April 2010

Humanitarian Mine Action Training Mission to Sri Lanka

Amy Crockett
Center for International Stabilization and Recovery

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal
Part of the Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol14/iss1/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
Sri Lanka is no stranger to landmine and explosive remnants of war contamination—nearly 30 years of hostilities between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan government have displaced thousands, impeded resettlement activities and hindered economic reconstruction. Although the two opposing sides entered into a 2002 cease-fire agreement, allowing for temporary land-clearance progress, the conflict reignited in 2006, leading to further mine and ERW contamination. In May 2009, the government defeated the LTTE in a military campaign, but, as of spring 2010, estimates indicate nearly 300,000 IDPs remain. The mine/ERW contamination continues to hinder resettlement and land-clearance efforts, especially in the gravely affected Northern province.

Preparations
To assess how the United States could most effectively aid the Sri Lankan military with its humanitarian-demining efforts in northern Sri Lanka, the Humanitarian Mine Action Team, a group of six U.S. military and civilian demining professionals from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Pacific Command, Special Operations Command Pacific, and U.S. Army Pacific Command, visited the country in June 2009, meeting with government officials, military members and nongovernmental organization representatives. In response to the crisis, the U.S. Department of State also announced funding of US$6.6 million to support demining in the north. "Demining is a critical step in the process so that people can return to their homes, and we support the government of Sri Lanka’s commitment to return all those displaced quickly and safely,” stated James R. Moore, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in Sri Lanka.

From 24 June through 1 August, the HMA team conducted a Requirements Determination Site Survey to finalize the training’s logistical planning, such as determining the curriculum components, trainees, and necessary equipment and how it would be obtained. The team consisted of Team Leader Staff Sergeant Mark C. Wells, Sergeant John M. Huysen and Specialist Jeffery C. Hunter who worked directly with the SLSME Commandant, Colonel Kalyana, and the HD Chief Instructor, Lieutenant Colonel Udaya Kumara, as well as the school members. The experience level of the trainees ranged from skilled HD SLA commanders to “future commanders unfamiliar with the humanitarian-demining process but experienced in the military engineer field.” Training was conducted in accordance with International Mine Action Standards.
Reviewing demining tools in Sri Lanka.

The HMA team’s main goals:
1. Assess the capability and knowledge of the SLA’s HD program and instructors.
2. Provide instruction on the most recent IMAS while comparing and contrasting those with the SLA’s HD standard operating procedures.
3. Update equipment important to the SLA Demining Program for SLMSE use.

The mission was underway on 25 August 2009 after the team arrived in the west-coast city of Colombo, Sri Lanka, and met with U.S. Embassy officials to verify the demining equipment’s shipment to the country. Meanwhile, the team hoped to travel to a demining location in the north following the requirements determination site survey, but the mission was never able to conduct observations because Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Defense failed to approve the trip.

From late August to early September, the team began training the Sri Lankan deminers at the SLMSE in Embilipitiya, Sri Lanka. According to the HMA team’s brief, the HMA team and the SLA worked together to give students “separate, but not contradictory” views regarding HD. The curriculum encompassed lectures and practical exercises on the HD process and on new procedures and protocols. Instructors also required students to conduct a final, solo, scenario-based operation conducted after the project to discover what happened and why it happened, during and upon completion of each exercise.

Analyzing the Mission’s Success

The team encountered an obstacle when some of the ordered course items did not arrive on time at the program’s beginning. It overcame this hurdle by managing to collect enough equipment on short notice, demonstrating the SLA’s ability to plan and adapt at a moment’s notice. The HMA team and the SLA taught lessons in English and Sinhalese. A dynamic learning environment also contributed to the mission’s success.

The HMA team’s instruction, the SLA Demining program and instructors, as well as providing instruction on the most recent IMAS course to the SLA’s respect and admiration for the U.S. military. The SLA expressed the desire for continued training would be in Sri Lanka’s best interest, considering the extent of the country’s landmine and IDP issues. Such training would ultimately ensure the implementation of the highest-quality standards, resulting in Sri Lanka becoming safer and, ultimately, safe from the impact of landmines.

Amy Crockett joined the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery in May 2009. She graduated from James Madison University in May 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in media arts and design and a minor in anthropology. She was also Copy Editor at The Breeze, JMU’s student newspaper. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career as a writer.

Amy Crockett
Editorial Assistant
The Journal of ERW and Mine Action
Phone: +1 703 614 5824
Fax: +1 703 648 5606
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

See Endnotes, Page 82