

# Building a Safer World “The Philly Way”

With the creation of the Philadelphia-area Adopt-A-Minefield program, many community members have offered their time and effort to raise money and awareness for the landmine problem in Mozambique. With new goals at hand, Philadelphians can expect to see the campaign continue, focusing on Afghanistan and the rest of the world.

by Mike Felker

## Introduction

In late 1999, members of the Philadelphia chapters of the United Nations Association (UNA) and Veterans for Peace began a UNA-USA Adopt-A-Minefield campaign to raise money to demine a minefield in Mozambique. Over the next two years, in conjunction with the UNA chapter in Washington, D.C., \$31,300 (U.S.) was raised to demine an 11,811 square-meter minefield in Ressano Garcia, located in the Maputo province in the southern section of Mozambique. This particular minefield is in an agricultural area. Despite the large signs warning of the minefield, local inhabitants walk through the minefield carrying firewood and other necessities rather than making a long detour around the minefield; this shortcut has resulted in deaths and injuries. With the \$31,300, demining efforts, consisting primarily of dogs and manual methods, started earlier this year. In anticipation of the cleared field, people are building houses around the minefield. Once the field is demined, these people will raise maize, peanuts and mangoes in the fertile soil, and the shortcut for carrying firewood will no longer be deadly.

## The Philadelphia Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign

The Philadelphia-area Mozambique Adopt-A-Minefield campaign was created

by Greater Philadelphia UNA board member Joan Reivich and myself—a Veterans for Peace member. Joan, a grandmother of 12, had long been troubled by the use of AP landmines. She saw the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign as a concrete way of mobilizing the community to take action against landmine use and help ameliorate the damage caused by mines. Joan states, “The more I learned, the more deeply I began to care about this issue. Like most people, I knew a bit about landmines because of the publicity Princess Diana brought to the issue, but I had no idea how many millions of these obscene weapons were still in place and the scale of the damage they do to individual lives and the development of nations. The more I learned, the more shocked I became. And the more angry I was that our country had not signed the International Landmine Ban Treaty. Spreading the word, involving others, and helping individuals and groups become part of the solution seemed the least I could do.”

## Spreading the Word

The main thrust of the Philadelphia-area Mozambique Adopt-A-Minefield campaign has been presentations to religious groups; community organizations; elementary, high school, and college students; and gatherings in restaurants and private homes. These presentations, lasting from a half-hour to two hours, were usually made by Joan Reivich and myself, often with other UNA and VFP members. In general, they consisted of an



■ Mike Felker as a medic in Vietnam, 1970.

overview of the landmine crisis including a video, personal accounts of my experiences in Vietnam, suggestions to the audience from Joan for raising money for the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign and entreaties from Joan to contact their government representatives to support the United States signing the Mine Ban Treaty. Over 50 presentations were made for the Mozambique campaign. After hearing a presentation, one congregation of a suburban church raised \$2,000 for the Campaign. Joan and I have made presentations to approximately 300 Presbyterian ministers and lay-leaders. In turn, the Presbytery of Philadelphia passed a “Resolution On Landmines,” which includes: “[making] landmines an on going priority, [appealing] for immediate ratification of the International Landmine Ban Treaty, and [encouraging] congregations to incorporate the UNA Adopt-A-Minefield campaign in their Mission Outreach.”

We have also raised money by sending holiday gift cards to friends and family members of contributors who made a donation in their loved one’s name—last December, over \$2,000 was donated through the gift cards. As another method



to raise money for the campaign, for the past several years I have run in the 10 kilometer Philadelphia Vietnam Veterans Memorial Run, taking pledges, mainly through the Internet, for the campaign. This year, more than \$1,500 was raised in pledges.

In conjunction with the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines, we've worked to have the United States join the Landmine Ban Treaty—we have visited the offices of Pennsylvania's senators and representatives, organized an e-mail advocacy alert network, distributed thousands of leaflets, written articles and letters to the editor, and participated in radio programs.

## A New Goal

The Philadelphia-area Mozambique Adopt-A-Minefield campaign ended last December. Given the state of the "war on terrorism" and the suffering the Afghan people had been through—suffering exacerbated by the five to seven million landmines in the country—it was felt that money should now be raised for demining efforts in Afghanistan. The following passage from the book *Landmines: A Resource Book* by Rae McGrath, solidified that resolve:

"A small boy, about nine years old, was following his goats as they grazed in the mountains. His name is not known. He was probably playing a little, throwing stones maybe, or he would have noticed the small green mine that blew his foot off at the ankle. From what we know of

how people react, from the memories of those who have survived, the little shepherd boy probably hopped or dragged himself to where his foot lay—it would have been quite close to him. He would have tried to put his foot back on the bleeding stump of his ankle. He would have cried or maybe just sat lonely and quiet and helpless and slipped into unconsciousness. His goats must have stayed until after he died, probably until wild dogs arrived at the scene. We have no way of knowing exactly what happened; the dogs found him days before we did."

## Conclusion

Our new campaign will continue to focus on presentations to make people aware of the landmine crisis in Afghanistan and the world. But we also hope to get children involved with a poster contest and fundraising. Placing ads in local newspapers is another possibility. Folks involved in the Philadelphia-area Adopt-A-Minefield campaign besides Joan and myself include UNA-GP President Dave Eldredge, Joy Harbison, Suzanne Milshaw, Richard Laudenslager, World War II veteran Carl Dahlgren, Temple University student Dan Tate, Barbara Harris and the Philadelphia Presbytery Peacemaking Resource Team, and several hundred individual contributors. All are united in the belief that when we use our resources to remove landmines, we are working to remove suffering, fear and

impoverishment. We are working against the horrors of war and towards building a safer world for all citizens. ■

## Biographical Information

Mike Felker is an employee at the University of Pennsylvania. While in the U.S. military in the late 1960s, he was sent to Vietnam to replace a medic killed by a landmine in December 1969. As a medic with the First Marine Division in Vietnam, Mike treated American and Vietnamese casualties of landmines. Most of the injuries were amputations caused by "toepoppers." Mike's memories of treating these casualties—tying a tourniquet around the remains of the leg, wrapping a battle dressing over the stump, looking for a vein in the victim's arm to start an IV—disturb him still. By relaying his experiences in Vietnam as part of the presentations, the Landmine Campaign has provided a way to use these memories positively.

*\*All photos courtesy of the author.*

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(Left to Right) Joan Reivich, Marietta Tanner and Mike Felker at a landmine presentation in Philadelphia, December, 2001. Ms. Tanner organized the fund raising event. Mike Felker at the Philadelphia Vietnam Veterans Memorial Run; more than \$1,500 was raised in pledges.

