



## Newsletter August 2023



A flash back from Feb 2005 – OSD SOLIC and HDR&D first visit to KCT

This week I was doing some research for a “History of Golden West” project. I work on the Foundation history when I get a chance, but so much is always happening it never seems to get caught up. Since I first encountered Golden West in 2003, there’s about twenty years of history to remember. One of the ways I try to recall what was happening at the time is by reviewing some of the 65,000 AOL emails in my account, going back to 2006. Most don’t apply, but some are very useful at reminding me what was going on at the time.

I can still remember the day in 2003 when Joe Trocino and Roger Hess came to my office in Crystal City to talk about the Foundation. My OSD SOLIC EOD Office had been displaced from the Pentagon by the events of 9-11 and temporarily moved while repairs were being completed.

I remember being impressed by the elegance of the EHP concept and how it reduced excess stockpile munitions, provided cost effective reliable explosive charges, provided scrap metal and reduced environmental damage all at the same time.



Al Vosburgh, President & CEO



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I recall Golden West's early projects with HDR&D that resulted in the creation of the Applied Technology Training Center aboard CMAC's TIMA campus in Kampong Chhnang. I can still see the bare site when Sean Burke and I visited the first time. Seminal work with cutting systems, began with the mostly useless Osprey Water Jet cutter and morphed into highly efficient electric bandsaws, resulting in 49,000 successful cuts of all types of ordnance, becoming the basis of the wildly successful Explosive Harvesting Program.

At the time, I had no idea that I would end up working for Golden West after military retirement. Today, after ten years of volunteering and seven years as the CEO, I can honestly say I continue to be impressed. I remain exceedingly proud to represent Golden West and proud of what we have accomplished together.

I think if you read through this newsletter, you will be impressed by the variety of activities and the level of excellence that is consistently applied across the organization.

Al Vosburgh  
President & CEO, Golden West Humanitarian Foundation

## MEET AFIFA HABBASSI, THE NEWEST MEMBER OF OUR TEAM

In a world where determination knows no gender boundaries, we had the privilege of sitting down with the extraordinary Afifa Habbassi, a trailblazing engineer specializing in weapons and ammunition, and as in the case of all qualified ATO's, also has a focus on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD). Her remarkable journey and dedication to her field have shattered stereotypes and inspired countless aspiring professionals. We were able to find some time with her for an interview earlier this month...



**GWHF:** Welcome, Afifa. We are honored to have you here. Please can you tell us a little about yourself?

**Afifa:** Thank you for having me. I am originally from Tunisia, and I specialize in the technical aspects of weapons and ammunition as an ATO and EOD. My first assignment with Golden West has led me to Moldova, where I serve as the Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM) Country Director based in Chisinau. In this role, I provide vital technical support and act as a reference on conventional weapons and ammunition matters while actively advising and training forces in PSSM within the country.



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**GWHF:** Can you share what led you to consider a career as an ATO?

**Afifa:** My motivation came from wanting to prevent tragedies caused by improper handling, transportation, and storage of ammunition and explosives, which affect entire societies. I saw an opportunity to make a difference and found the idea of working as an ATO challenging, useful, and rewarding. Although the field was predominantly male dominated when I started, I was even more determined to pursue this path. After my Bachelor's degree, my interest in this field grew, and I was fortunate to participate in an international Ammunition course and EOD course in Europe. Since then, I have become a trainer in Tunisia, and my passion for this profession has only deepened.

**GWHF:** Your journey is truly inspiring. How has your first field assignment for Golden West been?

**Afifa:** My first assignment in the Moldova program, which began in July 2022, was not without its challenges. However, I had the necessary skills and experience to handle the responsibilities. The specific working methods, culture, and tools unique to Golden West had to be learned on the job, but I never doubted my abilities. I am grateful for the opportunity and am looking forward to supporting UNODA as a Golden West trainer in a Female Weapon and Ammunition Management training in Austria.



