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Advanced Training on Ammunition Identification and Disposal in Afghanistan

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COURSE REPORT

ADVANCED TRAINING ON AMMUNITION IDENTIFICATION AND DISPOSAL IN AFGHANISTAN



**16–29 APRIL 2016
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

Report on 23 May 2016
Geneva, Switzerland

INTRODUCTION

GICHD delivered an advanced level training course on ammunition identification and disposal in Kabul, Afghanistan on 16-29 April 2016. The main focus of the course was to build on existing skillsets and improve the knowledge of the characteristics of NATO and other ammunition encountered in Afghanistan.

By not offering a formal IMAS explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) qualification and associated testing protocols, the course curriculum allowed flexibility content wise. On the first day the program was customised to the assessed needs of the attendees, based on the feedback from interviews with them all. As a result the curriculum allowed, for the practicing of alternative techniques in explosive ordnance disposal for enhanced safety and efficiency in operations, for familiarisation with the ammunition safety management method, and for refresher training sessions in certain ammunition topics last taught to the attendees a decade or more ago.

The 2-week course was financed by the German Federal Foreign Office and conducted by a GICHD team of 2 advisory staff with 2 consulting experts from Fenix Insight Ltd UK, with an assisting instructor from HALO Trust.

GICHD wishes to thank MACA and DMAC for the competent administrative support and the security detail provided both before and during the course. Thank you also to the demining agencies for organising the daily transport and optimising the daily attendance by releasing the trainees for the entire duration of the course. Our special gratitude goes to the HALO Trust for the excellent work that went into arranging all the course logistics and catering, and providing the classroom, the exercise facilities and machines, training models and materials, a variety of live explosive ordnance, demolition ranges and for the daily availability of HALO's Weapon and Ammunition Destruction team with the EOD officer.

BACKGROUND

In mid 2014 MACA requested that GICHD provide training and advisory services regarding newer NATO ammunition encountered as ERW both in former conflict areas and inside (former) ISAF ranges. With the introduction of the new IMAS 09.30 on EOD and the Test and Evaluation Protocol (T&EP) in late 2014, MACA/DMAC initiated the process to update the national mine action standard (NMAS) on EOD. This process revealed the need to update ammunition skills among the otherwise experienced demining agencies in Afghanistan, to be able to safely identify, transport, temporarily store and dispose of ERW in the changing technical environment, including the types of hazards encountered in former ISAF shooting ranges.

Afghanistan continues to suffer approximately 100 new civilian casualties monthly, majority of these cases involving pressure plate IEDs. Among the demining operators, NATO ammunition is attributed to the cause of at least 4 accidents in recent years. More accidents among demining operators involve tank gun and artillery projectiles than landmines. The main reason for this appears to be non-adherence to relevant SOPs coupled with lack of specialist training that appreciates the technical complexity of ammunition and fuze systems.

In this setting and with support from German Federal Foreign Office, GICHD designed a 12-day training programme to specifically address the identification and safe disposal of common yet complex ammunition items found in Afghanistan. The attendees were 27 experienced and formally qualified Afghan EOD operators representing 10 demining agencies and institutions.

In this setting, MACA listed 65 items of explosive ordnance of NATO origin. Through interviews with subject experts and analysis of IMSMA statistics on the frequency of occurrence and frequency as a cause of casualties, a training curriculum was built to include both 'Eastern' and 'Western' ammunition whilst focusing on the technically advanced and high-risk ammunition encountered in Afghanistan. The selection of the HALO Trust as the in-country expert partner was a natural choice due to their significant achievement to date in having destroyed 27'000 tons of ammunition with an outstanding safety record.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

To improve the professional capacities among operational, coordination and quality management personnel in the safe identification and disposal of specific ammunition types in Afghanistan.

PARTICIPANTS

There were 27 participants on the course from all national demining agencies in Afghanistan, as well as from 3 international organisations, the national directorate for mine action, and the UN. Most of the participants had more than a decade, and some more than 20 years, of experience in demining and EOD work, mainly involving former Soviet and Asian ammunition, landmines and, to a lesser extent, newer NATO ordnance. The participating agencies and representatives included Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC, 2), Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA, 2), Directorate for Mine Action Coordination (DMAC, 5), Danish Demining Group (DDG, 4), HALO Trust (4), Mine Clearance and Planning Agency (MCPA, 1), Mine Detection Centre (MDC, 2), Organisation for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR, 2), Sterling Demining in Afghanistan (SDA, 2), and United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (MACA, 3).

ACTIVITIES

The course lasted 11 full training days over a period of 2 weeks. There were 6 days in the classroom environment, 3 days of combined classroom and demonstrations in an exercise area, and 2 range days. The HALO Trust generously provided all the above training facilities, as well as logistic support from within their country headquarters compound in Kabul. Our gratitude for making it a success goes to Dr. Farid Homayoun and Mr. Tim Porter of the management team, and Mr. Zabto Mayer and Mr. Azizt Ashgar at the HALO Trust operations department.

