The fungus, a white-rot variety of Phlebia radiata, then devours the explosive material inside the bomb, rendering it harmless. Should the explosive detonate, the fungus disintegrates with the material.

By allowing manufacturers to control the content of the explosive-pellet mixture, they will be able to determine how long an unexploded package will be left dangerous.

Robert Riggs of Texas has filed a patent for pellets of dormant fungal spores that could be mixed with explosives before being loaded into an explosive package. The dry spores remain dormant until moisture in the air traverses down the wick of an unexploded package and germinates the spores.

The expanding role of mine action

RONCO’s guys are never hesitant or ill-equipped for a mission, whether it’s a task to destroy mines, empty a bunker filled to the brim with rockets or respond to an IED threat. In their careers, they have defined, developed and destroyed it all and effectively transferred these skills to host-nation personnel. Oftentimes, RONCO Advisors work alongside these people to mentor them every step of the way, assisting in tracking ordnance for on-site detonation or hosting maintenance on a truck for transport to a central disposal site. As evidenced in the company’s recent post-conflict experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, RONCO has created specialized EOD capacities to address specifically the ERW threat as an extension of mine action. The extremely dangerous nature of working in these fragile environments has required the deployment and use of security in mine action, an added component to safeguard RONCO’s people while fulfilling its commitment to the host nation and a testament to its commitment to this expanding mine-action role. See Endnotes, page 112

The Deminer

Prionous snakes are some of the less ominous dangers Bogdany encounters in the field. Below the surface of the ground lies a more deadly threat: landmines. “There were situations when I was a deminer that I could thank only God for being alive and in one piece,” she says. Such an incident occurred while she was working in Slavonia. “I was in a fight with my boyfriend, very unbalanced and stupid. I know that now. I thought that my personal problems wouldn’t interfere with my work. I was wrong.”

At the end of the work period, Bogdany’s Team Leader told her that she had to finish her section before they went home. Frustrated with her boyfriend and angry with her Team Leader, she finished clearing the section of the minefield. “The next day I went over the site I cleared with a metal detector and found my footprint in the dirt that covered an AP [anti-personnel] mine.”

“That day changed my life,” says Bogdany. “I have thought about that ever many times and every time the same conclusion comes to my mind: ‘Yes, I believe that God watches over me.’”

Not many deminers who have had a similar experience have gone back to work the next day. Bogdany returned to work. “I don’t know where I got the strength to do that,” she explains.

She returned to work as if nothing happened, but Bogdany broke up with her boyfriend. “I couldn’t allow myself to make the same mistake again.” Her relationship with her Team Leader changed. “I used to admire him, but now I realized that he didn’t care for his team. He cared for how many square meters we cleared.” Bogdany says that as a result of the experience, she promised herself that if she ever...
became a Team Leader, people and their safety would come first and not the daily results. “Naturally, daily achievements count, and that is how Leea does a good Team Leader—managing to have high productivity but not jeopardizing safety.”

The Team Leader

As a Team Leader, day’s work for Bogdany might involve guiding two demining machines and eight person demining team at the same time. She says this is not difficult if both the team and the machines are loaded in the same place or near another. However, deminers must be at least 200 meters (660 feet) away from each of the machines. “My team is often on one side of the field and the machines, naturally, are all the way on the other side of the field,” she explained. “Instead, I did a lot of walking around like some lost fly, and I am dressed to full equipments.”

The work not only mentally and physically challenges Bogdany, but it also affects her emotionally. After two Croation deminers were killed and one was hospitalized, she says. “My friends try to convince me that this comes with the job and I know that, but somehow I am not satisfied with that solution. I think that Team Leaders and Supervisors are mainly responsible for most accidents.”

She thinks a Team Leader’s most important job is taking care of his or her team and safety on the site. “It is a really big responsibility and a person must recognize the situation and not push it. You must know every person, his way of thinking and limits. It is hard to work with people, but the reward is big.”

Bogdany says it is difficult to combine work with work after every landmine incident. She thinks that discussing it with the team is better than not talking about it at all. What we all can and have to do is learn something from those incidents and try not to bring our colleagues and ourselves into a similar situation,” she explains. “I’ve noticed that most accidents happen at the end of the working period. I think that concentration falls and everybody is nervous and not thinking right.”

On Bogdany’s one-year anniversary of being a Team Leader she said: “My biggest reward is that I can go to sleep every evening knowing that my team is okay.”

Thinking about the Future

Every week-end in mine action has developed much quicker and deeper than I thought it would,” says Bogdany. “I became a Team Leader just 15 months after I met and became friends with many people who are also involved at mine action. I have gained more confidence in myself.”

Looking to the future, she says, “If God gives me health and luck, I will be involved in demining until my pension. I just hope that everything will turn out right.”

Silvija Bogdany remembers a long talk she had with her sister. Emilia, who retired from demining when she got married. “She told me one thing and I think about it every now and then. She told me that when she quit demining she realized for the first time how dangerous the job is. She is more concerned for me now than she was for herself when she was a deminer. Maybe it is better for not to think about that.”

An Interview with Silvija Bogdany

Where do you see mine action in the next 10 to 20 years, and where do you fit into this vision?

One thing is certain—they will always be minefields and mine action in the demining will continue for many years. I think that in 10 to 20 years, demining will still be demining as it is now, to their work. I would like to see more equipment and equipment, which will help deminers. World country working for an NGO (non-government organization) is a super mine-risk education. When money and other obstacles were no object, how would you go about dealing with the world’s mine problem?

If money were no object, hypothetically speaking, we wouldn’t have a problem because it would be an easy fight for people. Almost every mine doesn’t work well—fist type of mine action was launched where the mines would come out. World country working for an NGO (non-government organization) is a super mine-risk education.

What do you feel are arts in the demining world that can be improved?

I would invest more money in technology research and in new technology; I would invest more money in research and in new equipment and in equipment. Quality assurance and quality control are of big importance to demining. Before and during the clearance process and later in the final release, it would be essential that all inspection, clearing, processing, and clearing procedures be conducted in accordance with International Mine Action Standards."

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APOPO is a Belgian-African nongovernmental organization that trains rats to be at new mine-detection tool. The authors describe the basic idea behind this unique concept.

No Wizards, Just Patient Teachers

by Bart Weetjens [APOPO] and Jennette Townsend [Institute for Mine Action Information Center]

The presence of landmines all over the world is an issue the United Nations, governments, and other world organizations are trying to address. But the difficult question lies in how to find metal-based landmines using metal detectors because iron-containing metals in sub-Saharan Africa trigger the detector indiscriminately. Since every signal has to be checked, this method is not very useful in certain soils. One organization, APOPO, offers a unique approach to landmine detection. In Tanzania and Mozambique, mine-detection rats are now being used.

Rats show much promise in furthering mine detection. Like mine-detecting dogs, they have a highly developed sense of smell. APOPO trains rats in ten to direct mines in the field using vapor detection technology. Silvija Bogdany comes from the explosives within them, the rats are able to use their