

DDAS Accident Report

Accident details

Report date: 15/05/2006	Accident number: 202
Accident time: 09:30	Accident Date: 12/07/1993
Where it occurred: Pursat Bak Tra (Bactra) Quarter (Village), Pursat Provincial Town	Country: Cambodia
Primary cause: Field control inadequacy (?)	Secondary cause: Field control inadequacy (?)
Class: Missed-mine accident	Date of main report: 02/08/1993
ID original source: NM/MA	Name of source: CMAC
Organisation: Name removed	
Mine/device: PMN-2 AP blast	Ground condition: soft wet
Date record created: 15/02/2004	Date last modified: 15/02/2004
No of victims: 2	No of documents: 1

Map details

Longitude:	Latitude:
Alt. coord. system:	Coordinates fixed by:
Map east:	Map north:
Map scale: not recorded	Map series:
Map edition:	Map sheet:
Map name:	

Accident Notes

no independent investigation available (?)
inadequate communications (?)
inadequate area marking (?)
mine/device found in "cleared" area (?)
protective equipment not worn (?)

Accident report

An accident report was prepared by an expatriate advisor to the demining group (which was also the MAC) on 2nd August 1993. It was located at the country MAC in January 1999 and the following summarises its content.

Demining in the area had begun on 15th May 1993 and the group had cleared 7000m² of "hill track" finding 42 PMN-2 mines prior to the accident. At the place of the accident a cluster of nine PMN-2 mines had been found and destroyed on 17th June 1993.

The deminers left their base at 07:00 and started work at 08:00. At 09:00 or 09.30 [discrepancy in records] the victim was standing near the sticks/"flags" marking where the cluster of PMN-2s had been destroyed with a UN Supervisor while they oversaw the work being carried out 30 metres ahead. The UN Supervisor instructed Victim No.1 to straighten the sticks marking where the mines had been destroyed because some had fallen over "due to rain". The victim took two steps and a mine exploded under his right foot. The victim "suffered severe leg injury resulting in amputation of right leg above the knee and splinters on his penis and testicles". The UN Supervisor was knocked over but "did not sustain any injuries".

UNTAC Operations in Phnom Penh were asked for Medevac at "about 09:45". Victim No.1 arrived at the "civil hospital post" at about 10:00 and the Medevac helicopter left for Phnom Penh about 11.45.

The Team Commander's statement varied by including mention that he was unable to contact his HQ for 30 minutes despite trying [no reason was given].

Victim No.2's report differed by including that when they reached the field hospital "I asked the doctor to examine my left eye as I was feeling irritation in my eye".

Victim No.1's statement included "as I placed my right foot on the ground my foot slipped into a small depression and mine exploded...I think nobody laid the mines, but maybe mines were laid in layers and we could not find it with the mine detector". [Schiebel.]

Conclusion

The investigator noted a variety of possible causes including the possibility that local people laid the mine for hunting, that others laid it to disrupt demining (there was evidence of people having been near the site) or by unemployed deminers who "envy the employed teams". He thought that it could have been laid by a deminer dismissed from the platoon, or could have been buried too deeply for detection in the original clearance but have had the covering soil washed away by recent rain. A "very remote" possibility of it having been missed during clearance was acknowledged, but it was felt very unlikely because the area had been used as a rest area.

The investigator sought to reduce the list of possible explanations and asked the village chief about the use of mines for hunting – the chief said it was not done because it was ineffective and because they did not know enough about mines. General concern about trained but unemployed deminers was expressed. [Over 1000 deminers had been trained and were awaiting employment at this time.]

Recommendations

The investigator recommended that rest areas should be rechecked each day before work, site security should be ensured and the posting of guards considered, areas where mines are found should be rechecked thoroughly after disposal, random checks on cleared land should be made, and further inquiry into the possibility of deliberate targeting of the deminers should be made. He added that Supervisors must ensure that all mines found are destroyed on the same day so that deminers have no chance to re-use them, that trained deminers who are not employed should be found useful work, and that "procedural complexities" in processing compensation claims should be minimised.

The country MAC file included a sketch of the site, photographs of the site showing a cluster of sticks, a photograph of a "fragment" of PMN-2 mine case about 10 x 10cm, and a photograph showing "evidence" that someone had been to the site (a woven ring of sticks).

Victim Report

Victim number: 258	Name: Name removed
Age:	Gender: Male
Status: supervisory	Fit for work: not known
Compensation: US\$5,400	Time to hospital: not recorded
Protection issued: Safety spectacles	Protection used: not recorded

Summary of injuries:

INJURIES

minor Leg

severe Abdomen

severe Genitals

AMPUTATION/LOSS

Leg Above knee

Genital

COMMENT

See medical report.

Medical report

An "interim" report on 27th July 1997 signed by a military doctor from a German field hospital in Phom Penh listed Victim No.1's injuries as: "high amputation right leg; soft tissue injury left leg and lower abdomen; semi-castration (orchidectomy) right."

The Compensation Board were given a summary of the accident which included the argument that: "The Supervisor.. was on duty.. and was not breaking any [demining group] safety rules, as he was only standing in a previously declared clear area carrying out his duties...he should be paid full compensation for the loss of his leg above the knee".

"It is impractical for a man with one leg to conduct demining... every effort should be made to help him find alternative employment".

Victim No.1 signed a receipt for compensation of US\$5,400 on the 23rd September 1993. His salary was \$180 per month and his compensation of \$5,400 = 30 months salary.

[This compensation is the highest on record for the UN controlled MAC, but was made in 1993. Settlements have been less generous since then.]

Victim Report

Victim number: 259	Name: Name removed
Age:	Gender: Male
Status: supervisory	Fit for work: yes
Compensation: not made available	Time to hospital: not recorded
Protection issued: Safety spectacles	Protection used: not recorded

Summary of injuries:

INJURIES

minor Eye

COMMENT

No medical report was made available.

Analysis

The primary cause of this accident is listed as a "*Field control inadequacy*" because it seems likely that the area around the mine cluster was not adequately checked either before or after the detonations.

The large "fragment" of PMN-2 case is far more likely to have been left over from a deflagration than from a complete detonation. This makes it more likely that it was left after detonating the group of nine mines with explosive. It is surprisingly easy to blow the target to bits rather than blow it up and was not generally considered to be an unacceptable option – see the incidents that occurred in Cambodia on 23rd December 1996 and 24th November 1993. If they were destroyed by deflagration, the surrounding area would have been contaminated with the metal parts from those mines, so making it difficult to check the area thoroughly. Destroying by breaking up the mine is commonly called (if incorrectly) "deflagration".

The recent rain which made the marking sticks fall over must have softened the ground, which may explain why the missed mine was easier to detonate than previously.

The apparent failure of a senior supervisor to wear eye protection was a serious breach of field discipline.