The Human Face of EOD

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The Human Face of EOD

by Howard M. Thompson

Being a specialist insurance broker to explosive-ordnance-disposal organisations around the world has provided Howard Thompson with the opportunity to be on the sidelines of the humanitarian-demining community. But during a 10-day visit to Cambodia, he was able to experience first-hand the significance of humanitarian demining and clearance. He writes about this experience here.

For many years now, my company has specialised in the insurability requirements of minesweepers and explosive-ordnance-disposal operations operating around the world. During that time, I have learned much about the skills and methods engaged in the field and have been fortunate enough to visit many mine-clearance operations, primarily in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

In 2006, I joined one of my clients, Mines Advisory Group, on a 10-day visit to their operations in Cambodia and there saw even more forcefully what the “human” element of humanitarian demining is really all about.

Having seen many specialists working to the field, demining by hand with the aid of machines and dogs, I have nothing but admiration for their work. However, this visit showed me something to which, until then, I had not attached a true human face. Howard M. Thompson

The familiar sights of a demining programme were still on evidence; whether manual, mechanised—such as the Boma (see photo 2)—or of the countryMine Action Centre team in photo 3.

And of course there were some less familiar sights. For instance, MAG is unusual in involving female as well as male deminers. One young woman explained her story. Her husband had been killed by a mine, so she had to provide a living for herself and her three children. Working for MAG made much easier, she said, her helping her community and providing herself with a good living (see photo 4).

Another deminer (see photo 6) taking a break in the heat, was himself a mine victim. He had a family to support—and a large one. He said, “We, the members of a smaller area of the Cambodian community, therefore, gave him a better-than-average living to maintain his larger-than-average family.”

Moving on from where the work was being carried out, we entered the small village of Peakh Pot, which had been passed by only a short drive from the area where clearance work was still being carried out. In this village we really saw the full benefit clearance work can achieve. Young families were comfortable and secure, asking homes for themselves and creating the beginnings of a thriving community.

It was hard not to feel like an intruder in their world. Such thoughts were soon dispelled however; they made me feel so welcome and were very warm and friendly, which provided us enjoyment all around. I will build their memories here.

First, we met a woman who said that her husband worked across the border in Thailand cutting wood (see photo 7). She was happy to share her story with us, sitting on her bamboo village and the little boy was not so sure about us, though.

The next woman we met was far too comfortable. She lived in a rather fragile house, along with her children. Her husband had recently died of water poisoning and one of her children had to live elsewhere because there was no room for all of them in this new home. She had had back starts as she told her story.

She kept her distance from the other villagers and her children did not join the little miners who attached themselves to MAG. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house. She moved there to start a “village store” from her house.

Her story is a sad one, yet I hope her life and her children’s future will soon improve at any cause to feel like a real part of this new community.

In complete contrast, the man in photo 8 is responsible for the community’s irrigation supply, which was created from ground cleared by the MAG team. This proud man helps the growth of his and his neighbours’ crops. He needed very little persuasion to have his picture taken and to be photographed beside his pride and joy.

Photo 9 is a genuine display of a different sort of pride. A small boy delighted in showing us the recently created water supply and exactly how best it could be used, especially on a very hot day.

Could photo 10 be looked back upon in years to come as the start of the Cambodian neighbourhood Wal-Mart? This is one shrewd businesswoman! She moved here to start a “village store” from her house. She says the fair is hard and again safe, the knows the community will grow and the area will become wealthy as a result of the produce being farmed and the bamboos and fruit being harvested. What’s more, the mine clearance is nearby, coming to clean a large strip of land that is planned for store housing. As a family return in our business will grow. It seemed a very good business move to me.

We made an additional stop in this village to see a small mine-risk education campaign, class held by MAG community liaison personnel (see photo 10). One little boy proudly displayed the mine, though not stay at any explosion. Luckily he had survived reasonably unscathed; his playmate had not been so fortunate.

Our final visit was to Ta Lou, a school that was inaccessible due to mines when MAG first arrived in the area in the mid-1990s, but which is now flourishing.
In increasing the Impact of Mine-action Surveys

While mine-action surveys are an important tool in mine clearance, there are several challenges that must be overcome for survey results to be fully effective. Some of these changes include alterations in priority setting, information management and impact scoring. This article presents some potential obstacles to completing and evaluating mine-action surveys and proposes possible solutions to these challenges to increase their effectiveness and impact.

by Charles Downs [New York University Wagner School of Public Service]