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## Mine Action in Cambodia

Tim Grant

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notes  
FROM  
the  
FIELD



# CAMBODIA

## A Stepping Stone for Mine Awareness

by Tim Grant,  
consultant/  
photographer

### Introduction

During the past five years, I have worked in four different mine awareness programs. The first was in 1990, with the Land Mine Awareness Program (LMAP) whose mandate was to reach the Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai/Cambodian border. LMAP was the first mine awareness program to operate in the South East Asian region and was run through the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with funding by the Office of the U.N. Secretary General for the Coordination of Cambodian Humanitarian Assistance Program.

My job, as media coordinator, was to design and produce all the education materials for the program and to run the informal media component. After

LMAP finished, I entered Cambodia and set up the first mine awareness program there, which was called the Mine Awareness Training Team (MATT) and was funded by World Vision Cambodia (WVC). As program manager, it was my job to structure the program, adapting LMAP materials with new designs and approaches. I handed the running of MATT over to the local staff in 1994, and it is still successfully operating. As a consultant to a Cambodian/U.S. government initiative, I used my mine awareness experience to assist with the setting up and training of soldiers from the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF). The goal for this program was to create teams that could enter insecure areas where other mine awareness programs cannot go and train those people who are living on the front line.

### Role of Mine Awareness Education in Preventing Injuries

In Cambodia, there are more than 40,000 people who are disabled due to landmines. It is estimated that between 100 to 300 people per month step on mines. In October 1995, in just one province of Cambodia, 13 children were killed and injured by mines and UXO. Landmines must be recognized as significant contributors to the ongoing impoverishment of mine-affected communities. They are also a constant source of fear and insecurity for the population. In countries that have been mindlessly sown with landmines, demining is overwhelmingly the most pressing need. I see mine awareness as absolutely necessary until the mines cease to be such a threat.

### Mine Awareness in Conjunction with Demining Programs

At the rate of current demining in Cambodia, it may take more than 60 years to clear the mines from the most important areas—that is, if they stopped laying mines today. Deminers must assess the priority areas and clear these first. For the people living in the lower priority areas, mine awareness is their protection. Mine awareness should never be presented as a 100 percent guarantee that will stop people from stepping on mines, but it is the safest way for people to inhabit dangerous areas. Local people must be aware that it is up to them to protect themselves from becoming another mine victim.

The mine awareness messages must be repeated in many different media forms. People have become accustomed to living in mined areas, and subsequently, need constant reminders of the dangers. Different groups must be especially targeted. Common examples include children who have grown up with mines as ordinary objects and have little fear of them; young men who think it is brave to be seen handling mines; forest collectors who believe their fates are already destined, and therefore, do not take proper precautions; and women who spend most of their time in the villages and consequently have less experience with and knowledge of the mine danger. In Cambodia, people are forced by economics to venture into possible mined areas. In many cases, a safety message such as “Do not enter into known or likely mined areas” is not heeded. Some people have no choice but to enter into known danger areas or they will starve. Children are often in charge of their family’s buffalo herd, requiring them to continually venture to new areas to look for more grass, which typically leads them to mined areas, as they are the most overgrown. It is at these times that techniques such as recognizing warning clues, retracing footsteps and marking and reporting are useful skills.

There is debate as to whether the marking of mined areas is more effective than mine awareness. In Cambodia, this does not seem to be the case. People are suspicious of mine signs and sometimes think that the person erecting the sign is hiding something valuable or that they are claiming the land as their own. Mine signs do not last long in this tropical, termite-ridden environment, hence they require continual replacement. Also, a mine sign is a valuable sturdy piece of material that has many purposes. I have seen them fashioned into buckets, used to patch roofs, as a hand fan and as children’s toys. On the other hand, mine awareness equips people with survival techniques to use in the field. During my research period, I found that those who survived the

longest in the most heavily mined areas were the ones who knew the mine awareness messages and had practiced them. It is essential to equip those living with mines with as many survival techniques as possible.

### Training

In LMAP and MATT, we had experienced trainers instruct the mine awareness teachers of proper procedures and techniques. I tried to hire trained, experienced teachers for the MATT program, never deminers or ex-soldiers. My view is that military personnel already possess too much technical information in mine awareness terms, which they could, inadvertently, pass on to the villagers. The mine awareness teachers are taught all the information that is necessary for them to pass on safety messages and not any potentially dangerous in-depth technical details. They are instructed in the “Teacher’s Notes.” If you are ever asked questions that are too technical, relating more to demining or the workings of a mine, you could answer, “Sorry, I do not know that information because this is a mine awareness program, not a demining program.”

