

Explosive Ordnance Disposal as Mission

Helping civilians rebuild their lives after war.

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PREFACE

The idea of Mennonites removing landmines from a former war zone may come as a surprise to you, as you may expect people like us to stick with more traditional ministry approaches like farming assistance programs, literacy programs, emergency food parcels, medicine and clothing distribution, or good old-fashioned gospel preaching. None of these ministry approaches are wrong. They are quite solid. But what if large amounts of arable land in the country in which you find yourself are unsafe to walk through, much less till for planting crops? What then? We in America are of the fortunate few, when considering the world's population, who do not need to avoid certain areas of land because of explosive ordnance contamination. This reality is brought on by war, and while we believe there is a better way to solve problems than resorting to violence, to what lengths are we willing to go to undo the damage that other people have done to harm their enemies? In my mind, there are few things that demonstrate kindness more than someone taking the risk of injury or death by removing live explosives from the ground to save other people. Can we do this? Will we try? I know it is a big dream, and it carries a significant operating cost, not just financially but also in terms of bodily risk, however, I believe it has the potential to enhance our witness of peace for generations, showing in word and deed that the way of peace is an active force of good in the world and not a passive observer.

ACRONYM KEY

EOD = Explosive Ordnance Disposal
KC = Kingdom Channels
NGO = Non-Governmental Organization
IED = Improvised Explosive Device

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE VISION

The seed of this vision, at least in how the story has sprouted and grown in the greater story of Kingdom Channels, was planted while early volunteers were working among the Yezidi people in Iraq after the genocide of 2014. The war against ISIS left many Yezidi villages unsafe to return to and seeing unexploded mortars and random IED's was not an unfamiliar sight. Many people have been killed or horribly injured by IED's long after the fighting had passed when they tried to return to their village, clean up their house and reassemble something akin to normal life. Part of the reason why so many of the displaced people are still living in makeshift camps is because of the threat of uncleared explosives due to the slow pace of mine clearance work.

My exposure to the idea took place while volunteering with Plain Compassion Crisis Response in early 2019, when someone from MAG International approached our director about the potential for our organization to get involved with them doing demining work in the region. None of us had the time available to take up the offer, but it opened our eyes to the possibility and from then on, the idea was firmly planted in my mind.

After coming home, I discussed the possibility of demining with some friends in the KC network and discovered that there were several others who had the same interests as I, and a group chat was started to promote discussion and basic research began. The initial idea was, "What if we could demonstrate love to the Yezidis by helping to clear their former homes and lands of explosive devices, making it safe for them to return?" Few great ideas are as easy as they initially appear, but that is where we began.

WHY EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL?

Why would we put ourselves at risk in this way? What is our aim? In a lot of ways our reason for pursuing EOD is the same as those who teach English to speakers of other languages, drill wells in remote areas or clean up after a natural disaster. It is a means of access to places we couldn't normally go, and it provides an incredibly valuable service to the community. When we consider the value proposition for the service rendered, the case for involvement is incredibly clear.

I believe this presents a unique opportunity for us in the peace church community to put some weight behind our ideals of nonviolent living. You could

even say that we have a duty to be more involved since we profess to believe in the way of peace at all costs. Demining should be viewed as a tremendous opportunity for us to model a better way of forgiveness and restoration.

Now, when speaking to an audience that doesn't take up arms, it is likely that you will have no frame of reference for what I am talking about. You may agree with the thought process of what I am presenting but haven't seen the effects of war firsthand and don't understand how many people are affected by explosive remnants of war, how many children are injured every year, and the overall scale of the threat as it exists in the world today. It is hard to comprehend just how vast that threat is, and while we hope to save many people from meeting an explosive end, our overarching desire is to clear the way for sharing Christ's love and see people released from bondage. This is an open door for us to reach war-torn communities and share the way to true life.

As I mentioned earlier, de-mining as a humanitarian relief program is a relatively new line of work and didn't gain much attention on the world stage until the late 1980's when HALO Trust and MAG International were founded, so it is probably not something that comes to mind as an immediate possibility. Historically speaking, landmines as we know them today are a new invention and saw widespread use in World War 2. Hard as it is to believe, there are still unexploded landmines and bombs from that time and in every war since then, more and more mines have been laid. Many of them remain live and dangerous. In a perfect world the military would take care of locating and disposing of all unexploded ordnance, and they do remove a portion of the mines they lay, but in most cases, they are left in place for others to discover either by intent or by accident. Children account for more than half of all casualties from mine-related injuries. We can look at this as the tragedy that it is, for it truly is terrible, or we can take what was meant for evil and use it as an opportunity to show love! I sincerely believe God can work through us to redeem this tragedy.

