August 2002

One of a Kind: The Quick Reaction Demining Force

CISR JMU
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**

Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss2/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
One of a Kind: The Quick Reaction Demining Force

Mr. Harry "Murf" McClay shares some of his insights into the formation and resulting success of the U.S. State Department's unique Quick Reaction Demining Force (QDF).

by JJ Scott, MAIC

Introduction

Escorting an idea along the path from concept to reality often entails a journey that is ridiculously roundabout, rife with obstacles, and complicated by bureaucratic bungling. These tribulations ensure that only the most original, innovative, useful and timely ideas make it to the concluding stage: final judgment by the real world. Approval from this harsh arbiter sets the few truly special ideas apart from the chaff. Mr. Harry "Murf" McClay launched just such a singular idea and shepherded it faithfully through all its trials, eventually presenting the world with the QDF: a unique squad of highly trained, well-equipped deminers who travel worldwide, responding to emergency demining situations wherever the need arises. Mr. McClay now serves as the Program Manager of the QDF, a job he tackled from his position at the U.S. State Department (DOS). He spoke with Mr. McClay about the QDF's origins, ideology, deployments and final judgment.

Origins

In 1999, the stage was set for a humanitarian disaster in the Balkans. The war in Kosovo had driven a million members of civilians from their homes, forcing them to seek temporary shelter in sprawling refugee camps. After paralyzing NATO air strikes convinced Slobodan Milosevic to end his vicious campaign in June, the refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) began the arduous trek home, a journey made more difficult by hundreds of thousands of landmines and UXO deposited during the citizens' absences. Mr. McClay recalls, "In Kosovo, all of a sudden the war ended, and it was obvious that there were going to be hundreds of thousands of refugees flooding back into dangerous areas. That constituted a real crisis situation."

It was a situation the world had seen before, but this time the outcome would be different. Mr. McClay had been working since 1998 on plans for a demining force that could respond to just such emergencies. "I guess you could say I came up with a concept and then set it up," he explains, "and that worked so well that it was decided to make it a full-time thing." Along with others at the DOS and in Kosovo, Mr. McClay barely assembled a demining squad and put them to work. That first team of deminers arrived in Kosovo quicker than any others and provided emergency clearance of heavily traveled roads, clearing a safe path for the imminent deluge of weary refugees while the longer-term programs geared up. The squad saved lives and became the template for a permanent force of deminers now known as the QDF.

Brainstorming

Building on that experience, Mr. McClay and others at the DOS set about designing a strategy that would give a few demining teams the means to respond to demining crises as epitomized by the Kosovo situation quicker than any previous mobile demining group. The DOS determined that they needed a standing force of deminers who were always on call, able to commence emergency operations anywhere in the world within two weeks of notification.

Next, the DOS had to locate a home base for the team that would satisfy several criteria. After surveying the world, planners swiftly settled on Mozambique. Mr. McClay detailed the reasoning behind the choice: "Why did we establish the QDF in Mozambique? Well, we were looking for a country that had a serious mine problem to begin with because we knew the QDF wasn't going to be deployed 100 percent of the time. We knew there was going to be a lot of the time when they wouldn't be deployed outside of [that] national boundary." He added, "Since we were going to be paying for the force, we wanted there to be work for them to do while they were deployed as well as work for while they weren't."

As a result, Mozambique offers a perfect blend of economic, political, and operational assets, including an abundance of qualified deminers within the country who also contributed to the decision. "We had a nice convergence there: you had a country in need and a surplus of trained deminers that would be available immediately, and it would be economical to train them up and get them ready to go," Mr. McClay concluded.

An experience that Mr. McClay had while running the U.S. demining program in Kosovo may have solidified the decision to base the QDF in Mozambique and staff it entirely with Mozambican deminers. He explains, "I first started working with those guys in Kosovo. We needed to bring in some deminers to do some demining of a suspected mass grave. I told them they ought to bring in Mozambicans because they were politically neutral. It was obvious that they weren't Serb, they weren't Muslim, they weren't Croat—they were these guys from Africa. It worked out perfectly, and they did a good job for the International War Crimes Tribunal."

After answering the what, who, and where questions, the DOS tackled the how. They enlisted demining contractor RONCO's assistance in constructing the QDF. Outlining the DOS' relationship with RONCO, Mr. McClay said, "We turn to them and say, 'This is what we want. We want a Quick Reaction Demining..."
NOTES FROM THE FIELD
Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction, Vol. 6, Iss. 2 [2002], Art. 16

An Interview with Angelina Jolie

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie discusses her time in Cambodia and the effects of landmines there as well as the impact the trip had on her personally. She is willing to share her experiences with the world to help raise more awareness for mine action.

by Jenny Lange, MAIC

Jenny Lange (JL): What first made you aware of the landmine situation around the world?

Angelina Jolie (AJ): When I went to Cambodia for work, I was suddenly in a country where I saw it was a very big problem. We were restricted so where we could move or walk because of landmines.