Classroom sessions

Initially each attendee was interviewed to ascertain their background, needs and

expectations from the course. The training topics were tailored accordingly to best meet the level of subject knowledge among the attendees. The EOD instruction retained focus on NATO munitions that might be found e.g. during range clearance, but also covered many specific non-NATO topics requested by, and relevant to, the attendees. The main training topics were;

- > Land service ammunition characteristics
- > NATO ammunition identification, markings and colour codes
- > Risk assessments of NATO and other cluster munitions and submunitions
- > Fuzes – classes, types, functions and condition
- > Low order techniques for ammunition disposal – single and multi-item, and bulk
- > Alternative disposal methods, tools and techniques
- > Ammunition demilitarisation techniques, demonstration and practice
- > Burning of Small Arms Ammunition and fuzes, demonstration and practice
- > ERW bulk demolition techniques
- > ERW risk management, planning and preparedness
- > Mitigation of explosions in ammunition storage and diversion from stockpiles
- > Ammunition safety management

Several sessions were dedicated to teaching fuzes, with some of the attendees receiving advanced instruction on this topic for the first time. Subjects such as ammunition classification, markings and colour codes, both former Soviet and NATO, were covered in detail giving students a new appreciation of the depth of knowledge required for safe work. Instruction on submunitions concentrated primarily on former Soviet types, although there was a detailed lesson on others, e.g. U.S. BLU-97. A number of examples of accidents were used to illustrate the basic principles of risk management and practical accident prevention. Notional level EOD3+ subjects, such as clearance of Armored Fighting Vehicles (AFV) and of white phosphorus (WP) munitions, were covered. Other, more advanced, topics were introduced to broaden the know-how of, and make connections between knowledge areas amongst, the attendees, including but not limited to ageing of munitions and the implications of ammunition degradation, both in storage and in the field. These were appreciated and achieved the set training objectives according to the feedback received.

Outdoor exercises

The students were given an insight into munition exploitation techniques, including live demonstrations within the workshops established in the HALO compound. Among the subjects demonstrated were techniques and tools for remote cutting of fuzes, incineration of fuzes and SAA, tools for locally manufacturing disruptor igniters and shaped charges, locally designed and produced rocket wrenches, disruptors, de-armers and exploders, as well as safe and secure management of ammunition and UXO stores. Activities pertinent to operational risk management were introduced as part of each demonstration and exercise. It is hoped that risk assessment and risk management will be integral to any future training involving live ordnance and explosive materials.

Demolition range

The students received a thorough revision of demolition practices alongside two range days that included bulk demolitions of 1192kg of artillery and tank projectiles, mortar bombs, fuzes,

rifle grenades, RPGs, anti-vehicle mines and munitions containing white phosphorus. Low order techniques, tools and remote fuze removal were demonstrated and practiced. A remotely operated incinerator was used to burn rocket propellant, fuzes and SAA. The central demolition site at Dih Sabz, situated 35 km northeast from Kabul, was used. The HALO Trust Standing Operating Procedures were followed, with the HALO Trust WAD team and EOD officer present on range at all times.

OBSERVED RESULTS

Some attendees had last received EOD training more than a decade ago and needed a refresher on the more basic subjects prior to moving to more advanced IMAS level 3 and 3+ topics. The review process of the national EOD standard has not been completed; it therefore continues to make reference to IMAS competence level 4, which no longer exists. Furthermore, a degree of 'language barrier' was observed among some attendees, making the interactive sessions more challenging to both the trainees and instructors. Fortunately, thanks to the effective translation by Mr. Abdul Kakar from MACA and Mr. Zapto Khan from HALO Trust, the flexibility in the programme, and the revised course curriculum over the 11-day program allowed these challenges to be largely overcome. At the end of the course, the trainees carried out a self-evaluation in the form of an 18-question test containing imagery and theory on the subjects covered. The informal test resulted in most attendees having correct answers in at least 10 of the questions, the best scoring 14 out of the 18. It can be concluded that the attendees' ability to safely identify and dispose of essential NATO and other munitions was improved, and that their EOD knowledge was updated and advanced.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

This course reiterated the requirement to develop new training materials for GICHD. The HALO Trust's extensive collection of training aids (freed-from-explosive models of explosive ordnance) was vital for the successful delivery of the instruction. Through the accumulating feedback received during the course, it became obvious that further instruction in advanced EOD topics is necessary, and that GICHD is well positioned to run specialised, short courses. To best assist in developing Afghanistan's national EOD capacity, an EOD 3+ course should be established to enable a formal, universal qualification regime for EOD in the country.

ATTACHMENTS

Annex A: COURSE PROGRAM

Annex B: PARTICIPANTS

Annex C: SELECTED PHOTOS