### Job Descriptions

The supervisor’s task was to function as a liaison with the authorities, plan the schedule, supervise the staff, discuss local issues with the village headperson, write a report on each village and fill in as a teacher when necessary. The teachers would give formal lessons in different parts of the village, using a combination of silk screens, models, posters and simulations as aids for their presentations. After the formal lessons were over, they would visit homes, gathering small groups for more personalized train-



A house visit  
by a CMAC mine  
awareness team leader.  
Photo © CMAC

CMAC staff present mine  
awareness messages to NGO  
staff who are going to work in  
remote areas of Cambodia.  
Photo © CMAC



notes  
FROM  
the  
FIELD

ing. Throughout the day, the media assistants would play the video, display the materials, play games with the children and hang posters. This combination of different mediums and media helped to cater to people's different tastes, reaching many sections of the population. In the formal setting, detailed techniques are delivered in a serious manner, simplified concepts are presented informally as entertainment and printed materials are used as a reference and for studying.

**Security Issues**

Because of security concerns, the teams would return to the town every night after visiting one village per day. To overcome the problems involved with only day visits (i.e., not reaching people who are out in the field everyday who consequently are the ones who need the messages the most), we employed one local person as our village representative. Their job required them to visit all the villages within their local area, play the video, conduct mine awareness lessons at night and update the posters.

The areas that are the most heavily mined are also the areas that are the least secure and prone to bandit and guerrilla attacks; consequently, we equipped each car with a radio for security purposes, which also helped field coordination. I spent a lot of time reminding the teams of the importance of their job, which is to help save people's limbs and lives. As it became clear to them that their suggestions and observations were being listened to and acted upon, they started to take a more personalized interest in the program. Toward the end of my term with MATT, the staff had started to develop pride in their work and were coming up with their own new ideas and initiatives.

**Local Cooperation**

In Cambodia, it was imperative to have the support and cooperation of the local authorities. Visits to all the necessary authorities from the top down had to be made, first by the program manager and then the team supervisors. We provided all the necessary authorities with copies of our printed materials and a T-shirt as a gift. In turn, they encouraged the villagers under their control to attend our lessons, locate the best facilities and sometimes supply lunch for the staff. As the mine issue is too severe for any official to ignore, it was in everyone's interest to allow the program into all accessible areas. In general, it was not too hard to get a reasonable proportion of the village population to attend a session. Some came out of curiosity, but most were quite worried about living among mine fields and wanted to learn new techniques to protect themselves.

**Modifications**

The messages that are now included in the national Cambodian curriculum have come from eight years of testing, information gathering and trial and error. The LMAP Curriculum Developer was from Afghanistan's Operation Salamâs Mine Awareness Program, and she brought its curriculum and materials with her. These materials and the curriculum were adapted for a Cambodian audience through questionnaires and interviews. Many of the basic messages, such as "Do not touch," "Ask the locals for the safe path," "Stay on the safe path at all times" and "Retracing footsteps," remained the same as in the Afghan curriculum, and I think are transferable across all mine awareness programs. Despite the similarities, many changes were made to the details and techniques.

LMAP was located on the Thai side of the Cambodian border at a time when foreigners could not enter Cambodia. So, information on the mine types, warning signs and local habits had to be gathered from Cambodian soldiers, Thai authorities and refugees within Thailand. Some of the information, such



People have become accustomed to living in mined areas. Photo c/o CARE

as what warning signs they used to indicate a mined area, was not always easy to obtain. When I first arrived in Cambodia, my assistant, Mounh Sarath, and I conducted a three-month survey of mine awareness knowledge of the people who inhabited the most heavily mined areas. The survey confirmed that most of the curriculum points were correct, plus new information was gathered to refine the curriculum. Later, with the help from MAG and CMAC, we combined the MATT curriculum with MAG's to become the national curriculum. The curriculum consisted of a list of main points set out so the teacher can reference them easily during a session. Combined with this list was "Teacher's Notes," which gave hints on pre-

sentation, encouraging audience participation, necessary technical notes and the background for some of the more complicated concepts, such as fate, magic and karma.

**Children**

The messages of "Do Not Touch Mines/UXO" must be stressed repeatedly to the children. Surveys have shown that a significant number of child injuries and deaths come from playing with mines/UXO. Children are naturally curious and tend to touch things despite what they are told. Making the "Do Not Touch" message into a catchy tune can help the children to remember and heed this main message. Taking into account that a child's most common chore is to herd the animals and collect firewood, the next most important messages to stress should be how to identify the most likely mined areas, how to recognize warning clues, how to recognize warning signs and how to retrace your footsteps out of a mine field.

**First Aid**

The same problems arose with first aid. There is strong debate about the details of first aid training and whether it should be taught at all. Some medical people think that no one should be taught to apply a tourniquet to stop bleeding, as tourniquets can be very dangerous and may cause more damage because it will stop the blood from getting to the tissue below the tourniquet. Many people lose more of their limb than necessary because their rescuers did not know that the tourniquet must be released. In most cases, applying a compress to the wound can stop bleeding. Their views have come from experiencing many cases where whole legs have had to be amputated because the tourniquet was not released to allow bleeding. (There is a huge difference in quality of life between an above knee amputee and a below knee amputee.) On the other hand, other medical people say that the tourniquet should be used because as many people die from a loss of blood on the way to the hospital as from improperly applied tourniquets.

