August 2003

Demining in Bihac With 5 Korpusa of the Bosnian Army

Peter Hindy

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

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.
Mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex process with a large number of interested parties participating at the same time. The human cost of war is evident in the daily lives of the people who continue to work and live amidst the ongoing conflict. The mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to pose a significant threat to both civilians and military forces. The decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina must prioritize and strategize to mitigate the risk of mine action.

**Final Considerations**

Mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a process with a large number of interested parties participating at the same time. The human cost of war is evident in the daily lives of the people who continue to work and live amidst the ongoing conflict. The mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to pose a significant threat to both civilians and military forces. The decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina must prioritize and strategize to mitigate the risk of mine action.

**References**

1. According to the ICRC information with April 2003 included.
2. Demining Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 2010.
5. Effectiveness of demining is a constant problem, almost conceivable comparing to number of mines set. According to some estimations demining lasts hundreds times longer than mining
7. Dr. David Treni, Dr. Slavomir Smidovic: Unad & Metodologija Politikologije, Sarajevo, 1999, page 147.
11. Dr. David Treni, Dr. Slavomir Smidovic: Unad & Metodologija Politikologije, Sarajevo, 1999, page 498.
30. *All graphics courtesy of author.*

**Contact Information**

Dorin lisica
BHMAC Deputy Director (Operations)
Zmaja od Bosne 8
71000 Sarajevo,
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Tel: 387 33 253800
Fax: 387 33 667311
E-mail: dhindy@bhmac.org
Website: www.bhmac.org

**Demining in Bihac With 5 Korpusa of the Bosnian Army**

Despite the end to years of brutal fighting in Bosnia, landmines left behind from the war still threaten the safety of local populations. The following article gives a firsthand account of a former Canadian soldier’s demining experience in Bosnia alongside the Bosnian army.

**by Peter Hindy, Former Canadian Soldier**

**Introduction**

On September 12, 2001, I arrived under guard at work and made my way to the tip of the hill in Cekitkje, Bihac, Bosnia. I had a very strange, yet distinct sinking feeling from the tragedies of the terrorist attacks of the previous day. As I walked up the hill, I felt that I would have to somehow work past the usual morning smile and cheerfulness that I was not personally angry and vengeful at the Muslim world for the actions taken by the poor excesses for soldiers who complicated the attacks against the innocent people of New York and Washington. These and these brave men fought for the 5th Corps of the Bosnian Army (BSSWJ) and for what they thought was right. They were the finest people I have ever known.

At first, the deminers did not initiate the usual conversation and a few started at the ground. I expected to the other deminers that it was normal to feel tentative today towards me, a Westerner, as such a terrible thing had happened. After a short period of hesitant conversation, I presented with the following statement, “Now people in America know that it was like in my town every day.” The remark was not spoken in a hard tone, but rather was relayed in a neutral respectful manner. After all, these men had been marked fighting in their proud suicide town of Bihac for 1,200 plus days against overwhelming forces. They held their own for that entire battle through the good and the bad times. Even though the rest of the town has tried to get back to life after eight years of brutal conflict, these men are still fighting that same battle on the ground that they had been in July of 1995 in Cekitkje. The Serbs may have been defeated, but the mines are still standing awaiting their victims with patience and strategic, ruthless dedication. But as invisible as these mines are, they do nothing to dampen the efforts of the shake, professional character of the deminers of 5. Korpusa. 

“BSSWJ! Team and two partners in crime, relax in the adm area.

**Hosts of the Battlefield**

The minefields being cleared here today is one of many laid in 1992 during the conflict. In fact, 60 percent of these landmines are unknown and unmarked, and those who laid them may be long dead. The belts of protective and tacti cal clothing, boots, and other personal items are found—remnants to what the world allowed to happen here in this country two hours from London. For the men of BSSWJ, the war continues daily from seven AM to six in the morning. The men have been defeated, but the mines are still standing awaiting their victims with patience and strategy.

For the men of BSSWJ, the war continues daily from seven AM to six in the morning. The men have been defeated, but the mines are still standing awaiting their victims with patience and strategy. The minefields being cleared here today is one of many laid in 1992 during the conflict. In fact, 60 percent of these landmines are unknown and unmarked, and those who laid them may be long dead. The belts of protective and tacti cal clothing, boots, and other personal items are found—remnants to what the world allowed to happen here in this country two hours from London. For the men of BSSWJ, the war continues daily from seven AM to six in the morning. The men have been defeated, but the mines are still standing awaiting their victims with patience and strategy.
Demining in the Fields of Bosnia

The demining is very slow work; on average, the team only clears about 100 meters a day. This is the safest obtainable speed in Cerknje, due to the rugged terrain and obstacles, without the use minefields and obstacles, only during rainy season we have to work with balls 120 meter, meter, year, mine by mine.

