

June 2004

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Recommended Citation

Nielsen, Carlos (2004) "Mine Action Training in Argentina," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol8/iss1/6>

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Mine Action Training in Argentina



Background

Argentina has always relied on its military with respect to demining. At the same time, the government has continually taken an active role in promoting the use of military mine clearance throughout the international community. For instance, in 1993, three officers and one non-commissioned officer (NCO) were sent as a team, supervised by the Organization of American States (OAS), to Nicaragua. There they took the role of training the Nicaraguan army in different mine clearance techniques.

A few years later in June 1997, a senior officer was appointed United Nations Program Manager of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) Support Program for Mine Action in Angola. In coordination with the White Helmets,¹ eight officers and three NCOs were later appointed to

various Angolan provincial demining brigades until 1998. In January 1999, in coordination with the White Helmets, two senior officers along with one junior officer and one NCO were appointed to be part of a demining team in Central America. Later in July, three officers and one NCO relieved them. At the completion of the year, all team members returned to Argentina.

Humanitarian Demining Training Center—Argentina

Considering the increasing participation of Argentinean military personnel in international demining activities, the army began training its personnel on mine clearance techniques and procedures. These became known as explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) courses, which focused mainly on the safety of operators. This change in direction made a

substantial difference from former military procedures related to mine breaching.

On April 12, 2000, the Chief of the General Staff of the army ordered the Humanitarian Demining Training Center (HDTC) to be created in the Engineer Battalion 601 in Campo de Mayo, Buenos Aires. Later in September of 2000, the first course on humanitarian demining was held, continuing on through 2001. Military units throughout the country sent their engineer personnel to attend.

Since its creation, the HDTC has assumed the responsibility of training its own and foreign personnel in coordination with Joint Peacekeeping Operations Training Center in Argentina (CAECOPAZ). However, the financial difficulties faced by the country during 2002 and 2003 made training of foreigners impossible; thus, the courses were limited to Argentinean personnel.



The U.S. Southern Command, between April and June 2002, organized a course for instructors about mine clearance program management in accordance with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) multilateral agreement. They also contributed invaluable equipment for use at CAECOPAZ.

Current Situation

In 2004, there will be the following two courses on Humanitarian Demining:

1. Humanitarian Demining Basic Course: The aim of this course is to train personnel on the necessary techniques to carry on humanitarian demining operations.
2. Humanitarian Demining Advanced Course: The aim of this course is to train officers in the preparation needed for planning humanitarian demining operations.

The HDTC plans to continue exchanging instructors with U.S. training centers in Fort Leonard Wood and especially in Fort Belvoir, which holds a wealth of information pertaining to mine detection dogs. The HDTC has also requested personnel to be assigned to the Engineer Brigade in order to conduct specific research.

Argentine Marine Corps Amphibious Engineers Course

The Argentine Marine Corps has engineer personnel that participate in under-

water demining. Most notable is their amphibious engineer course, which takes pride in training the army specifically in amphibian demining operations. Currently, it also includes humanitarian demining training, but in the future this training will be carried out by the HDTC.

Joint Staff Updating Course

On October 1, 2000, the Humanitarian Demining Office was created as part of the Joint Staff. One of the main duties of the office is to ensure the application of internationally agreed procedures on mine clearance. Since 2001, it has organized two seminars a year, in which officers designated by each force are instructed on current UN demining guidelines.

The first seminar is normally held in May or June and focuses on the latest reports issued by the Meeting of States Parties of the Landmine Ban Convention, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the *Landmine Monitor Report* (LMR). However, the second seminar, which is normally held in October or November, focuses on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and the different advances on the issue stipulated by the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian

Demining (GICHD).

2004 Seminars

During the Updating Seminar VII scheduled for June 7–11, 2004, the main topic will be based on the "Guide to Mine Action." This guide was recently published by the GICHD and includes issues that are essential for understanding the current enforced doctrine. The second Updating Seminar VII being held in October or November will focus on the analysis of IMAS and other publications issued by GICHD.

Future Plans

In the future, the activities currently planned for the 2004 seminars will most likely be included in regular courses organized by the HDTC for the three military forces. The HDTC will be closely related to the GICHD. The HDTC will train its own personnel, and any foreign personnel, to take part in ongoing activities related to mine activities. The ultimate goal of the HDTC is contributing to the elimination of landmines all over the world.

The Joint Staff of the Armed Forces also plans to reorganize its activities to comply with the following aims: gathering demining information, coordinating and monitoring the application of topics agreed on by the member states' meetings, and implementing actions issued by the UNMAS and ICBL/LMR.

Endnotes

1. An official Secretary for International Humanitarian Assistance.

Photos do the author.

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