The MATT staff thought it was Khmer folklore to automatically apply a tourniquet; so, it is better to teach the people to apply a tourniquet the correct way. In case they do apply the tourniquet unnecessarily, they would then know to release it after a proper period of time to save the rest of the limb. In this case, they decided to stop teaching the tourniquet method and change the curriculum to instruct people to apply a firmly tied bandage compressed around the wound, but with a reference to the tourniquet. If you cannot stop the bleeding by this



Mine awareness media event at a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. Photo c/o Tim Grant

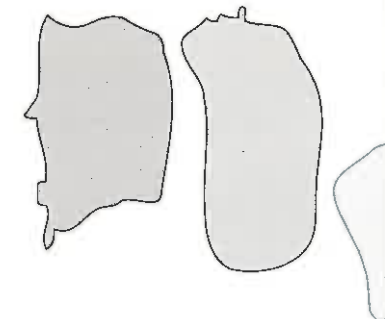
method, only then is it necessary to use a tourniquet. First aid was not taught to the children and is given only to the adults at the end of the instruction on mine field rescue procedures (i.e., prodding).

**Real Mines and UXO vs. Models**

I have seen real mines and UXO being used in a formal setting for identification purposes and felt it went against the messages. At one session, a UNTAC soldier had approximately 20 active mines laid out on a bench in front of the audience. During the lesson, a small child wandered up and went up to touch a mine; her mother managed to pull her away just in time. Later, when he was demonstrating how booby traps work, he removed the pin from a grenade before he placed it in a tin can. This action caused most people in the room discomfort. I think his view was that using real ordnance is the only way to ensure good, clear identification, and the adults would understand that they are experts in handling ordnance and that these particular models are perfectly safe. The opposing view is that mine awareness staff should set good examples by not touching or carrying any mines/UXO (even wooden models) in the presence of their students. Most of the mine awareness staff are not demining experts and do not know how to handle a mine. A "live" mine may accidentally get mixed up with the "free from explosives" mines, and even experts are not immune to accidents—there are many stories of experts accidentally triggering mines. Though identification is important, to identify every mine found in Cambodia may be an information overload (in the UNTAC case, most of the mines were bounding mines, which to a lay-person all look similar). If people have a good idea about what the most common types of mines look like, around 13 types, it should be sufficient for their needs.

**Materials**

Because of the 30 percent illiteracy rate, all materials were designed to be understood without the aid of the written word. There was a lot of debate about the content of each organization's program aids



and printed materials. It is a difficult area because it involves strong criticism and artistic egos. After working on a design for an extended time, it is sometimes difficult to consider changes or scrapping the design completely. There was endless debate among the Khmer staff in Cambodia over the correct wording and terminology used on the printed materials. This debate was partially solved by drafting a Mine Awareness Terminology Glossary, though debate over the issue still surfaces occasionally.

Other difficulties came from the accurate depiction of local characters in the illustrations. Foreign artists did not always depict the characters in their works accurately, but despite the majority of the artists being local, most were from cities and had "modern views" on what a country person should look like. It could help to draft some clear guidelines on how to develop and test materials. Outlined steps for conducting material testing, how to analyze the results and who are the necessary experts to check the technical details could be useful for field staff. These guidelines would have to be written as simply as possible because many of the field staff may not be highly educated.

### Assessment and Evaluation

Accident statistics could not be used to gauge the effectiveness of the mine awareness programs because the hospitals did not keep accurate records and most deaths in the field went unreported, though more reliable mine incident statistics are now being kept and used in Cambodia. The LMAP program was evaluated and tested on a number of occasions by the Curriculum Developer. At the start of the LMAP Program, we surveyed and ascertained that many people did not know what a mine looks like; what sets a mine off and how they kill; the signs to indicate the presence of mines; safe behaviors around mines; what they should do if they see a mine; how to get out of or rescue someone from a mined area; and how to treat someone injured by a mine blast. During the final assessment of the program, the results showed a vast increase in people's mine awareness knowledge.

To evaluate what impact MATT training was having on the population, I directed the staff to hand out periodical questionnaires. The people from villages that had not received any MATT training would be questioned on their mine awareness knowledge. Around three months after the MATT teams had trained the village, they returned and asked the villagers the same questions to reassess their knowledge. The surveys showed that there was an increase in their mine awareness knowledge in most areas, especially

in the areas of mine recognition (an increase of 20 percent), marking a location (35 percent) and understanding a tilt/touch mechanism (20 percent). Also, we found there were a few areas that required concentration, e.g., understanding a tilt/touch mechanism (although there was an increase in knowledge in the overall numbers, 41 percent of those surveyed knew about it, this percent was still too low), using tied grass as warning signs (only 26 percent of those surveyed knew this sign), how to retrace your footsteps (24 percent of the people who were asked to show how to retrace did not do it efficiently) and the prodding technique (only 28 percent could prod correctly, 44 percent said they did not know how and 24 percent prodded incorrectly). After receiving the results of this survey, some changes were made to the curriculum and new materials were designed and produced.

### Integration with Related Programs

None of the programs I worked in were, at the time, linked to demining or development programs. The refugee camps with which LMAP worked were strictly controlled—free trade was officially banned and movement by the refugees outside the camp was illegal. We could not consider any link to development and there were no demining programs operating there. When MATT started in Cambodia, demining programs were just setting up and the NGO's role was limited. MATT was the first mine awareness program to operate in the country and was started as an emergency response group with no links to other programs.

In Cambodia, it is necessary to take time to establish a relationship with the villagers before they will open up to you. Barriers such as large flashy cars, expensive watches and short-wave radios need to be broken down. It may take several casual informal talks before the full details start to emerge, then the mine awareness teams can evaluate that particular village's requirements and act as a link to the services available (i.e., demining, marking, new materials development) and advise the villagers how they can continue these contacts in the future. Other information such as the village's history of mine incidences and the mapping of the exact locations of the surrounding mined areas could also be made and then passed to the relevant organizations. The staff should be well aware not to make false promises to the villages about what services are available or what they can do for them.

### Conclusion

To have a successful program you must be flex-

ible and willing to modify your materials whenever conflict and/or new information is received. The mine awareness staff should be continually asking questions, evaluating and assessing the experts about technical issues, questioning the villagers on their reaction to the training and materials and asking the people who work in the field/forests for feedback about needs and habits. This information must be checked, discussed and acted upon. Do not think that if you make mistakes or miss some vital information that your program is a failure. It may take many years of field experience before you can feel your program materials are 100 percent correct.

If you are a foreigner working in another country, it is important to make sure the messages are adapted for a local audience. This modification will involve collecting information and working closely with the local staff. For example, when my mine awareness programs first started, I was instructed not to include any blood or gore in my images because some of the U.N. staff thought it may be offensive to the local people. After working with Cambodians for a period of time, I found that the most popular and effective images are those depicting graphic de-

tails about what happens if you do not follow the safety messages.

It is imperative that all relevant information you collect is shared openly with the other mine awareness programs operating in the country. Do not fall into the trap that some agencies do of holding back information and being territorial. You cannot forget the reason that you are doing mine awareness is to save people's limbs and lives, not to start an empire or to be the biggest and best mine awareness program in the country. It is better to share your designs with the other agencies and ask for feedback before the printing stage. It is better to try to get it right the first time and respect the experience and ideas from the other programs. Do not forget to follow your own advice when you are in the fields and among villagers. Be aware of mines. ■

### Contact Information

Tim Grant  
E-mail: pictim@inet.net.au  
Website: www.pitt.edu/~ginie/lm/cambodia.html

## Developing and Expanding Mine Awareness Programs

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Sadly, the people making these statements are normally those who have never cleared a landmine or destroyed a cluster bomb in their life, or have ever had to piece together what remains of a child that was disassembled by a UXO or landmine.

This MAP approach is completely different from the standard clearance methodologies and cannot be compared or evaluated in the same manner. It does not clear farmland, build schools, or develop any type of infrastructure.

What it does is add an asset to the program that is trained, organized, and equipped to rapidly respond to any reported hazard during and after the MAP training sessions, and by doing so will quickly reduce the amount of casualties sustained in their area of responsibility.

This EOD service is actually not a new concept. The U.S. EOD teams have been supporting the general public with this same type of service for around 30 years and are trained to do exactly this. This is not restricted to the continental U.S., but is often performed in the civilian communities near the military bases overseas, and is the same technique that our

teams are in the process of passing on to the Vietnamese military.

Instead of studying and micro-analyzing if enough people will benefit from the cost involved, it should be viewed as how many lives and limbs will be saved because of MAP effort.

As for cost, our teams conducted the EOD responses in conjunction with the clearance effort. Doing it in this manner, the cost involved with missions was less than \$200.00, including fuel, food, and explosives. That is the total cost for all of the missions. Based on that, the cost involved with the "comprehensive study" would likely fund a full year's worth of EOD support to a MAP team.

If by chance the villages that receive the support may not happen to have a large enough population to justify the cost in some people's minds, then we would like to know the value placed on a child's limbs so we can plan accordingly. ■

### Contact for Roger Hess

E-mail: r.hess@gte.net

