

UXO a Threat to Soldier Safety

By Chris Frazier

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center

FORT RUCKER, Ala. (Nov. 16, 2007) – A recent unexploded ordnance accident that claimed the life of a Soldier is serving as a deadly reminder to be extra cautious when handling munitions.

The Soldier was digging in front of his quarters when he discovered a yellow cylinder resembling a caulk tube. Once the Soldier brought the tube out of the ground, he banged it against a wall to knock the dirt off and determine what he was holding. The device, which turned out to be a BLU-97/B Combined Effects Bomb, exploded, killing the Soldier and wounding another.

The BLU-97 submunitions are yellow, soda-can-sized bomblets that are dispensed in large numbers to attack “soft” area targets. The bomblet case is made of scored steel designed to break into about 300 preformed ingrain fragments for defeating light armor and personnel.



Army safety officials urge Soldiers to be cautious when encountering unexploded ordnance like this BLU-97 submunition.

The body of the BLU-97 is cylindrical in shape, about 20 centimeters long and has a 6 centimeter diameter. However, military and foreign munitions can come in a variety of types, sizes and shapes and may not be easy to recognize. They include, but are not limited to, small-arms ammunition, projectiles, cartridges, bombs, rockets, pyrotechnics, grenades, blasting caps, fuzes, simulators and raw explosives.

According to the Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange, when encountering UXO, always follow the 3Rs of explosive safety:

- Recognize the munition.
- Retreat from the munition. Do not touch or disturb it, but move carefully away, walking out the same path the area was entered.
- Report the munition and its location.

Since fiscal 2005, there have been three Class A Army accidents resulting from Soldiers handling UXO. These accidents caused the deaths of three Soldiers. By following the 3Rs of explosive safety, Soldiers can help prevent future fatalities. In combat areas or on training ranges, it's best to remember, “If you did not drop it, do not pick it up!”

For more information on UXO safety, visit the Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange's UXO Safety Education Program Web site at www.denix.osd.mil/uxosafety.