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Humanitarian Demining Accident and Incident Database

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DDAS Accident Report

Accident details

Report date: 08/07/2005	Accident number: 410
Accident time: 16:30	Accident Date: 09/12/2003
Where it occurred: Iyakachchi village, Vanni, Kilinochi	Country: Sri Lanka
Primary cause: Inadequate training (?)	Secondary cause: Management/control inadequacy (?)
Class: Handling accident	Date of main report: 10/12/2003
ID original source: RS	Name of source: LA NPA
Organisation: Name removed	
Mine/device: Fuze	Ground condition: bushes/scrub sandy soft
Date record created: 05/07/2005	Date last modified: 08/07/2005
No of victims: 1	No of documents: 2

Map details

Longitude:	Latitude:
Alt. coord. system: Not recorded	Coordinates fixed by:
Map east:	Map north:
Map scale:	Map series:
Map edition:	Map sheet:
Map name:	

Accident Notes

inadequate training (?)
inconsistent statements (?)
visor not worn or worn raised (?)
no independent investigation available (?)
protective equipment not worn (?)

Accident report

The picture below shows the deminers at the accident site.



An IMSMA Mine Accident Report was made available in October 2004. The Demining group also made available their own ancillary files [reproduced under *Other documents*]. IMSMA reports are summaries and so it is recommended that the other documents be studied in order to get a full picture of this accident.

From IMSMA report:

“At 16:30 Section Commander [the Victim] was moving to the rest area for a 10 minute break. On the way back he saw an unidentified object lying in the sand in the base lane. The object was a cylinder, approximately 12mm in length and 5mm in diameter. [The Victim] picked up the object and carried it back to the rest area. [The Victim] sat down in the rest area and took out a pin to remove some of the sand and dried mud that covered the object. He inserted the pin into one end of the cylinder in an attempt to flick out some mud that was stuck in a recess. The object exploded....”

No fragments of the object were found during the investigation. It is almost certain that the object was a detonator (or part thereof) that was somehow broken open exposing the primary high explosive. It is possible that when [the Victim] inserted the pin into the recess he scraped the exposed primary high explosive, which detonated.

[Pictures of the device and the parts removed prior to the accident were made available and are shown below].





[The Victim] had removed this visor on entering the rest area, though still wore his apron.”

The accident occurred in an area described as “soft” and “flat”, with “light bush”.

The last QA visit had occurred with 9 days of the accident (the IMSMA date field does not require a day, merely a month and year).

The Victim had completed a “Deminers” and “Section Commanders” training courses. Work had been ongoing at the site for 2 months, 1 week and 3 days. Deminers worked for 7.5 hours a day [in a split-shift system that gave a break during the hottest part of the day].

The Victim was treated within 2 minutes of the accident. Treatment took 4 minutes and he was then taken in a “safety vehicle” to a local hospital 27 km away in 22 minutes. [Total time to hospital – 30 minutes.]

The accident was reported to the demining group HQ “orally” at 17:30 on the day of the accident. The IMSMA report was dated on the following day.

Victim Report

Victim number: 538	Name: Name removed
Age:	Gender: Male
Status: supervisory	Fit for work: presumed
Compensation: Not made available	Time to hospital: 30 minutes
Protection issued: Short visor	Protection used: Frag jacket
Frag jacket	

Summary of injuries:

INJURIES

minor Face

minor Hand

AMPUTATION/LOSS

Fingers Left hand

COMMENT

See medical report.

Medical report

No formal medical report was made available.

The IMSMA report summarised the injuries as: “traumatic amputation of first joint of both the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, Superficial injuries to other fingers on both left and right hands, small cut below right eye.”

The Medic gave a statement that: “... we met [the Victim] walking towards us, assisted by a deminer. We stopped at a deminers rest area where I applied first aid to [the Victim]. I noticed extreme trauma to the tips of [the Victim]’s left hand thumb and two first fingers. There were also cuts on his right hand and face. I then accompanied [the Victim] to the hospital where the medical doctors took over care and treatment for [the Victim].”

