August 2003

They Started With a Temple: JAHDS in Thailand

Paddy Blagden

International Mine Action

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.
They Started With a Temple: JAHDS in Thailand

The Japanese Alliance for Humanitarian Demining Support (JAHDS), better known for its research and development of Ground Penetrating Radar (Mine Eye), recently became involved in mine clearance. In the process of testing mine clearance equipment, JAHDS cleared an area around an ancient Khmer temple.

by Paddy Blagden, Former Technical Director of GICHD

JAHDS is better known for research and development of Mine Eye and for supporting the demining efforts of other organizations, rather than for mine clearance. The need to test Mine Eye under operational conditions called for the creation of a test field with access to live mines. It follows that if you have a field with live mines, you might as well clear them.

The decision to step into the mine clearance arena was not taken lightly. JAHDS had been testing equipment in Thailand for some time, with the full co-operation of the Thai Mine Action Centre (TMAC). It had also formed a working relationship with the General Charitable Chonkhavan Foundation (GCCF), a Thai NGO based in Bangkok, and the Thai Army, which had a Humanitarian Mine Action Unit (HMAU) working in the northeastern part of the country. JAHDS appointed Mr. Watara Sugaya, an ex-matser-mariner, as the project manager. JAHDS also needed an international specialist to provide field operational skills. They chose a South African, Johan Van Zyl, to be the Operations Manager. Zyl is a man of vast experience who is well known in the mine clearance world. They were ready to begin.

Obviously, you cannot start demining without a minefield. The project chosen was the area around the ancient Khmer temple of Sdok Kok Thom, close to the Thai-Cambodia border, north of the small border town of Aranyaprathet in Sisakhe Province. This temple is one of a network of Khmer temples, built about 1180 years ago, with the famous Cambodian temple complex of Angkor Wat as its centre. The Khmer Rouge, and other warring factions, may have mined the temple grounds as part of the border minefields. Clearance of the temple itself was needed to permit the promotion of increased tourism in the area and to provide access to land for local farming.

The site was relatively small—about 340,000 square metres in all—but presented a range of problems, with vegetation varying from a flat grassy area to densely vegetated sections with large trees. The area was seen as a good site to build up experience. Thus, JAHDS started with a temple.

Starting from nothing is difficult and demands patience, determination and good planning. The JAHDS team started by setting up a working partnership with HMAU 1 and began the refresher training of the GCCF deminers. The area chosen was perfect for such training—a low-vegetation area, with medium vegetation, but well suited to a systems approach, using machines, manual clearance and dogs.

As confidence and experience increased, more GCCF deminers were recruited, and HMAU 1 was able to loan a BD4MH brush cutter and dog teams, and to carry out some of the Quality Assurance. They also allowed JAHDS to use a Tempest Mk 4 and a Pearson SDTT (Survivable Demining Tractor and Tools), a highly versatile and effective machine.

Thanks to the help of its working partners, the JAHDS programme is now in full swing. Two sections of land have been formally handed back to the District, and are even now being cultivated. The work being done will be available for inspection by those attending the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty. It appears JAHDS will meet its target completion date of October 2003. Life has always been "interesting" (remember the Chinese proverb) for the clearance community. The encouraging news is that issues that are central to their work in the field (such as responsibility for clearing up ERW and adherence to the Fifth Protocol) are now being visited by beautiful contestants for the "Miss Thailand" competition.

No group of deminers has ever concentrated quite so hard.

For the future, there are other challenges in the border area, and even over the border in Cambodia. But JAHDS will never forget that they started with a temple.

Contact Information

Mr. Patrick Blagden
3 Old Compton Lane
Farnham, Surrey GU9 8BS
UK
Tel: 41-22-609-16-74
Fax: 41-22-906-16-90
Email: paddy@blagden03.fsnet.co.uk

Explosive Remnants of War: The Negotiations Continue

From 16 - 27 June 2003, States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) met in a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to discuss a draft proposal for an Instrument on Explosive Remnants of War. A previous article in the Journal of Mine Action outlined the background to this process, and the June meeting was the second to take place in 2003. This article explains what was discussed in June, what will happen next and some of the broader issues of interest to the mine action community.

by Paul Ellis, GICHD

The aim of the current series of meetings is to discuss possible measures that could alleviate the humanitarian impact of ERW. Based on earlier work, the ambassador from the Netherlands, who is responsible for coordinating work on ERW in the CCW, presented a paper as a possible basis for an instrument or protocol on ERW. At present, there are two arguments as to how work on this paper should proceed. The majority of States Parties favour the adoption of a legally binding protocol. However, some States Parties continue to oppose this view, favouring a "statement of best practices." For the clearance community, the encouraging news is that issues that are central to their work in the field (such as responsibility for clearing up ERW and measures to protect civilians, e.g., fencing and marking) are being discussed in an international forum. These discussions may result in formal obligations for parties to future conflicts to provide clearance and other mine action activities.

After two weeks of discussions, the Coordinator for ERW will now re draft the proposal and present it again to States Parties in the autumn in the next formal meeting scheduled for November 2003. The key articles of interest to the clearance community are Article 3: Clearance, Removal and Destructive Disposal of Explosive Remnants of War; Article 5: Provisions for the Protection of the Civilian Populations from the Effects of Explosive Remnants of War; Article 7: Existing Explosive Remnants of War; and the Technical Annex, which covers recording and provision of information on UXO and abandoned ordnance and plus risk education and the provision of information.

The Draft for an Instrument on ERW

From a positive perspective, the draft paper offers the prospect of recognizing the responsibility of parties to a conflict to clean up ERW, which could mean better funding provision, swifter action in dealing with ERW and improved cooperation between military forces and humanitarian organisations. Also, information would be available, such as the types of ordnance used, location of battle areas, methods for safe disposal, presence of anti-handling devices, and location and amounts of abandoned ordnance. All this information would be of considerable use for pre-deployment planning and preparation for a post-conflict environment. However, the proposals could see states increasing their own assets (almost certainly the military) to undertake work previously done by the clearance community. This raises issues about the quality and efficacy of the military in this type of work. Furthermore, if states use their own assets to clear ERW or provide risk education, they might have to pay a third party to do what they see as a duplication of work. As a result, there could potentially be a negative impact on funding.

Before there will be any agreement, there are a number of obstacles that we need to overcome. First, among many delegations, there is still a lack of understanding about the reality of work in the field or what is involved in providing risk education. The few "experts" that states bring along are almost always military officers, and now always with experience in explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), let alone a mine action programme. Several states are openly opposed to providing any information beyond the bare minimum. The usual reason cited for this is national security. The GICHD and others have pointed out that the issue is not one of providing the information but rather of when the information becomes known. A good example would be, should states refuse to provide coordinates for cluster bomb strikes, it just means that the clearance community would have to establish the location using a survey.

The information ultimately becomes known—just takes longer and costs more. There are also grounds for concern about how information would be provided. The draft proposal mentioned international databases, perhaps run by the United Nations, that might have to pay a third party to do what they see as a duplication of work. As a result, there could potentially be a negative impact on funding. The information ultimately becomes known—it just takes longer and costs more. There are also grounds for concern about how information would be provided. The draft proposal mentioned international databases, perhaps run by the United Nations, that might have to pay a third party to do what they see as a duplication of work. As a result, there could potentially be a negative impact on funding.