance operations and assess the probability of UXO

contamination in areas identified for economic development.

These combat missions were conducted in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam from 1965 to 1975. The original data system was developed by IBM in the early 1960s and captured daily air combat information on the Vietnam conflict in the National Combat Command Information Processing System (NIPS). The data (classified Top Secret) was maintained by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in 1976 declassified and delivered to the National Archives for safekeeping.

Four major databases are being reviewed for information that will assist host nations in determining the

scope and scale of air bombardment, helping to prioritize bomb and mine clearance operations:

Files Accessed & Data Period

Combat Activities File (CACTA)
October 1965 - December 1970

Southeast Asia Database (SEADAB)
January 1970 - June 1975

Strategic Air Command's Combat Activities report (SACCOACT)
June 1965 - August 1973

Herbicide Data Files- (HERBS)
July 1965 - February 1971

Other databases to be reviewed include the Combat Naval Gunfire Files, Mining Activity Files, and other files relating to friendly and opposing force base camp and artillery data.

Data in the air combat files includes specific mission numbers, type and number of aircraft, location of target, latitude/longitude coordinates, ordnance type, number of ordnance dropped, and additional information on downed aircraft.

The goal of this combined effort is to provide host nation mine action offices with geospatial information (maps, digital, and other data) to support humanitarian demining surveys, setting priorities for demining operations, training, and assessment of the mine and UXO threat to economic development activities. The recovered data are being incorporated into geospatial databases for analysis by the host nation mine action centers using Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

Information for Laos has been retrieved, incorporated into a relational database, and installed at the headquarters of the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Program (UXO LAO) in the capital city of Vientiane. The air combat information is displayed with vector or raster geospatial data and used to plan UXO clearance operations and to assess the probable impact of UXO on economic development projects.

Herbicide mission data has also

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been incorporated into the GIS at UXO LAO. Herbicide mission data was obtained from the U.S. Armed Services Center for Research of Unit Records (CRUR) that is also the source for substantiation of veteran's claims of herbicide contact. Data includes the original HERBS tapes plus man-portable, truck, and helicopter missions that were conducted during the conflict.

The partnership between the DSCA and its contractors is also in the process of developing a user-friendlier informational/relational database and look-up tables to better assist the end user in planning for and prioritizing bomb clearance missions in specific areas of the country. A prototype internet-accessible version of the geospatial data is also in the developmental phase and will make it easier for host nations to access the data without a major investment in information technology equipment.

Maintaining the work on this

project is essential for continuing assistance to Laos and possible expansion to the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) and the newly established Vietnamese Centre for Treating Technology Bombs and Mines. The project will continue to support our government's engagement strategy in the region.

In October 2000, a senior Vietnamese military delegation visited the United States to observe demining training activities and discuss ways in which the two countries could begin engagement by sharing information on demining issues. The delegation was extremely impressed with the bombing data retrieval project and, as a result, former President Clinton offered to share the information with the Vietnamese government during his historic visit to Vietnam in November 2000. Efforts are underway to coordinate the development and support of this initiative with the Government of Vietnam.

The use of this kind of data, and the integration with facilitating technologies, is unprecedented and is a clear demonstration of the value that technology can play in enhancing demining efforts, reducing costs, and building cooperative efforts between nations. The skills being learned through this process and the knowledge gained will most certainly be of value in other countries and other situations. This and other like initiatives will help ensure that the world will become mine safe sooner rather than later. ■

Contact Information

Mr. Tom Smith
DSCA (HA-D)
1111 Jeff Davis Highway – Suite 402
Arlington, VA 22202
Tel: (703) 601-3657
Fax: (703) 602-0075
E-mail: tom.smith@osd.pentagon.mil