**GWHF:** Can you share your most rewarding experience in the field so far?

**Afifa:** Every mission is unique and rewarding, but two experiences hold a special place in my heart. One was training ten Iraqi women in EOD levels 1 and 2 in Iraq, which felt incredibly fulfilling. Another highlight was training female armorers in CAR, where I encouraged women to work in this field. Knowing that I inspired women across Africa and the Middle East makes my journey worthwhile.

**GWHF:** What is the most exciting aspect of your job?

**Afifa:** The most exciting part is understanding the assignment and successfully carrying it out. Each situation is dynamic, challenging, and sometimes dangerous, but the opportunity to save lives and make a difference is incredibly rewarding.

**GWHF:** Finally, what advice do you have for other women considering a career in ATO?

**Afifa:** My advice would be not to be intimidated by the status quo. Ammunition does not discriminate, and women have unique perspectives that can be invaluable in situations involving the safety of families. With the right traits and motivation, anyone can master ATO. Believe in yourself and your abilities, as your voice and expertise can save lives and inspire others.



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## SUCCESSFUL TRAINING OPS EUROPE

### CROATIA

We successfully completed HMA EOD Level 3+ Underwater training course for personnel from the Croatian Navy. The program was led by the EUCOM HMA EOD team & the Croatian Navy in Split, Croatia.

Our EOD SME, Toby Petersen, supported the US Navy HMA EOD Team with his knowledge & field experience, in the refurbished EOD shop, classroom, & the surrounding waterways of the Split Naval Base. It focused on IMAS Level-3+ training, specifically tailored for personnel from the Croatian Navy.



### ALBANIA

We recently completed EOD Level 3 training organized by Albanian Army EOD & US EUCOM HMA in Tirana, Albania.

Adan Morones shared his experiences regarding ops in Iraq & Afghanistan, focused on search methods & enemy observations on EOD actions.

Following the training, GWHF will continue to offer mentorship to these teams for several weeks, working closely with them in the field to reinforce the knowledge acquired during the classroom sessions.

### MOLDOVA

We supported training and provided mentorship to the Moldovan Army in partnership with US Army HMA EOD team (720th Ordnance Company).

Finn West contributed instruction and assistance for this IMAS Level-2 & Level-3 at the Army Range Complex in Bulboaca.

After the training, GWHF will work closely with the Moldovan Army in the field, reinforcing the knowledge acquired during the classroom sessions.



## AND FINALLY FOR THIS MONTH, GOOD NEWS FROM THE MARSHALL ISLANDS...



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### UPCOMING PROJECT IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS SPONSORED BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, PM/WRA



**FRONT L-R:** Joe Valdez (GWHF Technical Advisor), Dan Koch (GWHF Team Assistant Leader), Adan Morones (GWHF-RMI Project Manager), President Kabua, Tricia Menke (CHPO Historian/Registrar), Megan Emos (CHPO Cultural Anthropologist)

**BACK L-R:** Henry Hands (US Embassy CDA), Lance Posey (US Embassy DCM), Wilbert Alik (CHPO Director), Judy Tomeing-Kur (CHPO Fiscal Officer), and Dereka O'Brien (CHPO Intern)

The Golden West team in the Marshall Islands were honored to meet the President of the Marshall Islands, Culture and Internal Affairs Minister Kitlang Kabua and other Government representatives, as well as the US Embassy (Majuro) Charge d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission.

The GWHF team mobilizes to Maloelap on August 25th for a 22-day mission and will destroy five previously located bombs. Over the next four years, GWHF will be working on Maloelap, Jaluit, Wotje and Mili; each year will be dedicated to a single atoll.

The team is looking forward to getting to work and to continue the removal of dangerous ordnance that remains in the Maloelap atoll and assist the CHPO in explosive ordnance risk education.

With generous support from U.S. Department of State PM/WRA, we look forward to working with the Marshall Islands Government in the years to come.