I n January 2003, the Anti-Mine Network-Rwensori asked MAT Operations Director Ben Remfrey to conduct an assessment of the Kasese district in western Uganda. Reports from Uganda stating there was a landmine and unexploded ordinance threat to the local population drove the deployment.

Like many African countries, Uganda has experienced bloodshed as a result of major internal conflicts during the year since independence, and today internal security problems remain with organisations like the Lord’s Resistance Army. The legacy of this fighting is areas of land contaminated by anti-personnel mines and UXOs as well as approximately 1.4 million internally displaced people. These problems are exacerbated by a recent influx of Sudanese refugees into northern Uganda.

The Allied Democratic Forces further contaminated the western region, particularly the Rwenzori Mountains, during the infiltration and heavy fighting in the late 1990s. The most heavily contaminated region, however, is still northern Uganda; it has been the area of some of the fiercest fighting between the LRA and the Ugandan People’s Defence Force.

During his time in Uganda, Remfrey met the Johnson family, who survived the tragedy of the war that raged around them. They survived from their displacement to their devastated village with their five children who were all born in the middle of war and hardship and livelihood. The children were playing to the rear of their home when there was loud noise, which caused the children to be frightened to an MF9 submunition, and it detonated, killing three of the children in instantaneous execution and injuring two.

Uganda Needs Assessment

The plight of the Johnson family became a catalyst for action, and MAT set out to secure funding to conduct a needs assessment and implemented a mine-risk education programme. The MAT report was sent to the United Nations, which incorporated large excerpts as part of its official inter-agency report in July 2004. Comic Relief donated £50,000 to MAT in June 2004, which enabled MAT to conduct an eight-month needs assessment in the western district of Uganda.

Adrian Sahatciu, who had been a member of the MAT Kosovo Mine Risk Education Programme in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, was the principal Needs Assessment Coordinator and was assisted by Netsa Solomon, who had worked for MAT previously in her home country of Eritrea in 2002. The NA team based itself in the Kasese district and, in conjunction with Anti-Mine Network-Rwensori, the team members immersed themselves in the local communities. During the two-week build-up phase, MRE Assistants were trained in interview techniques, methods of systematic collection and analysis of data, map reading, radio transmission procedure and first aid, as well as the preparation of reporting and briefing documents. After an initial three months, the teams underwent a week-long course, primarily concentrating on map-reading, ground appreciation and data analysis.

The team members of the needs assessment were to appraise the level of contamination in the suburbs of Kasese, identify and record all suspected dangerous sites in the areas assessed, and identify and verify all landmines/UXO casu- als. The NA also sought to evaluate the existing knowledge of the local populations concerning threats of landmines and UXOs, calculate the “at-risk” section of the local community and analyse the socioeconomic impact of the landmine/UXO contamination on the district.

Motorbikes proved to be a highly valuable transport for the team, as they were used to access the most remote villages and thereby obtain the information required to satisfy NA objectives. With a determined and creative approach, the project staff managed to gain the respect and trust of the people of the Kasese district and gleaned valuable information and data that can now be used toward implementing an effective National Mine Action Plan.

This NA is still the only detailed study of any district in Uganda, and it identified 37 suspected dangerous areas. However, the most heavily affected districts in the north are yet to be fully surveyed. Additional donor funding is required to implement future MRE and clearance programmes.

A New Partnership in Kenya*

The U.K.-funded International Mine Action Training Centre opened 17 Feb. 2005. In less than a year, the Centre has trained and equipped 370 African deminers to International Mine Action Standards’ countries were needed. Consequently, the IMATC sought a suitable organisation to provide the technical ability and discovered MAT working in Uganda.

A new partnership has now evolved between the IMATC and the Ugandan army/policeman units to conduct particular aspects of humanitarian mine action (whether that be manual mine clearance, breach-area clearance, IED or Technical Survey), and MAT provides the Technical Advisors to ensure the training occurs and that standards are rigorously maintained.

The IMATC is ideally located in Nairobi, Kenya, on the doorstep of some of the most deeply affected African nations. The IMATC is currently involved in training personnel for demining operations in Entretia, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda and Somaliland. With the majority of mine-action nongovernmental organisations that operate in and around eastern Africa having developed a partnership with the International Mine Action Training Centre, which resulted in a state-of-the-art mine-detection dog training facility in Kenya. MAT’s collaboration with and assistance to eastern African organisations has put the area on the path to becoming mine safe.

by Nigel Howard [Mines Awareness Trust]
the IMATC to become humanitarian deminers and EOD technicians respectively, was funded by the British government’s Department for International Development and the U.K. Ministry of Defence. MAT has been contracted through the United Nations Development Programme by the Department for International Development to provide the Technical Advisors to supervise the Ugandans in their new role, ensuring that the International Mine Action Standards are maintained and the teams operate at their maximum capability.

