

NICARAGUA • HONDURAS

Destroying landmine stockpiles

by Hank Morris

Six thunderous explosions rippled across the military range and reverberated through the hills of the northern Nicaraguan training base of Condega, signalling Nicaragua's fourth destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel (AP) mines in compliance with the Ottawa Convention. Plumes of black smoke drifted toward the nearby mountain, but the lower grey tendrils hung near the blackened holes that had held 10,000 mines. Ten thousand less and counting...

Moments before, President Arnoldo Aleman, surrounded by members of the diplomatic corps and the press overlooking the range area, had given the order over the radio for the controlled detonation. I was there representing Canada's Ambassador for Mine Action and heading a technical team from Canada's Department of National Defence accompanied by regional and local Organization of American States (OAS) demining representatives.

The visit by the Mine Action Team, coordinated with the Washington OAS office, had begun earlier in the week. We had met with the Nicaraguan Corps of Engineer Chief Lt. Colonel Bassi and his staff to exchange information on methods and procedures of preparation and destruction techniques and had reviewed future plans and foreseeable problems related to destruction of landmine stockpiles.

Two days before the blast, representatives of the Canadian team and the OAS inspected the stockpile to be destroyed. Back in Managua, I met with donor countries and non-governmental organizations to obtain their opinions and views con-



One of six blasts destroying a total of 10,000 anti-personnel mines at Condega, Nicaragua.

cerning compliance with the Ottawa Convention.

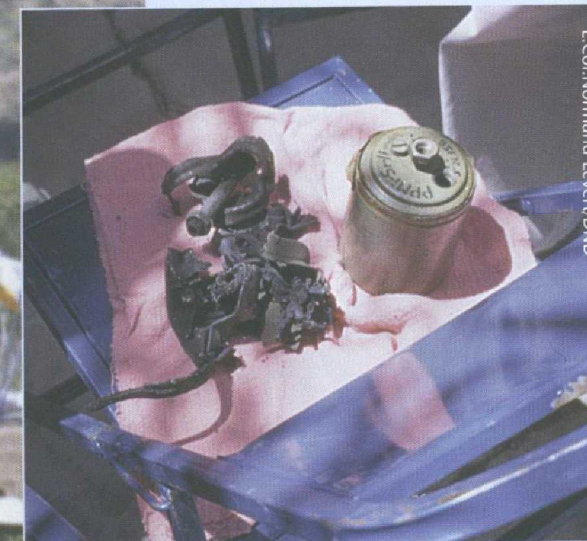
When Nicaragua signed the convention in December 1997, they had more than 130,000 AP mines stockpiled. Since then, they have detailed plans to destroy all of them within a two-year time frame, a schedule two years faster than the Ottawa Convention stipulation.

L.Col.Normand Levert/DND

Honduras

An eight-hour drive north of Managua, the team arrived in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. The haunting effects of Hurricane Mitch were still evident throughout the city. Once again the regional and local OAS demining representatives had organized the visit.

The Vice-Minister of Defence Rosales Abella and Chief of Staff Colonel Lopez Carballo and their staff met with us to exchange views on how and where to destroy



A POM-Z bounding mine before and after destruction.

L.Col.Normand Levert/DND

Honduras' stock of approximately 7,000 AP mines. The team visited and inspected several storage areas and surveyed possible sites for the planned destruction. The exchange of information was beneficial and has allowed the Honduran authorities to proceed with their destruction plans in 2000.

At the end of the joint visit, a press conference was held explaining the Ottawa Convention and Honduras' plans to comply with Article 4 – the Convention's article concerning stockpile destruction.

There are very active humanitarian demining programs in both Nicaragua and Honduras. Both hosts showed an openness and transparency throughout the visit of the Canadian team.

At this rate, Central America could be one of the first regions to comply with the Convention. In a region where less than two decades ago the sounds of warfare were common, present explosions signal a peacetime implementation of the Ottawa Convention. ●

Hank Morris, a veteran of 10 years service in Central America with the United Nations, is Special Advisor on Stockpile Destruction to Canada's Mine Action Team.

Canada helps buy shelters for Honduran deminers

Canada has contributed \$60,000 to the Organization of American States (OAS) to purchase shelters and related equipment for OAS demining teams in Honduras. The shelters are intended to improve the deminers' living conditions – especially during rainy season – and thus make clearance safer and more effective.

With Canada's contribution, the OAS bought six tents for the Honduras Mine Action Program. The program – a collaborative effort between the OAS and the

Honduran Army – requested the shelters during the joint OAS/Canada stockpile mission in early spring 2000. Once mine clearance is finished in Honduras, the OAS will transfer the tents to other mine action programs in the region.

The Honduras Mine Action Program suffered equipment loss and damages when Hurricane Mitch devastated the country in 1999. Nonetheless, Honduras is set to complete its demining by the end of 2000. ●