JL: What about Cambodia pulled your attention away from the movie and towards Cambodia and its problems?

AJ: I think it’s a lot of things like knowing the history of the place, (and) having not been taught at school. I felt I should have been taught about the landmine problem. It made me suddenly realize certain things about the world and how much I had to learn, like the history of the people. They are so warm and great and spirited; they are such survivors. I think they are such amazing people.

JL: Did you approach UNHCR, or did they approach you after your visit to Cambodia?

AJ: I approached UNHCR because I believe in what the United Nations is attempting to do. … and I support the United Nations. I read about the different chapters and UNHCR was the most [appealing] because I believe refugees are the most vulnerable people in the world. They are affected by anything, including landmines. They are vulnerable to everything.

JL: Through your position at UNHCR, what exactly are you hoping to accomplish?

AJ: With HALO, which is a great organization. We were there in Cambodia. We were… in one field they were demining [where] they had found three different mines. At the end of each day they explode them, and they let me explode one. It was a great feeling because you know something like that, if HALO hadnt been there and if you weren’t detonating it, that it might be more hurting someone, and you are getting rid of something that could be otherwise hurting you or deadly. So it is a great feeling.

JL: Are you able to describe personally the effect that landmines had on the victims in Cambodia, physically, psychologically and economically?

AJ: I think it’s difficult to describe because these people are victims of such horror, and yet they are so strong, that they don’t seem like victims. So, I think, you don’t want to shout that they are victims. We should express a point that they don’t have to go through this because they are such working independently or in conjunction with one, two or three other teams, with or without dogs. Mr. McCloy pointed out the flexibility this arrange- ment offers, saying, “We can shoot them all in at once or we can phase them in and rotate or our team then send them out two and three, two and three.” Rotating the teams between foreign assignments and their day-in-day-out jobs around Mozambique also keeps the men morale up. “You can just use these guys like a rag to wipe up the bat, they have to go and see their wives and kids. That’s one of the reasons we’ve got the QRDF bro- ken up into separate teams,” he explained.

Deployments

Despite the DOS’ best efforts to keep the teams near their families, the QRDF’s job descriptions—response to emergency demining situations anywhere in the world within two weeks of notification—means the men must keep their passports ready. Since its inception, the DOS has officially deployed QRDF compo- nents twice, to Sudan and then to Sri Lanka. While battling the heat in Sudan, two teams from the QRDF managed to demolish several essential roads “so that those people who were doing the peacekeeping and refugees who were returning could move around freely and do what they had to do,” Mr. McCloy said.

Another situation emerged soon af- ter the Sudan deployment, sending the remaining two QRDF teams to tropical Sri Lanka. The long-smoldering conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government has finally cooled off a bit, allowing thousands of refugees to take their first chance to return home in years. As in Kosovo, however, thousands of mineworkers listed their perfect opportunity for the QRDF to show its stuff. “In Sri Lanka they’re working for the government, but they are demining in the government occupied area where a large portion of the Tamil population is. So with the assist- ance of the government they’re conducting demining so the refugees can come and occupy the homes that they did before the war kicked them out of there,” Mr. McCloy announced. As in Kosovo, “they're there to try and pave the way for a heavy influx of refugees now that peace has broken out.”

While all four teams were occupied, a new and very different emergency situ- ation materialized in Nigeria. An ammu- nation depot exploded in Lagos, sending showers of UXO and red-hot shrapnel raining down on a nearby residential district. The DOS quickly scrambled an ad-hoc team of deminers from Mozambique, since it was a situation that certainly could be taken care of on an emergency basis by the resources we had available to us, “because the infra- structure was already in place, according to Mr. McCloy. The new teams, though operating in the same capacity as the QRDF and under the direction of the DOS, will not be maintained permanently. The mission in Sudan ended after five weeks, and the DOS foresees an in- country stay of at least three months for the Sri Lankan and Nigerian projects.

With one job under their belts and two others well underway, I asked Mr. McCloy to rate the teams’ performance so far. He said the only problems encoun- tered were “the simple stuff like how to import explosives into a country, stuff like that.” He continued, “There’s nothing there that hasn’t been dealt with as long as you understand that you don’t conduct each QRDF deployment based on what you did the last time. Basically, once you’ve got the bone structure of planning and foresight.”

The Verdict

With no major problems as of yet, Mr. McCloy eagerly shared his opinion of the QRDF’s performance to date. “I think you judge the success of an opera- tion by determining if it achieves what you sent it in to do. Like in Nigeria, they were in to clear up all that exploded ammunition, and the fact is that we’re getting rid of a lot of it,” he said. Such success has earned the QRDF com- mendations from officials in both the Nigerian and Sri Lankan governments. In Nigeria, Mr. McCloy reports that “the army is saying, ‘We wish you would stay longer,’ so that says we’re being suc- cessful down there.” And the Sri Lankan government loves it… because there was a need to get rid of thousands and thousands of mines so they could move again. The next three are each capable of

Ideology

The DOS designed the QRDF for very specific situations and therefore lim- its its deployment to suitable events. Mr. McCloy explained how the DOS deter- mines the QRDF’s missions: “There are some things that are going on every day in the demining landscape that the normal processes take care of. We look for places where quick demining assistance needs to be applied.” He added, “This program is not designed to cure a country’s demining ills. It’s sort of a band-aid for the fight. It’s only there to provide immediate assistance where no other assistance is available.” Living up to the “Q” in QRDF, the force’s deployments generally last three to six months, just enough to “serve as a bridge while the longer-term stuff is getting on the road,” according to Mr. McCloy.

