HALO Trust in Angola

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HALO Trust in Angola

HALO Trust, a British charity, is gaining acclaim for both the scope and quality of their demining operations. In Angola, HALO has successfully adapted to an unstable political climate to help clear mines and allow for the return of hundreds of thousands of displaced refugees. In light of Angola's newfound peace, the Trust plans to expand their operations and finish the job.

by David Hartley, MAIC

Introduction

With the landmine community increasing in size, and political and bureaucratic challenges, HALO Trust is distinguished from other demining groups by the simplicity of their mission. This British-based non-governmental organization (NGO), the largest private non-profit demining organization in the world, shares all involvement in religious crusades or political campaigns and conferences. Instead, deactivates landmines. HALO employs only to get mines out of the ground...with as little fuss as possible. This no-nonsense demining stance has earned HALO an increasingly high international profile, highlighted by Princess Diana's visit to Angola and the recent Japanese Government's contribution of $800,000.

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Founded in 1988, HALO divides its international operations into the following six basic regional groups: Africa, Asia and the Caucasus. Headed in Scotland by director Guy Hartley and a number of key staff officers, HALO is hierarchically run and program managers in each country of operation. Free from political distractions, HALO can focus on developing new technology and expanding their programs, which already boast 4,850 mine clearance personnel in nine countries.

Funding

HALO's Angola program received $800,000 from the United States in the 2001 fiscal year, along with funding from the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the European Union. The majority of this budget pays the salaries of HALO's employees. The United States has given great importance to HALO and is one of the NGO's leading financial contributors. On June 19th, Joyce Brownfield, the Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action, reaffirmed HALO's commitment to the elimination of landmines in the world. The Trust has been recognized for its role in the clearance of landmines, and HALO has played a crucial role in this process, helping to reduce the number of landmines around the world. The Trust is committed to reducing the number of landmines and UXO through their operations and has received recognition for their work.

Research & Development

Hailed as a leader in research and development, HALO has broken new ground in their use of selective armor, tractors mounted hedge and verge cutters, adapted and armored medium wheeled loaders, and demining dogs. HALO's Mine Detection Dog (MDD) program has seen significant action throughout Africa and has been aided by the installation of six search stations. The purchase of the weather stations will help HALO predict the optimal conditions for mine detection. The Trust developed the use of visors without helmets, for improved demining comfort, as well as one-handed detectors and one-man drills. HALO has also experimented with a variety of methods for clearing rechargeable batteries in the field.

However, the Trust also operates with 23 Land Rover, two Case 721 armored loaders, two Wolf mine protected anti-explosion vehicles, a Fiat Allis FL50 tracked dozer and a New Holland 110/90 armored vegetation cutter. This equipment is controlled and used by 26 separate demining teams. HALO has been presented with a unique and daunting challenge in Angola. Not only does the South African nation have one of the most alarming landmine problems in the world, but the Angolan socio-political situation is also notoriously unstable. To date, at least 76 different types of AP landmines have been found in Angola, manufactured in 22 different countries.

Civil War

Two decades of civil war have decimated Angola's population and left an unknown number of landmines and UXO throughout the nation. Although Angola has signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty, little has been done to stop the use of landmines. When Angola's electoral process collapsed in 1992, a period of indiscriminate mine laying continued. Angola's civil war is the longest in Africa. After winning independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola was seen as a model of democracy. Since 1992, conflict has continued between the Angolan government and its neighbors, with the pan-African movement of liberation.

A Downturn in Security

In Angola, HALO seeks to clear land so people can build homes, remove mines which inhibit the work of aid agencies, and provide internally displaced persons (IDPs) with "safe access to agricultural land." The organization has been clearing land in Angola since 1994, and it has had a definitive shift in operational procedure in 1998. Despite the increasing deployment of anti-vehicle (AV) mines, HALO has been almost completely dependent on aircraft for in-flight clearance. Furthermore, HALO has faced with a massive migration of IDPs into government-controlled territory. Due to military conflict in the eastern municipalities, as many as 80,000 IDPs fled to Kuito, and up to half a million to Huambo. Working with other humanitarian organizations to provide for the influx of refugees, HALO teamed through most of 1999, 2000 and 2001 to clear land around the provincial capitals. The Angolan IDPs were pouring into the area, "trying to compete with each other for strips of land on which to grow crops." Shantytowns with open sewers and virtually no basic amenities sprung up, forcing refugees to scavenge for food wherever it could be found. This makeshift communities often appeared in close proxim-

The conflict ultimately disrupted HALO's demining operations. Most importantly, however, the political turmoil displaced hundreds of thousands of Angolan citizens. These bystanders were driven from their homes as family and forced to seek solace around Angola's central provincial capitals. For HALO, this has created an urgent and unique demining scenario.

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This Angolan landmine victim lost his leg to an AP mine, c/o IIRC
An Interview with Hendrik Ehlers of MgM

Hendrik Ehlers discusses the challenges facing demining in Africa, research and development, and mechanical clearance used by his company. His candid replies offer insight into the world of demining and managing a multifaceted organization.

by Margaret Busé, Editor

Margaret Busé (MB): Can you describe how MgM came to be formed in Germany in 1996?

Hendrik Ehlers (HE): My friend and partner since childhood, Hans Georg Krueger, and I were on Christmas leave back home, when we learned that our contracts with GPC's seconding ADP in Mozambique as instructors and supervisors of the survey plus explosion end-time disposal (EOD) section were not renewed. We had no choice but do to what many people had told us to do before: make our own non-governmental organization (NGO). With the help of our old school pal Christoph Brocks this was done within a few days and MgM was legally founded on January 16, 1996.

MB: What do you feel are the most unique aspects of MgM that set it apart from other demining organizations?

HE: The above structure is absolutely unique and so is the fact that both of us have no formal military background or similar education. Well, I was conscripted for a year as a radar operator on the Hawk system. We learned everything in the field by doing it, which as a side effect generated a number of self-built clearance and management devices that actually work. A very important thing is that we work in a team of multi-talents with maximum decentralization and decision-making. We are a group of friends and 99 percent of our staff...