

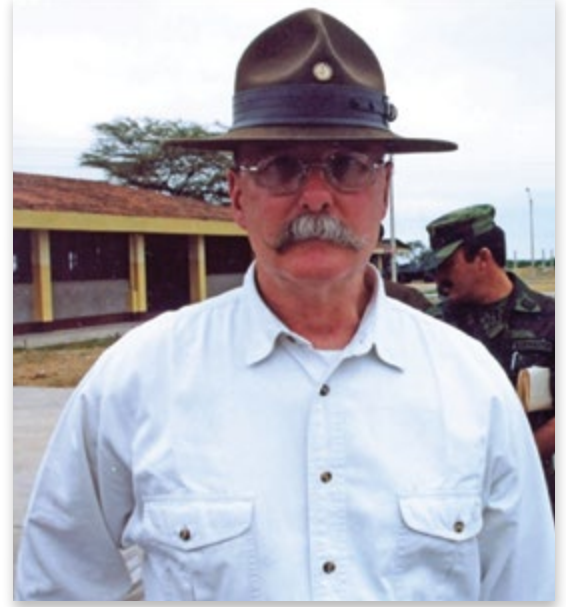
In this issue of The Journal, we feature interviews with two officials from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the US Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) who recount their careers and experiences working with conventional weapons destruction (CWD) programs.

AN INTERVIEW WITH Harry "Murf" McCloy

Harry "Murf" McCloy, is a retired US Marine Colonel who transitioned from military service to become a pivotal figure in humanitarian demining with PM/WRA in the US Department of State. Heading the US State Department's first demining program in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, McCloy became the State Department's Senior Demining Advisor in 1998, holding this position until his retirement in 2007. He continues to work part-time in the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement and has played a crucial role in the strategic oversight and execution of mine action programs across forty-six countries, significantly enhancing safety and establishing essential demining programs worldwide.

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION? WHAT WERE SOME OF THE EARLY CHALLENGES YOU FACED WHEN STARTING THE FIRST HUMANITARIAN DEMINING PROGRAM IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA?

My first involvement in humanitarian demining was in September of 1993, when I was hired by the United Nations to work in Somalia on the staff of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of UNOSOM II. Although I was initially hired as a police official, I was told that I would find out what my real job would be once I got to Somalia. As it turned out, upon arrival I was assigned as the Chief of the Demining, Disarmament, and Demobilization Division, which was just being formed. My Deputy was an Australian Ministry of Defense official seconded to the UN staff. We split the programmatic responsibilities between us along functional lines; I took on the task of setting up a program to demine Somalia, and he took on the task of setting up a program to encourage former combatants to turn in their weapons and learn trades that were needed in the civilian community. Two of my biggest challenges in these pre-International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) days were to: (1) find minefields where local inhabitants from both sides of the conflict could agree that the mines should be taken out, and (2) find local demining groups as well as international demining nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that were acceptable to both sides to do the work. Needless to say, the demining program that was eventually put into place was much more limited in scope and impact than the lofty initial goal of "demine Somalia," but it did get off the ground and was providing life-saving relief in several locales before the mission was terminated.



The author in what is now North Macedonia.
All images courtesy of the author.

The lessons I learned from my exposure to demining in Somalia carried over to my next UN mission with the UN Humanitarian Coordination Unit in Angola during the UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) II and III. Here I served as the Deputy and subsequently Interim Demining Program Manager. A large part of my efforts involved working with the Director of the nascent Angolan National Institute for Demining to establish a demining school, staffed by military instructors from New Zealand and France, for demobilized soldiers from both the Angolan Army and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the former rebel group, and to integrate UNITA members into the National Demining Institute staff to increase the knowledge of the mine threats planted by both sides during the war. To complement these confidence- and capacity-building measures, I also worked with international demining NGOs already in the field to increase the flow of information regarding explosive threats and their impact on the provision of humanitarian assistance to severely impacted communities. This information was extremely useful in the planning and prioritization of future demining efforts in coordination with the National Demining Institute as resources became available.

After cutting my demining teeth with the UN missions in Somalia and Angola, I was offered the opportunity to head the US State Department's first demining program in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the US Demining Coordinator for Bosnia and Herzegovina, a position I assumed in early 1996, I was essentially the in-country Program Manager for the Department's Office of International Security and Peacekeeping Operations, which was responsible for the Department's demining programs at that time. Our implementing partner for Bosnia and Herzegovina was a commercial contractor with demining experience in Afghanistan and Africa.