Signed: Medic Team 04, 11 December 2003

Witness statements

WITNESS STATEMENTS FOR ACCIDENT 9 DECEMBER 2003. Translated by HDU Task Impact Assessment compiler, [Name excised].

[The Team-leader, Name excised], the team 04 leader, says: - I am the leader of team 04. With me 3 section leaders are working. First section leader is [the Victim] and the second [Section Leader 2, Name excised] and third [Section Leader 3, Name excised]. On 09.12.03 we started the evening work at about 3.30. I was making a direct observation over every team. While I was heading on [Section Leader 2, Name excised]’s Section that is working the opposite of the Road, I could hear a loud explosion. At about 4.35 pm I did not have a radio. I approached the medic. He said to me that the accident to place in the way of Samuthran and he was asked to come to the spot. I with the medic was going towards there along the safety line. On the way we saw [Deminer 1, Name excised] with injured person coming towards us. We identified that [the Victim] was injured on his left hand. Behind [the Victim] 2 more deminers, [Deminer 2, Name excised] and [Deminer 3, Name excised] also came. I asked them what has happened [the Victim] replied that he took a small strange thing and scratched it and at the time it exploded. He said it was a mistake.

I ordered to the medic to give him first aid and then I sent him to the hospital with the medic and [Deminer 1, name excised]. I enclose here statements of those who were on the spot when the accident took place.

[Deminer 1, Name excised]’s statement: - I, from Vaddakkachchi, am demining for the past 8 months in this team. At about 4.00p.m I was enjoying my rest in the rest area. [The Victim] came with a strange small thing and said that it must be an electric thing. He let me to have a look at it. Then I gave back it to him. [The Victim] sat down and began breaking it into small pieces. Having a wound on my leg I got permission to be in the rest area from my section leader, [Section Leader 3, Name excised]. Approximately 4.25 pm we were told that there was a mine in the field and then [the Victim] went to the Base. After leaving [the Victim], [Deminer 3, Name excised] and [Deminer 2, Name excised] started breaking it. I told them that it may be an explosive thing and throw it. At about 4.30 we were told to go back to the work. When [Deminer 2, Name excised] was going to the work, he took a tiny part of this small thing and handed it over to [the Victim] and said that [Deminer 1, Name excised] is believed that it must be an explosive thing.

[The Victim] came to me and said it is not explosive. But I told him that it must be an explosive thing. [The Victim] disdained my words and started scratching it with the safety pin. After him smelling it, he told it must be filled with mud. He tried to throw it but unfortunately it exploded on his hand. I took him to the medic. Coincidentally the medic came on the way of us. I handed him over to the medic. After giving the first Aid I was send to the hospital with the causality.

[Deminer 4, Name excised]’s statement: - I, from Mulliyavalia am working in the same team for the past 8 month. On 9.12.03 I took the same strange thing and gave it to [the Victim] who was very nearest to me. [The Victim] told me that it must not be an explosive thing. When I

got the rest area I saw the same strange thing into pieces and [the Victim] was not there. [Deminer 2, Name excised] took a tiny part of the same thing while he was going back to the duty. On the middle way back of [the Victim] to the rest area, he gave it to [the Victim]. [The Victim] in the rest area began to test it. At that time it exploded.

[Deminer 2, Name excised]'s statement: - I, from Mulangkavil am a deminer in the same team for the past 8 month. At about 3.04pm I was in the rest area. [The Victim] came there and told me to give the shear to my partner. I gave it and sat down in the rest area. I noticed that a strange thing into pieces. Immediately after [the Victim] was told that there is a mine in the minefield he went there. At that time my duty time is on. I took a tiny part of that strange thing and gave it to [the Victim]. I told him that [Deminer 1, Name excised] said that it must be an explosive thing. I went back to my duty.

[Deminer 3, Name excised]'s statement: - I was in rest in the appropriate area. [The Victim] came there with the same strange thing. He started breaking it and I also helped him. Then I went back to my work. On my way to work I could hear a loud explosion.