There are some requirements that a situation must satisfy before the DOS will deploy the QDFE. For example, the DOS demands that hostilities cease prior to the teams’ departure in a bid to ensure the deminers’ safety. “We’re not putting them out there to get killed. They’re not sent in as a peace enforcing entity, but rather to reinforce peace. They’re not there to push people apart; they want to help get them back together,” Mr. McCloy stated. After all, deminers’ jobs are dangerous enough without having to worry about bullets flying overhead or directly at them.

The four teams are each capable of

realize the enormity of what is being done, and they are thankful for the effort that is being put into clean up all that exploded ammunition.”
One of a Kind: The Quick Reaction Demining Force

Building a Safer World, the Philly Way

With the creation of the Philadelphia-area Adopt-A-Minefield program, many community members have offered their time and effort to raise money and awareness for the landmine problem in Mozambique. With new goals at hand, Philadelphians can expect to see the campaign continue, focusing on Afghanistan and the rest of the world.

by Mike Felker

Introduction

In late 1999, members of the Philadelphia chapter of the United Nations Association (UNA) and Veterans for Peace began a UNA-UNA Adopt-A-Minefield campaign to raise money to demine a minefield in Mozambique. Over the next two years, in conjunction with the UNA chapter in Washington, D.C., $53,300 (U.S.) was raised to pay for a demining crew. This crew carried out an 11,811-square meter minefield in Ressano Garcia, located in the Maputo province in the southern section of Mozambique. This particular minefield is in an agricultural area. Despite the large signs warning of the minefield, local inhabitants utilized the minefield for carrying firewood and other necessities rather than making a long detour around the minefield; this shortcut has resulted in deaths and injuries. With the $31,300, demining efforts continued primarily of dogs and manual methods, started earlier this year. In anticipation of the cleared field, people are building houses around the minefield. Once the field is demined, these people will raise mazes, peanuts and manioc in the fertile soil, and the shortcut for carrying firewood will no longer be deadly.

The Philadelphia Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign

The Philadelphia-area Mozambique Adopt-A-Minefield campaign was created by Greater Philadelphia UNA board member Joan Reivich and myself—a Veteran for Peace member. Joan, a grandmother of 12, had long been involved by the use of AP landmines. She saw the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign as a concrete way of mobilizing the community to take action against landmine use and help ameliorate the damage caused by mines. Joan states, "The more I learned, the more deeply I began to care about this issue. Like most people, I knew a bit about landmines because of the public’s perception that it was a war that the U.S. had no business with. But I had no idea how many millions of these obscene weapons were still in place and the scale of the damage they do to individual lives and the development of nations. The more I learned, the more shocked I became. And the more angry I got at what our country had done and the International Landmine Ban Treaty. Spreading the word, involving others, and helping individuals and groups become part of the solution seemed the least I could do."

Spreading the Word

The main thrust of the Philadelphia area Mozambique Adopt-A-Minefield campaign has been presentations to religious groups, community organizations, elementary, high school, and college students; and gatherings in restaurants and private homes. These presentations, lasting from a half-hour to two hours, were usually made by Joan Reivich, and myself, often with other UNA and VFP members. In general, they consisted of an overview of the landmine crisis including a video, personal accounts of my experiences in Vietnam, arguments to the audience from Joan for raising money for the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign and entreaties from Joan to contact their government representatives to support the United States signing the Mine Ban Treaty. Over 50 presentations were made for the Mozambique campaign. After hearing a presentation, one congregation of a suburban church raised $2,000 for the Campaign. Joan and I have made presentations to approximately 500 Presbyterian ministers and lay-leaders. In turn, the Presbytery of Philadelphia passed a "Resolution On Landmines," which includes: "[making] landmines an on going priority, [appealing for] immediate ratification of the International Landmine Ban Treaty, and [encouraging] congregations to incorporate the UNA Adopt-A-Minefield campaign in their Mission Outreach."

We have also raised money by sending holiday gift cards to friends and family members of contributors who made a donation; a donation made in the last December, over $2,000 was donated through the gift cards. As another method of spreading the word, the Adopt-A-Minefield campaign has been promoted through the Philadelphia area newspapers, and the Adopt-A-Minefield website, which includes a "Make a Minefield" page, where one can enter a minefield's latitude and longitude and send a message to the UNA Adopt-A-Minefield campaign. To find out more, visit www.adoptaminefield.org.

Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2012