The early challenges I faced with the State Department's program were pretty much the same ones I had faced with my previous UN missions: (1) gaining an understanding of the history of the conflict and the political and military entities involved; (2) developing working relationships with appropriate officials (including political and military officials of the former warring parties, donor country representatives, the NATO military command, and the newly established UN Mine Action Center (MAC); (3) establishing an infrastructure

to support national demining capacity building and long-term support; and (4) eventually deploying trained demining teams to designated areas to identify and eliminate contaminated areas of threat.

The one new challenge I encountered in Bosnia and Herzegovina revolved around the application of the International Standards for Humanitarian Mine Clearance Operations (the forerunner of IMAS) that were published in early 1997. This was a useful development, but as with any new initiative, there are always areas of ambiguity or possible multiple interpretations that can pose bars to progress if left unresolved. Fortunately, this was not a problem of long-standing, as areas of concern were addressed and resolved as they arose in close coordination with the UN MAC. To be sure, at times strong opinions led to heated discussions, but the end result was always the same: greater clarity of the scope and intent of the standards, better understanding of the roles and missions between the demining coordinating and executing organizations, and increased safety for demining operations and local beneficiaries.

HOW HAVE DEMINING TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES EVOLVED SINCE YOU FIRST STARTED IN THIS FIELD?

When I first came into the world of humanitarian demining in 1993 there were no international standards in existence (this wouldn't happen until 1997), and demining was basically conducted according to the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the demining organizations contracted to do clearance work. These SOPs were based on the equipment they had on hand and the experience of the demining experts they had on staff. These demining experts were, for the most part, former military sappers or explosive ordnance (EO) demolition experts, although there were a few that had learned to deal with explosive threats in the maritime salvage field. The techniques employed in the early days were basically manual demining with some attempts to integrate dogs trained to detect mines, and WWII minefield breaching equipment (such as flails), adapted to humanitarian mine clearance work. Needless to say, the training and techniques varied between implementing partners, and the general rule of the day (before IMAS came onto the scene) seemed to be "do the best you can with what you've got;" sort of a variation of the Hippocratic Oath "Do no harm."

Now that we're twenty-seven years into the IMAS era and counting, things have changed significantly for the better. For example: (1) the IMAS have become the bedrock upon which humanitarian mine action (HMA) is based, which in turn has led to an overall greater accuracy of results, higher productivity, and the realization of economies of scale (i.e., "more bang

for your demining buck"); (2) the mechanical assets available have greatly increased since the mine flail days, which has improved the options available to implementing partners to enable them to "work smarter, not harder" when tailoring their operations to meet local requirements; (3) bio-technology has been expanded in HMA from mine detection dogs (MDD) to include mine detection rats (MDR), which gives implementing partners greater operational tailoring choices similar to the mechanical equipment options; and (4) the recent advent of drone technology promises to be another great asset for survey and other HMA work in the future.

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HAS THE DEFINITION OF RESIDUAL RISK CHANGED FOR HUMANITARIAN DEMINING OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES?

Absolutely! When I first came into the demining field the word “risk” was not in the deminer’s vocabulary. Demining results expected were nothing less than 100 percent. Over time, in the face of the practicalities of the situation, the international HMA community came to realize that nowhere

in life is there a 100 percent guarantee (except death and the payment of taxes), and that some degree of acceptance of risk had to be accepted by all concerned, including the beneficiaries of the demining operations. It was a hard but necessary pill to swallow.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS OR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD OF HMA OVER THE COURSE OF YOUR CAREER? WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS?

I think the most significant achievement, or actually combination of significant achievements, that have contributed to the field of HMA during my thirty-one-year career has been the explosion of technological developments to make HMA safer, faster, and more cost-effective and efficient. From the first adaptations of WWII minefield breaching technology (tank-driven mine flails and armored bulldozers), there are now a variety of specialized mechanical and biological technological arrows in the mine action quiver. A few cases in point are: (1) for explosive vapor detection purposes, there are now two different animal species (dogs and rats) that with proper training and accreditation are now included under

the IMAS-acceptable umbrella; (2) the sensitivity of metal detectors has been increased and now can be augmented by ground penetrating radar to identify underground EO by size and shape; and (3) there are now a wide variety of both single-purpose and multiple-purpose machines with attachments designed to detect or destroy explosive hazards and to prepare ground for further clearance measures. I think the evolving adaptation of drone technology to HMA is the next wave of the mine action future and will contribute as much to the safety and efficiency of operations as any of the other technological advancements mentioned.

