


[Table of Contents](#)
[Editorial](#)
[Focus](#)
[Special Report](#)
[Notes](#)
[Book Reviews](#)
[Briefs](#)
[Country Profiles](#)
[Journal Home](#)
[CISR Home](#)

## DDG Aid Workers Rescued

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Danish Demining Group aid workers Jessica Buchanan and Poul Hagen Thisted were captured by Somali pirates on 25 October 2011 while traveling through Gaalkacyo, the capital of the north-central Mudug region in Central Somalia.<sup>1</sup> Three months after they were taken hostage, U.S. Navy SEAL Team 6 carried out a rescue mission, leading both Buchanan and Thisted to safety.<sup>2</sup>

Buchanan and Thisted were working for DDG in northern Somalia, educating Somali children about the dangers of weapons. DDG has been working for several years in Africa and the Middle East in an effort to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance and provide explosive-remnants-of-war risk education and humanitarian relief to those in conflict zones.<sup>2</sup> DDG, along with other mine-action organizations, also works directly with the Puntland Mine Action Centre to “prioritize EOD, MRE, and survey tasks” in Somalia.<sup>3</sup>

While Somalia is known to be heavily contaminated with landmines, the location of those landmines remains vastly unknown. Conflict in the country has prevented any extensive surveying and removal in the area. By the end of 2010, there were at least 2,639 known casualties from mines/ERW in Somalia.<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of landmines in the area and the lack of knowledge of their specific location makes the mine-action efforts that much more pertinent for the safety of the people of Somalia.

Buchanan had worked for DDG since May 2010. Prior to joining DDG, she lived in Kenya and in 2007, began working at the Rosslyn Academy in Nairobi. She taught first, fourth and sixth graders at the Academy before moving to Somalia with her husband, Erik Landemalm, an Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa aid worker, in 2009.<sup>5</sup>



Jessica Buchanon

Thisted was a passionate DDG aid worker. According to his LinkedIn profile, he was stationed in Hargeisa, Somalia, since July 2009 as a manager for the Somali Religious and Traditional Leaders Peace Initiative, a program organized by the Danish Refugee Council, Finn Church Aid, and the International Horn University.<sup>6</sup> DDG has been providing aid



Paul Hagen Thisted

to Somalia for 14 years, which includes providing more than 100,000 internally displaced people in the Mogadishu area with daily meals, shelter and aid packages.<sup>1</sup>

During the rescue mission, Navy SEALs parachuted into the area after dark and traveled on foot to the captives' location. The SEALs then reportedly killed all nine captors before taking Buchanan and Thisted in a Black Hawk helicopter to Djibouti. 🚁

~ Katy Lovin, CISR staff

[TOP OF PAGE](#)

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[TOP OF PAGE](#)

### Endnotes

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