(LONG TERM) WHERE DO WE HOPE TO GO?

We intend to focus on countries in the 10/40 Window, more specifically the Middle East, that have been historically hard to access, places like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, or countries in Southeast Asia that have been contaminated by extended periods of fighting. Afghanistan is also heavily contaminated from decades of fighting and presents some unique challenges to access. Long term, we hope to have teams of trained, spiritually attuned deminers training local men to detect and remove mines, working alongside them as they clear their homes and land from explosives.

In the nearer future we are looking for an opening in Ukraine. It is not in the 10/40 Window but presents an easier path of access for us to gain experience.

HOW IT WORKS.

Demining is a relatively simple job, though it is as dangerous as it is straightforward and requires a high level of respect for the deadliness of the munition. In the most ideal scenario, the field technician takes a special metal detector and sweeps the ground for metal fragments or special kinds of plastic that are used in the construction of the mines. When a signal is detected, he takes a small trowel and carefully excavates toward the spot where the mine is expected to be. Once it is found, the next step is to discern if it can be moved safely. If it can be moved it will be taken to a special pit for later destruction. If it cannot be moved safely it will be destroyed in situ. The safety of the deminer is of utmost importance.

There are other scenarios that are much more complicated, such as when multiple devices are attached to each other or in the case of IED's. There are also some common misconceptions about demining that could be mentioned here. For instance, nobody is cutting any wires! This isn't a Hollywood bomb squad. And landmines explode as soon as they have enough pressure to activate the firing mechanism. The designers weren't so kind as to make them explode after the subject releases his weight from it. No, no, they explode as soon as you step on them, and inflict just enough damage to maim you. Of course, the larger mines would turn you into a fine red mist. There's no coming back from that.

Getting back to how demining is carried out, it is important to note that each country has its own rules for how clearance work is done. It is likely that in most countries we will serve as employers, training and supervising teams of local workers, since governments are looking to see more of their own citizens gainfully employed and less foreigners taking jobs that could otherwise be for them. In times of crisis, as in the current war in Ukraine, anyone with the appropriate training can get involved.

I believe we can have a positive impact in either scenario, whether it's us doing the work directly or if we're employing and empowering local men to clear their own fields. You may be wondering why we need to employ people and the government wouldn't fund the work themselves. That is a legitimate question, and some governments do fund teams of deminers directly, but often there simply aren't enough resources to carry out this complex and time-consuming work. So, foreign NGO's step up to fill in the gap.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

As we look forward to launching and funding this work, we are quite aware that this will be an expensive endeavor. We will be employers providing jobs,

training, and equipment to our personnel. There are also quite a few expenses related to attaining and maintaining certification to operate in new countries. At this point it is too early to give out any solid figures, but we do know that it could easily cost several hundred thousand dollars per year to finance a clearance team. We hope to partner with established NGO's as we gather experience and build capacity.

LOOKING AT CONTEXT

The Great Purpose of Kingdom Channels is:

Making disciples of Christ and establishing assemblies which uphold all His teachings among every unreached people group of the 10/40 Window.

What is the 10/40 Window?

"The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. The 10/40 Window is often called "The Resistant Belt" and includes the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. The 10/40 Window is home to the majority of the world's unevangelized countries. Today, followers of Christ are concentrating their efforts on the unreached peoples of the world, most of which are in the 10/40 Window." *-Joshua Project*

What is an unreached people group?

"For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." *-Joshua Project*

There are 17,400 people groups in the world. Of those, 7,400 are yet considered unreached with the Gospel; 6,040 of those unreached groups are in the 10/40 Window. They do not have any or enough Christians within themselves to spread the Gospel and need people to come learn their language and tell their people about Jesus.

There are still empty seats at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

"So we, God's servants, go, our Master's invitation in our hands..."

-Why God Calls us to Dangerous Places

How does EOD fit in?

One needs to use platforms to gain entrance into these restrictive countries, and although EOD certified Anabaptists might be a new concept for many people, it simply reveals there is a community of believers who are convinced the Gospel

needs shared in the 10/40 Window and are doing their best to wisely seize the opportunities available to be present, however creative those opportunities may be.