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US Pacific Command: PACOM Demining

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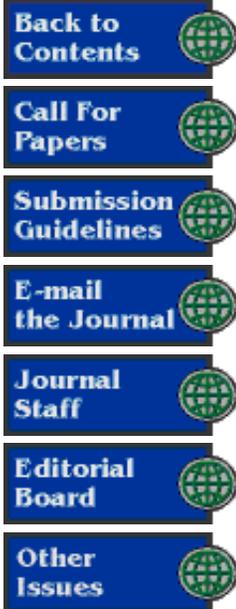
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The Journal of Humanitarian Demining



US Pacific Command

"PACOM Demining"
Major Matthew T. Carr

Overview

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The responsibility for humanitarian demining operations and training in the US Pacific Command falls on the Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOCPAC), which is located at Camp H.M. Smith in Hawaii. SOCPAC is the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (USCINCPAC) executive agent for all demining operations and related activities such as mine awareness.

In all countries, the Commander's intent is to facilitate the abilities of the host nation to sustain its mine clearance and mine awareness programs. The training and assistance efforts focus on building those mine clearance and mine awareness capacities as well as related capacities incidental to demining operations such as medical skills, small unit leadership skills, and truck driving. Some assistance is provided in the management of demining operations at the regional or national level as required. The training and assistance efforts produce competent individuals who can both implement the skills they learn and teach these skills to others.

The focal point for our demining operations in each country is a Demining Coordinator assigned to the U.S. Embassy office. The coordinator's responsibility includes coordinating the arrival and departure of U.S. forces; working with host nation organizations, customs requirements, and communications requirements; arranging MEDIVAC capabilities; and, most important, keeping the U.S. Ambassador and Defense Attaché informed regularly about all demining operations.

Our teams coordinate and work closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in country. We continually assess our training course in consultation with the NGOs and discuss with them ways to improve it. Our demining coordinator and the NGOs have a good working relationship. They recruit and hire the personnel we train prior to their arrival at the training courses. Our Program of Instruction (POI) is about 10 weeks in duration and gives a full basic demining and UXO clearance course that includes demolitions, basic first aid and some organization.

The Pacific also uses the Demining Support System (DSS). The system provides interactive multimedia modules for demining training, access to a database of world landmines (MineFacts©), and development of mine awareness materials directly related to the local threat. A system was given in February to UXO Lao. UXO Lao uses the system for efforts in Community Awareness.

Cambodia

In Cambodia prior to 1994, mines inflicted about 300 casualties per month and disrupted the country's economic growth by degrading transportation infrastructure and removing arable land from production. These mines were sown over a 20-year period by various factions. SOCPAC and its Army component, in cooperation with other agencies, developed a training program for the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) to improve mine awareness, mine clearance, and medical treatment of mine casualties. Operating since 1994, this program aims to "train the trainer," to provide the CMAC and Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) with the capability to perform mine awareness activities, clear mines, and treat mine casualties. Overall, SOCPAC support to the Cambodian demining program has been extremely well received and has cut Cambodia's mine casualties from 300 to 100 per month.

The political situation in Cambodia led to a suspension of assistance in mid-1997. Cambodia is expected agree to resume training after the upcoming elections. At that time, probably late summer or early fall 1998, USCINCPAC will conduct a full assessment of Cambodian demining and then restart training.

Laos

In the spring of 1995, the People's Democratic Republic of Laos requested United States assistance in clearing unexploded ordnance (UXO) and land mines from their country. Northern Laos contains numerous fields of UXO; southern Laos contains numerous minefields left over from years of warfare. Each year, land mines and UXO kill or maim countless hundreds of civilians and livestock throughout Laos. The people of Laos were facing a humanitarian disaster.

In June 1996, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) arrived in Laos to carry out a humanitarian training mission to develop a self-sufficient Laotian capability to conduct demining and UXO clearance operations. The U.S. training is based on the concept of "train the trainer." The goal was to create a self-sufficient Lao cadre of trainers to continue the program after the U.S. completes its humanitarian assistance mission. U.S. personnel worked with the Lao government's primary organization,

Unexploded Ordnance Laos (UXO LAO). UXO LAO develops the plans and priorities for UXO removal throughout Laos.

U.S. SOF training in demining and UXO for UXO LAO students focused on two main areas: clearance and community awareness. Clearance training provided basic instruction to the demining platoons' deminers on removing mines and UXO safely and effectively. Clearance courses include instruction in land navigation, radio procedures, demolition and minefield operations. Additionally, driver training was given to personnel selected to operate vehicles for the clearance teams. The nine weeks of instruction culminated in a comprehensive practical exercise.

Students who complete the demining course are employed by two separate Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These organizations hire the trained deminers and employ them in demining/UXO removal operations throughout Laos. NGOs coordinate and supervise the demining/UXO removal units throughout the country. The U.S.-trained students are employed in UXO removal by NGOs for approximately six months. After that, the best deminers return to start a cadre of instructors. The cadre will allow the school to become self-sufficient with little or no assistance from the U.S.

U.S. SOF also taught a basic community awareness course, with the goal of selecting and training the instructor cadre for follow-on classes. The community awareness course included instruction in developing, field-testing, and disseminating community awareness (media) products. During this seven-week course, the class observed an actual community awareness team working in Xieng Khouang province. The students who graduated from the first community awareness course were immediately employed by UXO LAO to perform as instructors at the training center. Follow-on courses will be taught by this initial cadre with assistance from the U.S. instructors.

Throughout the instruction, the focus and goal was to develop a self-sufficient Laotian force capable and confident of conducting and sustaining demining and UXO removal. The instruction has helped Laos progress toward a self-sufficient solution to their land mine and UXO problems.

[Laos segment reprinted with permission of the Asia-Pacific Defense FORUM Magazine Source: <http://www.pacom.mil/forum/laos.htm>]

Thailand

The Government of Thailand is expected to formally ask the U.S. for assistance in clearing mines along the Thailand-Cambodia border. In response, the Interagency Working Group (IWG) will send an assessment team to develop the scope and nature of this assistance. USCINCPAC will follow shortly thereafter with a more detailed assessment. The

Vietnam

Although we understand that Vietnam has a considerable amount of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and landmines, the Government of Vietnam has made no official request for U.S. military assistance. U.S. NGOs, however, are working with the Republic of Vietnam on this and related issues.