The medic stated: "I was at the control point of demining task HDU 080 when I heard an explosion from the working area of the task site. I looked at my watch and the time was 4:37 pm. I immediately called on the radio to ask what had happened and the section leader, [the Team Leader, Name excised], informed me that the section leader, [the Victim], had been injured. I, along with the team leader, were walking towards the accident site when we met [the Victim] walking towards us, assisted by a deminer. We stopped at a deminers rest area where I applied first aid to [the Victim]. I noticed extreme trauma to the tips of [the Victim]'s left hand thumb and two first fingers. There were also cuts on his right hand and face. I then accompanied [the Victim] to the hospital where the medical doctors took over care and treatment for [the Victim].

Signed: Medic Team 04, 11 December 2003

The Team Leader stated: "After inspecting the clearance lanes in minefield task 080A, I was walking towards task 079A when I heard an explosion from the area I just left. I checked my watch and the time was 4:35 pm. I hurried towards the control point of 080A to find out what had happened. I used the medics radio to confirm that one of my section leaders, [the Victim], had been injured. The team medic and I started walking towards the accident site (the deminers rest area) and met [the Victim], aided by a deminer, near the other sections rest area. [The Victim] told me that he had found a strange object and was inspecting it by scratching it when it exploded. The medic gave him first aid treatment in the deminers rest area where we met. [The Victim] was then transported to Kilinochchi hospital with the driver, medic and one deminer, who were given instructions to inform HQ of the incident."

Signed: Team Leader, Team04, 11 December 2003

Deminer 1 later stated: "I was in the rest area during my rest period for demining. At approximately 4:10 pm [the Victim] came to the rest area holding a strange object in his hand. I asked him "what is that thing?" he told me that it was something electrical. I took the object in my hands and had a look. It looked like a square shaped reflector from a flashlight but I suspected it to be dangerous, possibly explosive, and then gave it back telling him what I thought. [The Victim] took his helmet off, sat down and started pulling the object apart by breaking pieces off it. Soon after, [the Victim] was called out to the minefield where a mine had been found. He put the object down and went to the minefield.

After he left, 2 deminers, [names excised] picked up the object and continued breaking it apart. At about 4:30 pm the horn signalled the changeover of deminers and the two named deminers readied themselves for work. Before departing, [Deminer 2, Name excised] showed me part of the object he removed. After seeing it I was then sure it was some sort of explosive device. [The Victim] returned to the rest area and [Deminer 2, Name excised] told him that I think the object will explode. [The Victim] said to me that it will not explode. [The Victim] took a safety pin and started scratching and prodding the object. Some powder fell into his hand; he smelled it and said it must be sand or mud. I once again reminded him that I thought it was dangerous and it might explode. Within 10 seconds of saying this it exploded. Immediately [the Victim] screamed, I saw bleeding from his hands, and I called out to my section leader informing him who is injured.

I helped [the Victim] move towards the control point but we were intercepted by the medic and team leader near the other rest area. We stopped at that rest area while the medic treated [the Victim]. I accompanied [the Victim] and the medic to the hospital where I stayed by his side for the rest of the night. [The Victim] never lost consciousness throughout the time I was near him.

Signed: Deminer 1, Team 04, 11 December 2003

Analysis

The primary cause of this accident is listed as "*Inadequate training*" because the Section Leader did not recognise the danger of the device and allowed it to be investigated inside the rest area where deminers without PPE congregated. Some deminers recognised the danger and warned the Section Leader but he ignored them and initiated the detonator while not wearing a visor. If the entire device had detonated inside the rest area, the casualties could have been severe.

Some are minor discrepancies over the reported time of the accident and inconsistencies between the IMSMA summary and the witness statements. The device was not identified by the demining group. A trace of stencilling on the photograph of the device makes it likely that it was the fragmentation warhead from a Russian air-to-surface S-8 rocket.