CONVERSELY, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FACING HUMANITARIAN DEMINING EFFORTS TODAY?

I see two big challenges ahead: combatting donor funding fatigue and meeting the challenges posed by conducting HMA in a manner that is more attuned to environmental management and climate change considerations.

The donor funding fatigue challenge is not a new problem but an old, persistent, and expensive one. The stark and wearying facts donors must face are: (1) there are no quick fixes in HMA, as national EO contamination clearance programs typically take decades to complete; (2) there is not enough funding to take care of everybody’s problems at once; and (3) there is no end in sight of armed conflicts creating new levels of EO contamination in the world before the “old” threats are eliminated, and this puts donors to HMA on a road that goes ever on.

Regarding the second challenge, the new emphasis on environmental management and climate change considerations will usher in a concomitant rise in the costs of HMA operations as current accepted practices such as open detonation/open burning operations and in situ destruction of EO are reduced and/or replaced by more costly but environmentally friendly practices. This will extend the time needed

to complete HMA programs as well as elevate operational costs. The result will be increased costs and time to complete programs in exchange for more environmentally friendly land remediation measures.

It remains to be seen if donors will increase HMA funding to compensate for the increased costs of meeting environmental and climate change challenges and what effects their decisions will have on the overall achievement of programmatic goals and objectives.

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AS MINE ACTION EVOLVED AND MATURED, WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT SURPRISED YOU, EITHER REGARDING THE SCOPE OF THE WORK CHANGING OR THE FIELD SHIFTING FOCUS TO ADDRESS DIFFERENT CHALLENGES?

I was quite surprised at how the initial focus on clearing minefields and the destruction of anti-personnel mine stockpiles quickly expanded to include the acquisition and destruction of excess firearms, advanced conventional weapons such as man-portable air-defense systems and anti-tank guided missiles, and large quantities of abandoned ordnance and unexploded ordnance from national authorities, other parties,

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CAN YOU SHARE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OR STORY FROM YOUR TIME IN HMA THAT HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON YOU?

In July 1999, I went to Kosovo to serve as the in-country program manager of the Kosovo Emergency Demining Force, a large and capable demining group that was composed of personnel from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia that we had trained and equipped in earlier years.

After we got on-ground and began operating, Marine Colonel Mark Adams, the Deputy Director of the State Department’s Humanitarian Demining Programs Office (PM/HDP), came to Kosovo to check on our progress and to see if there was any further assistance that the Office could provide.

I had inherited a HUMMWV from excess military assets used by the peacekeeping force in Kosovo, and so I used that vehicle to drive the deputy director to the various demining sites, as it was a very robust vehicle, and the site visits involved considerable travel along mountain roads and some off-road travel to reach the demining sites.

We had completed our last visit of the day and were headed back to home base when suddenly there was a terrible screeching sound coming from the rear of the vehicle, which quickly turned into a wobbling of the entire vehicle. I got the wobbling under control and looked out my driver’s side window just in time to see my left rear wheel go flying past and down a steep ravine to my left front. Since the vehicle was stable as long as I kept the speed at 30 mph, I was able to drive to a “controlled crash” close to the spot where the rear wheel had disappeared.

and armed conflicts in an effort to take these implements of war out of circulation. Although these demilitarization efforts don’t eliminate the illicit trafficking of weapons from one area of conflict to another, they do reduce the deadly products available, which in and of itself is a worthy contribution to local and regional peace and security.



The author in the HUMMWV in Kosovo.

Colonel Adams and I immediately jumped out of the vehicle and went racing down the sides of the ravine to try to find the wheel, when all of a sudden, we stopped dead in our tracks and gave each other a look that said, “we’re in deep trouble now, what do we do next?”

The problem was that the verges of the roads and the ravines on either side were suspected of being mined, and this section had not yet been checked for any possible EO contamination.

The end result was that Colonel Adams and I had committed a bad “rookie mistake” in jumping to solve a missing wheel problem without taking into account the mine threat factors which should have been foremost in our minds.

The end result was that we slowly retraced the steps we had taken to get to the point of our “explosive threat epiphany,” and by slowly, I mean very slowly. Trying to retrace steps through undergrowth by looking for broken twigs, crushed leaves, and disturbed ground is not a fast process, and this is especially so when your life hangs in the balance.

It took us no more than two minutes to push our way down the side of the ravine to start our search. It took thirty minutes to retrace our steps to safety. And those were the longest thirty minutes of my life! ©

The views expressed in this interview are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the US State Department, US Government, or the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery.