

The MINEX Center

This article highlights the efforts of the French Army Engineer School's MINEX program.

by MINEX

History

Since 1978, in the scope of cooperation or defense agreements that link us to some countries (e.g., Chad and Lebanon), the French Engineers have taken part in overseas operations in countries that are greatly affected by the problem of mines and battlefield pollution, and that are no longer at war. Those sappers will acquire an experience recognized worldwide.

In 1992, in order to standardize mine clearance techniques and to elaborate an acceptable training doctrine for all the military actors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to create a training center for post-war mine clearance within the French Army Engineer School in Angers called "Centre MINEX."

The center stood out rapidly at the international level thanks to the quality of the teaching, experience of the staff and constant innovations in developing pedagogic tools.

At that time, the French Army Engineer School received two orders:

- Train Engineer officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in post-war mine clearance.

- Collect and spread information concerning landmines and sub-munitions.

In 1997, the process of the Ottawa convention and France's ratification of it opened the door to a new step: putting the abilities and expertise of French soldiers at the disposal of the countries and organizations that fight against anti-personnel mines.

The MINEX Center became "Département de Formation au Déminage" (DFD), a training and information center for mine action, and is still the only post-conflict mine clearance training center in France. The number of training requests is widely increasing. For

this reason, the French Army Engineer School decided to create the National Center of Humanitarian Demining Training in 2001.

Training

The courses dedicated to engineer officers and NCOs are called MINEX. Following are brief descriptions of these courses.

MINEX 1

MINEX Level 1 corresponds to training on individual clearing techniques, which are dedicated to all the military staff in engineer regiments. The training is spread throughout all the engineer regiments and lasts about two weeks.

MINEX 2

MINEX Level 2 training is dedicated to all the engineer squad leaders-to-be, whose field of specialty is "combat and engineer techniques." The soldier who has obtained the MINEX 2 qualification is able to command a squad for a mine clearance action or for an area clearance and to take part in actions of demolition or neutralization of known and studied ammunitions, including landmines, sub-munitions, demolition equipment and pyrotechnics. The training lasts about two weeks.

MINEX Platoon Leader

MINEX Platoon Leader training is dedicated to young engineer officers as well as NCO candidates for the BSTAT (Superior diploma for French Army technicians) assigned to "combat engineer" and "crossing" sections. The aim of this level is to train platoon leaders to organize and command under safety rules, mine clearing and clearance missions.

MINEX 3

MINEX Level 3 training is opened

to engineer NCOs who have already obtained the first two levels—MINEX 2 and MINEX Platoon Leader—assigned in combat units and are volunteered to obtain the third level. The MINEX 3 graduate is particularly able to fulfil reconnaissance missions over polluted areas. He is also experienced enough to demolish or neutralize known ammunitions, especially landmines and attack ammunitions. The training lasts six weeks.

MINEX Staff Level

MINEX Staff Level training is delivered to confirmed and senior engineer officers. The MINEX Staff Level graduate is authorized to serve within an army headquarters as a command adviser for the conception and the conduct of mine clearance missions, as well as in international bodies taking part in mine action programs.

International Courses

The French Army Engineer School proposes international courses for the MINEX Platoon Leader and MINEX Staff Level courses that would be open to foreign military specialists. For example, the center has been training officers and NCOs from U.S. forces for more than five years (twice per year). The School also trains foreign units before they are committed overseas.

Humanitarian Demining

Humanitarian demining is part of the action program against mines developed by the United Nations. It is a tool for social and economic development for civilian populations and nations suffering from mine and UXO contamination. It is also a factor for new development, since it allows populations to recover free use of economic and social tools (cultures, houses, etc.).

The implementation of an action program against mines requires several fundamental parameters. The very first action aims to increase awareness among populations of the danger that mines and

other munitions represent. Mine risk education is completed by concrete assistance to the victims of mines among those populations, namely medical, surgical and orthopedic care.

Humanitarian demining remains the main action of the program and is composed as follows:

- The first stage consists of evaluating the threat and planning operations. Demining is a very complex, long and exacting task; a technical reconnaissance is conducted in order to determine with precision the contaminated areas and to optimize time dedicated to clearance operations.

- The second stage is dedicated to the removal of mines (neutralization and demolition) and to the determination of quality assurance (QA) (issuing an area clearance certificate before the area is delivered back to the population).

The major part of an action program against mines is the training of all the actors implicated in it. The National Center for Humanitarian Demining Training created in Angers gives to those people all the experience and the know-how of the French Army for all demining operations.

National Center for Humanitarian Demining Training

The French Army Engineer School opens its demining training ministry to all the categories of staff, dealing with humanitarian organizations or working for action operations against mines. The school proposes trainings for different personnel, including management for demining programs and operations, instructors, advisers, inspectors for QA and specialists who will help increase the

population's awareness.

The training will be under the responsibility of a French company accredited by the French Ministry of Defense. The School, as a service provider, gives assistance in the form of offering teaching help, lending technical and infrastructure equipment and delivering a "Quality Label." The trainings are in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) decreed by the United Nations and adapted to the very specific needs of a country or an organization. Moreover, the Center works closely with international agencies that deal with mine action.

Expertise

The training and information center for mine action (DFD-TICMA) provides:

- Conceptual expertise allowing for texts to be written (memos, rules, notes, studies).

- Technical expertise in research and development for new mine clearance technologies.

- Advice to the ministries and to the Parliament National Commission for the Eradication of Anti-Personnel Mines.

The specialists working at the French Army Engineer School have developed a database containing more than 1,000 different types of mines and submunitions used all over the world. This database, presented on CD-ROM, is an internationally recognized reference in that domain. The database gathers two kinds of information:

- Technical information about characteristics and functioning of ammunition; this information can be widely distributed.

- More confidential information

about neutralization procedures. This information can only be given to accredited staff having all the technical abilities to use it.

Mine Risk Education

Awareness is one of the Center's capacities recognized throughout the world; thus, DFD-TICMA also participates in several high-level trainings for civilians, especially for students in law and politics from the university in Aix-en-Provence (southern France), who are about to work for international humanitarian assistance and for Bioforce, an organization working with the World Health Organization (intervening in training, expertise and engineering).

The department also draws the attention of searchers, engineers and public or private agency technicians to the problem of mines and mine clearance within research programs in that field. The department also organizes sessions to increase awareness about this problem in the French Army schools and units and also for the French or foreign forces overseas. ■

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