The Evolution of Mine Detection Dog Training

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Global Training Academy has been building Mine Detection Dog (MDD) capacities for years, even while they worked under skeptic voices and much criticism. Now, the academy serves as the main MDD sub-contractor for the Department of State (DOS) and has experienced many successes with their program.

**The Evolution of Mine Detection Dog Training**

A major obstacle encountered by USAID and RONCO in moving clothing and equipment from Afghanistan was the large number of landmines being encountered on the roads and trails. Doctor Ottenburg made a recommendation to USAID that landmine detection dogs be used to assist in clearing the trails and roads. He explored the possibility of the Thai military assisting with the project. Doctor Ottenburg realized that perhaps the human element could be eliminated from the search pattern because the rural areas were inaccessible to the people. USAID wanted to provide safe travel routes for the re habilitation of the farmlands. The road clearance also allowed the UN World Food Program to distribute a larger supply of food relief to the Mozambican population.

By January 1993 and August 1995, Global and RONCO trained a total of 38 MDDs, 42 handlers, seven Para Vets and six MDD supervisors for Mozambique.

**Mozambique**

In January of 1996, a new Mine and Demining Center was established in Rwanda. The program received funding through USAID and the U.S. Military Assistance Program, whose goals were to establish a Mine Action Center (MAC), provide training of manual deminers and establish a self-sufficient MDD Program. The objective was to make it safe for the rehabilitation of farmlands and the resettlement of rural villages.

From January 1996 until September 1999, Global trained 28 MDDs, 40 MDD handlers, six MDD supervisors and four MDD trainers for the Rwandan military.

**Bosnia-Herzegovina**

In the summer of 1996, Global, along with RONCO, received a request to develop a mine clearance program in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was funded by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The original MDD handler training took place in Honduras with each country sending four potential handler candidates. The first MDD teams were deployed into the minefields in their respective countries in January of 1999.

The program within Nicaragua expanded to 112 MDDs. Second, due to the high infestation of landmines, the Nicaraguan military eventually developed the ability to train their own mine dogs. They have trained two additional MDDs and an additional six Mine Detection Dog (MDD) handlers at their training facility just outside of Managua. Nicaragua received a training package that included nine mine dogs and handlers, in conjunction with a manual demining capability.

**Central America**

In the fall of 1998, three additional MDD training programs began in Central America: Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The MDD training was funded by the U.S. DOS and monitored by the Organization of American States (OAS). The original MDD handler training took place in Honduras with each country sending four potential handler candidates. The first MDD teams were deployed into the minefields in their respective countries in January of 1999.

**Conclusion**

During the summer of 1997, we made another logistical change in our training and minefield clearance procedures. This change came about due to incident in clearing landmines within Bosnian-Herzegovina and has improved productivity and safety within the minefield.

The new search procedure in the minefield is as follows: a minefield or suspect area is identified, it is divided into eight- to 10-meter square blocks. Safe lanes are made around each block. Dividing the minefield in this manner serves two purposes. First, it makes it easier for the manual deminer and/or MDD team to identify areas where tripwires may cross the minefield. Second, it makes it possible that there are visible changes during a search, the handler can reposition himself and the dog safely around the block, ensuring timely completion of clearing an area without having to move throughout the minefield.
Working With the U.S. Department of State

In the spring of 2000, the U.S. DOS’s Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs (HDP) funded RONCO and Global to train six MDDs to work with an NGO, which receives funding through the United Nations. The organization is known as the Accelerated Demining Program (ADP) in Maputo, Mozambique. The ADP’s program was the second instance in which HDP provided MDD assets to a pre-existing demining operation. The first time was to assist the OAS in Central America. The ADP’s program was the first where MDDs were specifically trained to work in minefields that had been prepared for demining use by flail machines. The use of MDDs in areas cleared by the flails has broadened the utilization of MDDs in demining operations.

In 2000, HDP funded a separate MDD (12 dogs) demining operation in Beira, Mozambique. This operation was to clear the railroad lines within central Mozambique in order to improve travel and trade. This project was completed in the fall of 2002.

During the year 2000, HDP funded RONCO and Global to accomplish the following tasks in Thailand:

- Establish a MAC and furnish technical assistance in training the Thai military to operate the center.
- Provide training and technical assistance in manual and mechanical demining procedures.
- Provide the Thai military Mine Dog Center (MDC) with training assistance in updating their MDD program. This program has provided 28 MDDs and handler training. It also has provided four MDD trainer instructors, who will complete their training in the summer of 2003.

In the spring of 2001, HDP established the Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF). The QRDF has eight MDD teams and manual deminers assigned. Their mission is to deploy to hot spots anywhere in the world that the United States has an interest in emergency demining. This group has been deployed to three locations in the last 18 months—Sri Lanka, Nigeria and twice to Sudan.

In 2001, HDP funded RONCO and Global to support humanitarian demining operations in the following countries, each of which was provided with MDDs:

- Eritrea received six MDDs in 2001 and an additional six MDDs in 2002. All the dogs are fully deployed in the minefields.
- Oman received four MDDs in the spring of 2001, with all dogs being deployed in the fall of 2001.
- Lebanon received its first six MDDs in the spring of 2001 and a second group of seven MDDs in the spring of 2002. Lebanon is scheduled to receive an additional five MDDs the spring of 2003. All MDDs are deployed working behind flails and conducting quality assurance.
- Azerbaijan MDD operations commenced in September of 2001 with RONCO initially providing six leased MDD teams out of Bosnia. One of the lease dogs was replaced due to illness in the fall of 2001. These six MDDs were donated to the Azerbaijan Mine Action Clearance Program. RONCO and Global trained local nationals to handle the MDDs. The second indigenous MDD handler course, which commenced in the spring of 2002, consisted of seven new MDDs. A third handler/supervisors course was conducted in August of 2002, which added three additional MDDs later that year.

In late spring of 2002, HDP funded a humanitarian demining operation with the military forces of Armenia. The requirement was to build a MAC, provide training for manual deminers and establish an MDD program. Seven MDDs were entered into training, and in September of 2002, five MDD handler teams completed training. These teams were deployed with a manual demining group in October of 2002.

Conclusion

In summation, the use of MDDs has become a very important tool in safe and efficient demining operations. Even though Global received much criticism about the use of dogs in humanitarian demining, much success has come from the program. Dogs deployed to many minefields around the world have greatly enhanced the productivity of the local manual demining teams. Having proved the effectiveness of MDDs in support of humanitarian demining operations, Global and RONCO are now the main contractors for MDDs for the U.S. HDP.

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