GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE DEEMED TO BE EXCESSIVELY INJURIOUS OR TO HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS

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Explosive Remnants of War Information Requirements
Render Safe Procedures (RSPs) during Humanitarian Clearance Operations

Background Paper prepared at the request of the Co-ordinator by the
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

Introduction

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining was requested to prepare a short background paper to summarise Render Safe Procedure[1] issues in the context of information requirements during humanitarian clearance operations.

The development and execution of effective RSPs are the major elements that contribute to the safety of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal [2] (EOD) operator, and the information they receive has a major influence on the development of these RSPs.

Previous papers have explained the detailed information requirements, therefore this paper will explain the requirement for critical information in order to maintain or improve the safety of the EOD operator. It will not explain RSPs in any technical detail due to their confidentiality and sensitivity.

EOD Training

The range of RSP options available to the EOD operator will generally be dependent on the level of training that the individual has had, (assuming the availability of sufficient resources and the appropriate equipment). Training periods for the EOD operator range from a period of weeks to over one year [3]; obviously the longer the training, the greater the RSP options[4].

[1] The application of special EOD methods and tools to provide for the interruption of functions or separation of essential components to prevent an unacceptable detonation. (IMAS definition).

[2] The detection, identification, evaluation, render safe, recovery and disposal of UXO. EOD may be undertaken; 1) as a routine part of mine clearance operations, upon discovery of the UXO; 2) to dispose of UXO discovered outside mined areas, (this may be a single UXO, or a larger number inside a specific area); or 3) to dispose of explosive ordnance which has become hazardous by damage or attempted destruction.

[3] The basic deminer course is around 2 weeks; a military Engineer EOD operator's training is between 3 to 6 months, whilst an Ammunition Technical Officer's training is well over one year.

[4] There is an argument that experience will improve the effectiveness of EOD operators. This is a highly debatable point if they have received insufficient training to begin with. Experience will improve operator safety for those tasks that they have been trained for; for those where insufficient training has been received, then the value of experience in terms of safety is negligible.

Therefore the information requirements for the deminer or EOD operator will, to a large degree, be dependant on their capability to work from first principles, combined with their diagnostic ability. These skills can only be improved by training. In effect, the more effective the training, then the lower the information requirements. Notwithstanding this, every EOD operator will be more effective with the more information that they have.

Render Safe Procedures

It is widely agreed within the EOD community that a primary aim of RSPs must be to restore the situation to normality commensurate with safety. The safeguarding of human life, (ideally including that of the EOD operator), must take precedence over everything else.

The safety of the local community, once the clearance operation has commenced, is generally easily achieved by the implementation of adequate danger areas (exclusion zones). These danger areas are primarily determined by the explosive content of the UXO, although certain designs, such as the incorporation of shaped charges, will require additional considerations [5].

The safety of the EOD operator is, however, a different matter. They will be required to make manual approaches to the UXO and take some form of preparatory action as part of their RSP, (for example the laying of a demolition charge or the deployment of an X-Ray system). Ideally the subsequent action will then be initiated remotely to reduce the risk to the EOD operator. Yet, there will inevitably be occasions when the EOD operator needs to take some form of positive action when in close proximity to the UXO [6].

Information Requirements

The above justification suggests that EOD operators will certainly be safer, and generally more effective, the more information on UXO design that is available to them. In addition, for those occasions where adequate danger areas cannot be achieved, the safety of the local community will also be significantly improved should the appropriate information be readily available to humanitarian EOD teams.

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[5] Circumstances where the danger area cannot be achieved may demand a more complex RSP, which will be explained later in this paper.

[6] Indeed, for those scenarios when evacuation of the danger area is not an option, for example if the UXO is next to a hospital, then the complete RSP may need to be conducted in close proximity to the UXO.