August 2006

Decade of Service: The MAIC is 10!

Dennis Barlow
Center for International Stabilization and Recovery

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

Recommended Citation
Barlow, Dennis (2006) "Decade of Service: The MAIC is 10!," Journal of Mine Action : Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol10/iss1/2

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.
A Decade of Service: The MAIC is 10!

The James Madison University Mine Action Information Center is celebrating 10 years of service to the mine-action community. Director Dennis Barlow looks back on 10 years of accomplishments.

by Dennis Barlow | Mine Action Information Center |

W e at the Center have seen and been a part of much that has transpired in the mine-action realm since that summer day in 1996 when the U.S. Department of Defense decided to create an independent clearinghouse for humanitarian-demining information. Having faith in the passion and dedication of those in an academic setting, they asked for this Center to be created not in a bustling metropolis like Washington or New York, but instead in the heart of Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, at James Madison University.

Behind-the-Scenes Support

Like everyone else, we’ve had our ups and downs, but we feel pretty good about the efforts we’ve made and the fruits grown and harvested from those efforts. Unlike many of the larger and more powerful organizations involved in mine action, the MAIC at JMU has played the role of junior partner. We understood early on that the United Nations, sovereign nations, regional agencies, global nongovernmental organizations and large corporations would rightly dominate the play of humanitarian mine action. But we also felt that a university, with a passionate altruism tempered by an abiding neutrality, could—may, should—play an integral role.

So the MAIC was established as a public-policy center with a small central staff augmented by the part-time work of professors with key subject-matter expertise and students with unflogging energy and dedication. It has not been easy to maintain the balance of such a small vessel on a sea amid some very tall ships, but it certainly has been exciting.

As JMU reaches this milestone, we hope to be forgiven the egotism of looking back over our 10 years and reflecting on some of our accomplishments. I do this knowing that sometimes the tall ships catch most of the wind and make it harder for the smaller MAIC craft to unfurl its flag.

MAIC’s Far-reaching Impact

We’re proud to say that we have inspired many of our students to become part of the mine-action arena. Several of our students and interns have gone on to bigger and better things in a variety of mine-action or humanitarian organizations. Stacy Smith is now working for RONCO Consulting Corporation; Keith Feigenbaum works for Science Applications International Corporation; Juan Carlos Ruam is at the Organization of American States; Craig Finkelston was the U.S. Department of State’s Humanitarian Demining Fellow; Kurt Chenko went to work for HALO Trust as a deminer in Afghanistan; and Erin Snider worked at Adopt-A-Minefield. Others are still looking for the right position. Sarah Smaanam will move to Egypt in late summer 2006; where she will pursue a master’s degree at the American University in Cairo, and Owen Usher is currently evaluating several offers related to mine-action organizations.

Keeping Up the Standard

The MAIC was instrumental in getting the International Mine Action Standards process under way and maintaining it. At a global conference convened by JMU in 1997, we highlighted standards as an agenda item, and the UN. Mine Action Service stepped forward during that meeting to take the lead in establishing this very important program. Since then, JMU has convened focus groups, maintained the IMAS Web site, and worked with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in updating technical notes, modifications and additions to the standards.

In the initial development of the Information Management System for Mine Action, the MAIC played a primary role in providing information and advice, working with the GICHD, and having seminars to determine the requirements for a mine-action information system, subsequently helping to determine these requirements. The MAIC again worked closely with GICHD to define and fine-tune the need for and shape of casualty data within the framework of the IMSMA system.

Asking the Hard Questions

Given the independent nature of the MAIC, we have been able to ask politically sensitive questions or raise controversial issues and provide a forum in which they could be debated. The Journal of Mine Action is now in its 10th year and a perusal of its index will indicate the breadth of topics covered. We note with pride that the JMA was cited over 100 times in the GICHD’s comprehen- sive book, A Guide to Mine Action. The JMA has also featured many of the seminars and workshops convened by JMU have focused on specific themes and topics critical to the effectiveness of mine-action campaigns and programs. This same openness to ideas drives our vision related to Web-based polling questions and our non-referenced lessons-learned database.

A Portal to Mine-action Information

We’ve found that many in the mine-action community use the MAIC Web site as a gateway to mine-action information and resources. Not only does the MAIC maintain an up-to-date registry of mine-action organizations, but it furnishes links to every significant mine-action group in the world; reports significant mine-action news on a daily basis; displays an up-to-the-minute review of “what’s new” in mine action, and provides “help desk” access to those who want to know more about mine-action activities.

Top-Level Training and Conferences

Of course, as a university-based organization, the MAIC at JMU has contributed as a source of mine-action training and education. Using UNIFIL best practices, a JMU team of clinical psychologists and health educators wrote and developed a mine-risk education curriculum, which was implemented by the Women’s Union and the Committee for Public Education in Quang Tri province of Vietnam in 1999. We foresee the need to revamp that curriculum to base it on community standards, while focusing collateral capacity-building projects in central Vietnam. The MAIC also sent a team of Geographic Information System professors to support the Southeast European Mapping Project and taught GIS skills to deminers in the Balkans. In May and June 2006, the Center conducted its fourth Mine Action Senior Managers Course for the United Nations Development Programme.

Mine-action Software and Publications

The MAIC worked with an interdisciplinary team of JMU students and professors to create various global information system products. The JMU GIS team first modified the best-off-the-shelf geographical software packages to make the products user-friendly, then added mine-action features to make them useful to the field. The same team created the Spatial Data Information Center, a database of GIS-related products available to landmine-afflicted countries. This product was issued in concert with an educational database that offered a comprehensive, easy-to-use online geographical tutorial.

Over the years, the MAIC has produced various publications in addition to the Journal of Mine Action. In 1997, the MAIC was selected to produce the book Sustainable Humanitarian Demining, a compendium of trends, technologies and mine-action techniques. In 2001, the MAIC, in support of the U.S. State Department’s joint conference with Rotary International, produced the first primer on mine action, entitled The Landmine Action Smart Book, which is today in its second printing and was recently made available in a web version on the MAIC Web site.

From the beginning, JMU has been able to call on its resident sources of expertise to provide strong bases for mine-action policy, planning and operations. MAIC-produced studies have investigated such issues as critical-victim stress, operator requirements, the use of casualty data, the application of military skills to humanitarian demining, and planning and phasing of mine-action campaigns. JMU studies and surveys can be accessed on the MAIC Web site (see contact information).
An Alternative Perspective on Landmines and Vulnerable Populations

By offering a different view on the International Campaign to Ban Landmines’ dominant message concerning mine action, this article presents an argument for possible alternatives. The author brings up such points as a lack of discussion and an acceptance of facts without proper checking of research. In addition, suggestions of constructive use of landmines in the defense of vulnerable populations are made to refute the idea of a necessary worldwide ban.

by Shelby Weitzel [College of the Holy Cross]

People living in areas infested with landmines are quite aware of the impact these mines have on their well-being. For those of us living in “the developed world,” public awareness of the impact of landmines is due largely to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. From this campaign we have learned of the physical, psychological, economic, and environmental damage caused by landmines left over from past conflicts. We have also learned of ways in which, contrary to the dictates of responsible use, landmines are used to terrorize civilian populations. Thus the most vulnerable populations in the world sustain much of this damage, making this senseless violence particularly heinous.

From what we have heard, we might easily infer that landmines are inherently problematic. However, focusing solely on these harms gives the false impression that only bad consequences result from landmine use. Furthermore, these arguments fail to consider that bad, perhaps worse, consequences can result from a failure to...