Handshakes for the Deminers

The deminers of BSSW1 have seen war up close. Despite the dangers of demining, I was once told by a deminer with three children and a wife that he has no other choice but to do this work because of the economic hardships of Bosnia. "I will do this because of the war," a soldier was how I grew up. I never knew college. I knew only the rifle and the blood-soaked mud—the war. I wouldn't leave my town. I have made my life here. Now it's only the good money around. I have kids to feed. But if I ever lose respect for what I do, I shall quit that very day! This is no place for cowards! We have a job to do and we must do it right!

The team continues on day after day, mine after mine. Despite the heat, problems with getting proper kit and medical supplies, and even not getting paid their monthly wages on time, the deminers continue to work. Once, the deminers had to wait three months to receive their 700 Deutsche Marks per month. Pay. Another time, they knew they did not have enough IVs or morphine to treat the injured deminers. Despite these obstacles, the demining team continues their tedious task. From March until November, working together. Sometimes you can hear them sing the same old Bosnian songs that were sung before the war up close. Despite the dangers of demining, I was once told by a deminer with three children and a wife that he has no other choice but to do this work because of the economic hardships of Bosnia. Why would I do this because of the war? A soldier was how I grew up. I never knew college. I knew only the rifle and the blood-soaked mud—the war. I wouldn't leave my town. I have made my life here. Now it's only the good money around. I have kids to feed. But if I ever lose respect for what I do, I shall quit that very day! This is no place for cowards! We have a job to do and we must do it right!

Mines continue to claim their victims. Every minute there is a mine going off close by. Despite the heat, problems with getting proper kit and medical supplies, and even not getting paid their monthly wages on time, the deminers continue to work. Once, the deminers had to wait three months to receive their 700 Deutsche Marks per month. Pay. Another time, they knew they did not have enough IVs or morphine to treat the injured deminers. Despite these obstacles, the demining team continues their tedious task. From March until November, working together. Sometimes you can hear them sing the same old Bosnian songs that were sung before the war up close. Despite the dangers of demining, I was once told by a deminer with three children and a wife that he has no other choice but to do this work because of the economic hardships of Bosnia. Why would I do this because of the war? A soldier was how I grew up. I never knew college. I knew only the rifle and the blood-soaked mud—the war. I wouldn't leave my town. I have made my life here. Now it's only the good money around. I have kids to feed. But if I ever lose respect for what I do, I shall quit that very day! This is no place for cowards! We have a job to do and we must do it right!

Contact Information

Peter Hindy
Former Canadian Soldier
3 Karputa
ARBD
BSSW1-2
Cerknje, Pirtocka Minefields
Bihac, Bosnia

http://pinda.webnet.ba

Note: Pete Hindy is currently an unemployed technical advisor and can be contacted at his email address (see below).

*All pictures courtesy of Peter Hindy.*

**MASG in the Balkans**

In order for members of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) to fully understand mine action programs and to study the implementation of mine action at the national level, several MASG representatives visited and met with government and UN representatives in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This article describes the discoveries and conclusions they made on their trip.

by Lt Col Klaus-Peter Koschner, German Permanent Mission to the United Nations

**Introduction**

To allow representatives of MASG to see mine action programs in the respective countries and to study the implementation of mine action at the national level, the representatives visited Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina from May 18 to May 22, 2003. Meetings were held with relevant government representatives of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Albania as well as with UN representatives accredited in those states.

**Conclusion**

The most important part of preventing landmine casualties is education. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) goes through great lengths in educating people to adopt behavior in order to avoid and remove the unnecessary dangers that mines cause, as well as pass this knowledge on to others. But still people do not listen. Even with the knowledge of minefields now available, we still hear stories about people who just wouldn't listen. As if the signs are not plain enough to see, people still risk their lives for that jug of water. One good indication is that since the war, the word is getting out in a big way, children are more aware and as long as the news is spread about the dangers of mines, I am confident generations will live longer. Take a minute and think for a minute of the people who are risking and giving their lives like gifts today for your tomorrow.

**The Albanian Mine Action Programme**

A survey carried out in 1999, illustrates the mine threat in Albania. In northeastern Albania, a 120-km border has 102 areas contaminated with anti-personnel mines and anti-tank mines from the former Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as unexploded North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ordnance, covering an area totaling some 15.25 km², with no available records. The defining efforts of the international community and those of the Albanian Mine Action Centre (AMAC) have not only reduced the contaminated areas by half, but have also led to substantial progress in the area of mine risk education (MRE) and victim assistance. The strategic objective is to remove all mines and UXO by 2010, seems realistic, although not easy to achieve. Nevertheless, a shortfall of $95.8 million U.S. for the demining program in Albania for this year was noted. For the next two years, $3.9 million per year will be needed to reach the goal of a mine-free country.

**ITF**

The ITF is headquartered in Slovenia, the only mine-free country in the Balkans. ITF activities are focused on the other Balkan states and are able to be extended to mine-affected states such as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Its activities comprise demining, mine victim assistance, support for demining structures and training. Further, a Geographical Information System for Demining in Southeast Europe will be developed under the ITF's auspices. During the five years of its existence, the ITF has raised a total of $111.2 million. Eighty percent of these funds were used for demining, with roughly half of this funded