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Operation: Mine Awareness-Thailand

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Mine awareness teams in Surin Province, Thailand.

Photo c/o Katie Shepard

THAILAND

OPERATION: MINE AWARENESS

Years of conflict along the borders of Thailand have resulted in countless landmines buried along the Thai-Cambodia, Thai-Laos, Thai-Malaysia and Thai-Myanmar borders. The number of booby-traps, UXO and landmines in Thailand is unknown. Surveys made by the Royal Thai Army and Navy indicate that the land of 19 provinces are landmine-infested. Approximately 796 square kilometers of the land cannot be utilized, affecting the livelihood

of 400,000 people residing in these areas.

by Katie Shepard, MAIC

A high percentage of the population along the borders of Thailand have co-existed with landmines and UXO for decades, yet the number of landmine/UXO-related accidents is high. The Ministry of Health in Thailand states that at least 100 people a year are maimed or killed by landmines. The majority of these accidents occur because a person is forced to travel into a well-known, mine-infested area out

The Ministry of Health in Thailand states that at least 100 people a year are maimed or killed by landmines. The majority of these accidents occur because a person is forced to travel into a well-known, mine-infested area out of basic survival needs.

Gathering information from the village of Ban Non Som Boon in Sra Keow Province.

Photo c/o Katie Shepard



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of basic survival needs. However, many accidents occur due to lack of knowledge about the landmine danger.

With assistance from the U.S. Department of Defense, the Royal Thai Military implements and coordinates Mine Awareness Training Courses at the Thai Special Forces/PSYOPS base in Lop Buri, Thailand. The training courses are designed to enhance Thai soldiers' ability to teach mine awareness programs that encourage people to adopt activities and attitudes that avoid landmine dangers. Additionally, the courses train the soldiers to effectively collect information from local communities about the presence of mine fields and UXO.

The military mine awareness team of the first Humanitarian Mine Action Unit (HMAU) began mine awareness in April 2000, at Sra Keow province along the Thai-Cambodian border, the site of the first Thai-U.S. demining partnership. The teams continue to organize mine awareness presentations in villages and schools, distribute and post mine awareness materials and collect information on victims



Mine awareness teams often organize presentations for schools.

Photo c/o Katie Shepard

and suspected mine fields. Between April and June 2000, 30 villages were visited, reaching a total of 26,000 people living in Sra Keow.

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), an international training center located on the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology, is one organization working in partnership with TMAC to increase mine awareness in Thailand. ADPC hosted a *National Seminar on Mine Action* in December 1999, announcing the launch of ADPC's Landmine Awareness Program. Guest speakers included the Permanent Secretary of Defense, the director of TMAC and the Deputy Governor of Sra Keow province. As part of the Landmine Awareness Program, ADPC coordinates monthly mine awareness seminars in Sra Keow province.

ADPC held the first Sra Keow mine awareness training seminar in July 2000. Fifty government officials from the province participated in the seminar. ADPC plans to create a network of volunteer instructors from the seminar participants who will devote their time to mine awareness programs in Sra Keow. Parichatt Krongkant, the ADPC Training Director for

the Landmine Awareness Program, reported that eight participants from the July mine awareness seminar volunteered to be mine awareness program trainers. "After we get around 20 volunteers, we will conduct a "train-the-trainers" course and "walk-through" workshop... We also plan to pull the network of mine victims in Sra Keow to be trained as instructors or resource persons in this project," stated Krongkant.

In August, ADPC organized a second mine awareness seminar. Forty-two government officials and district chiefs attended. Part of ADPC's training included participant exposure to actual field operations. On August 29, 2000, participants traveled to Nong Ya Kaew village near the Thai-Cambodian border to observe demining operations.

Krongchatt reports that ADPC has received ample support from several community leaders in Sra Keow. ADPC was invited by one participant to conduct mine awareness training for 250 housewives in five sub-districts of Arunyaprathet, located in Sra Keow. The mine awareness seminars will be held every month for the next two years in an effort to reach the 1,500 government officials and community leaders in the province.

Handicap International

Handicap International (HI) is also working with Thailand to develop a Mine Risk Education (MRE) program. Since 1985, HI has provided assistance to victims in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. HI reports that from 1998 to 2000, 400 appliances were supplied to amputees in the refugee camps of Tak and Mae Hong Son provinces. Eighty percent of the amputations were due to mine accidents.

Following the coverage of HI's Rehabilitation Project and a 1999 needs-assessment survey, HI began a 12-month pilot phase in June 2000 for the implementation of a MRE project along the Thai-Cambodia and Thai-Myanmar borders.

Along the Thai-Myanmar border, the MRE Project targets two different populations—the refugees in the camps and the people inhabiting the Thai villages along the borders. Clemence Wilm, the HI Project Manager for the MRE project, states that a "separate needs assessment of each population is crucial for the success of this program." The pilot phase began in June 2000. Training for the MRE staff began in September 2000.

Bike Rally 2000

The Landmine Victims Network 1999 in Sra Keow, along with the Thailand Campaign to Ban Landmines (TCBL), sponsored a bike rally in May

2000 to raise public awareness of the impact of landmines in Thailand. The rally was held for the benefit of landmine victims and extended from Aranyathprathet district in Sra Keow province to Surin province. The bike rally lasted for four days and covered a distance of 259 kilometers in three eastern border provinces of Thailand. Participants included 28 Thai mine victims, 11 members of the Thailand Bicycle Club for Health and 12 TCBL organizers and interested people.

Conclusion

With concerted effort, defined goals and, most importantly, support from other organizations, the Thailand Mine Action Center strives to make a considerable difference in the number of lives affected by landmine/UXO accidents. By increasing mine awareness programs and activities, TMAC and its partners hope to extend their reach to educate the greatest number of Thai people. ■

Katie Shepard is a graduate student at James Madison University. She was in Thailand as an intern at the Thailand Mine Awareness Center from May 2000–September 2000.

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Mine Awareness courses train soldiers to effectively collect info from local communities.



Marking an area for survey work.

Photo c/o Katie Shepard



A child plays in a safe lane next to a mine field.

Photo c/o Katie Shepard

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