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The Countermine Training Support Center

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The U.S. Army Engineer School established the Countermine Training Support Center (CTSC) at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, in April, 1996. In the short amount of time in which it has been functioning, CTSC has carved out several unique and important roles relevant to humanitarian demining and is initiating activities that will be of great interest and value to the demining community. The new roles and enlargement of the mission that have occurred at the CTSC are in direct response to U.S. government policy guidelines that call for the expansion of humanitarian demining program. Activities underway--and planned--promise to aid in the global effort against landmine tragedies.

The CTSC, designated as the Countermine Center for Excellence by the U.S. Army, runs two different resident courses in new buildings in the Engineer School complex in the heart of Missouri. One course caters to conventional Army units and offers a five-day program of instruction in Mine Awareness techniques. The other course is longer--two weeks--and geared to prepare American Special Forces detachments to run a successful "train-the-trainer" program in the specific country to which they will be deployed.

Conventional Mine Awareness Training

The Army's Training and Doctrine Command, realizing that many peacetime operations and countermine activities have direct impact on and relevance to the host nation populace, has directed and funded the Mine Awareness course. The course is designed to give U.S. commanders the ability to coordinate more effectively with foreign civilian and military officials and to stress the congruence of U.S. military countermine activities with the mores and customs of civilians. It strives to implement a campaign that uses themes that resonate with the local populations in the area of operations. The CTSC coordinates its Mine Awareness program of instruction with Psychological Operations organizations at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. This coordination between Army conventional forces and Special Forces facilitates the kind of linkage necessary to plan demining missions that emphasize unity of effort.
Humanitarian Demining Training

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict began funding a Humanitarian Demining course at the center in December, 1996. It was designed primarily for Special Operations Forces detachments that were preparing to conduct demining training operations in countries that had requested such support from the U.S. The course concentrates on the "train-the-trainer" concept and is modified constantly to make each course specifically relevant to the country under consideration. Instructor to pupil ratio is 1:5, which allows for more personal attention and consistent feedback.

The course also uses "lessons learned" reports gleaned from various sources and responds to an electronic link—a web browser—that connects the CTSC, the National Ground Intelligence Center, and the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. The center produces a training support package consisting of lesson plans, slides, and other materials required to conduct the course. While the center has the capability of sending mobile training teams to conduct training off-site, it has found that the use of training aids, survey techniques, and especially, the use of explosives makes such exportation of the full course impractical.

Dr. Greg Bier, Technical Director of the CTSC, stresses that the goal of the training is not to duplicate or even approach the level of expertise required by qualified Explosives Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel. The goal of the training is to take personnel who have readily applicable cultural, military, and sustainment skills (e.g. Special Forces soldiers) and give them enough demining instruction to make them effective at conducting a rudimentary but effective humanitarian demining program. Indeed, there is an exercise planned near the end of the course that consciously puts the student in a situation in which he/she is beyond his/her demining/EOD competence. The "school solution" or correct answer is to take the problem to the Embassy and EOD authorities for a solution. Any student not arriving at that solution fails the exercise.

The course content is constantly changing. The staff has recently revised the program of instruction based on the adoption of demining standards by the UN and reports from the Mine Action Centers in Bosnia and Cambodia. The course is modified to focus on the country that the students are planning to deploy.

A particularly interesting aspect of the course is that the students are provided with a veritable treasure trove of demining aids upon graduation. Each class is cautioned to have someone arrive by automobile or truck so that the materials can be transported back to their home station. Not only do they take away such aids as mine awareness boards, manuals, and references, but they are furnished with a "Deminer's Tool Box"—a footlocker filled with hand tools, references, checklists, and other basic equipment for a mine clearer. Upon arrival at the host nation (hopefully within the context of a national demining center or office), the U.S. Special Operations team should recommend...
that the country, or supporting organization, create versions of this
demining package for each person to be trained. The CTSC has trained
about 130 Special Forces soldiers in the past year. Recently trained teams
have deployed to Bosnia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Chad.

Outreach of the CTSC

The command structure at the Engineer School, including Major General
Flowers, has articulated a vision which aims at the expansion of the
school's outreach. One of the charters of the center is to provide subject
matter expertise to requesting non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
as well as DoD agencies. Dr. Bier is making course slots open to
Department of Defense (DoD) agencies on a "space available" basis and
is organizing a pilot study to determine how the center can accommodate
NGOs. The study will determine the scope of support offered to NGOs
and will attempt to find out both what subjects NGOs would like to study
(e.g. victim assistance, mine clearance techniques, mine awareness,
project management) and how the course could be made logistically and
financially feasible. Anyone interested can offer input to Dr. Bier via e-
mail: bierg@wood.army.mil.

The CTSC has been able to use the larger venue of the Engineer School
to enhance and widen its humanitarian demining training. Liaison
officers from Australia, France, and Canada have provided valuable
demining instruction support while plans for a more formal officer
exchange program are being made.

Information about the Countermine Training Support Center and its
services and products are available on the CTSC web site:
www.wood.army.mil/dtl/ctsc.htm. Studies and papers will be written
under the auspices of the center, for example a land power essay entitled
"Understanding and Expanding the U.S. Military Role in Humanitarian
Demining" is being completed, and plans are under way to publish a
periodic newsletter.