Upon completion of the course and repatriation to Uganda, MAT was essential in helping to shape the strategic policy for the deployment of these newly trained forces. The Office of the Prime Minister and the mine-action Technical Advisor for the UNDP have agreed to acquire the necessary life support and operational funding for the teams to undergo refresher training and deploy to the field to conduct clearance operations. This has by no means been an easy feat, and with this new approach to national governmental infrastructure to include mine action within its national regeneration plan and assign essential funding and personnel.

As present, MAT Chief Technical Advisor in Uganda Danny Dannenberg is assisting in the development of the national mine-clearance programme and will then deploy on operations with the UPEF. It is a very delicate balance that the team has to manage, as there must be some close supervision to ensure standards are maintained while allowing the command element to develop.

The government of Uganda’s mine-action aspiration is to free the country from the most severe humanitarian and economic effects of landmines and UXO by 2009. The prioritisation of mine-action tasks will be in accordance with the government’s newly published document, “National Policy for IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons],” taking into consideration the government’s rehabilitation and reconstruction requirements. In order to implement this policy effectively, the staff needs a great deal of cultural sensitivity and empathy to ensure that the right capability is employed to maximum effect.

Concurrently, MAT has secured additional funding from the UNDP to conduct another needs assessment, which will concentrate on the two northern districts of Lira and Soroti. With the desire for this NA to incorporate as much distance, there is a considerable drive by all involved toward securing mine funding to make this possible so that valuable and critical information required for a focused and efficient mine-action plan can become a reality.

Mine Detection Dog Programme At IMATC

With the development of Uganda’s mine-action capacity, MAT has started to build a mine-detection dog training facility on the grounds of the IMATC. As present, MAT Chief Technical Advisor and head of the MDD training facility, Damian Leitch, the MAT Technical Advisor and head of the MDD training facility, the Dirk-Ridge Dog Centre, controls the day-to-day running of the centre and occasionally assists the instructors from the IMATC during the course. Leitch provides specific EOD knowledge from his experiences gained during his career in a British Army EOD team operating in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Macedonia. Andreas Steinberg, the MDD TA employed by Securatec, is responsible for the actual dog and handler training beyond the standard required by the IMATC. Once the MDD teams are trained, MAT will deploy them to countries that need MDDs, and with the help of NGOs/commercial organisations, will put the MDDs to work, utilising them in area reduction and quality assurance as part of a national mine-action programme.

The Future

MAT has provided programmes in Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and developed MDD capability in Kenya. MAT aims to consolidate these activities and to expand its “toolbox” most likely towards the mine-clearance team.

With the influx of mine-action activity in Sudan and as donors are re-educated to the plight of Africa’s forgotten liar, the threat of landmines and UXO, a concerted effort to develop a more efficient, affordable method of dealing with these devices is needed so the people can return to their way of life without fear of death or injury. Without a multifaceted mine-action programme, fully implemented at the U.N. or national level, Uganda will be unable to move from the shadow of landmines and UXO.

For additional references for this article, please visit http://dias.pau.net/journal/10.1/jn focus/trends/miniwolf/sudan.htm

See Endnotes, page 109

**Picking the Right Tool for the Right Task: Mine Clearance with the MineWolf Machine in Sudan**

In 2005, Norwegian People’s Aid used the mechanical mine-clearance machine MineWolf to aid in the demining process in Yei, South Sudan.

The MineWolf system combines both the tiller and flail systems. The mine-clearance team overcame several challenges to transport the 25-ton machine to South Sudan. Once here, the MineWolf was used to clear over 280,000 square meters (39 acres) of land, including a school complex, a planned housing complex and a teacher-training centre.

by Christoph Freese (MineWolf Systems GmbH)

S udan has been embossed in a civil war for all but 10 years of its post-independence existence, making its internal hardest part of Africa’s longest running conflict. The civil war has created a considerable problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance in Sudan. In general, the mines are located along communications and logistical lines and around towns and military facilities. In 2002, the United Nations reported that landmines on key logistical routes were a great impediment to the delivery of humanitarian aid. Consequently, much of the aid has been delivered by air at tremendous cost. The involved parties have specified clearance of the road network as the first priority, the second priority being access to water and the third, food security. Almost four years after setting these priorities, are we still struggling with the most severe humanitarian and economic effects of landmines and UXO.

In 2005, Norwegian People’s Aid decided to support its mine-action program in Yei with a mechanical mine-clearance machine called the MineWolf. The MineWolf is a German machine that combines the advantages of both the tiller and flail systems. It is designed as a multi-purpose tool to provide maximum flexibility for the user, especially in the challenging environment of Sudan. As a result of a feasibility study in January 2005, it became clear that in order to support and move a 25-ton machine in South Sudan, a well-equipped and perfectly organized team must be formed to deliver cost-effective results. The main challenges would be transportation, hard ground conditions during the dry period and dense vegetation after the rainy period. Based on its experience in the Balkans, MineWolf Systems provided NPA with a tailor-made transport and support solution.

Getting There and Moving Around

To achieve operational flexibility and maximum deployment, the system needs its own transport and support assets. Taking into