



## LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

As 2023 comes to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the year and thank everyone for their hard work on behalf of the Foundation. In many ways, this has been a tough year. In April we lost our Founder and President, Joe Trocino. This was both a loss to Golden West and to many of us personally. Joe meant so much to so many. His leadership created Golden West and had an impact on many people around the world. I miss him every day.

Just last week we lost Rommel Meza, a long-time friend to the Foundation and our first major leadership addition in years. We were doing a transition and were full of hope and optimism for fresh ideas and new energy for the Foundation. Rommel's unexpected loss has been a tough blow to the HQ and to his many friends around the world

While recognizing these losses, we have also had great successes during the year. We are adding exceptional new talent to our Board of Directors. We welcome Paul Arcangeli, with a deep understanding of government and the first Director of the Humanitarian Demining Training Center as the newest member of the Board. He will bring a new perspective to Golden West and help us achieve our long-term goals. We look forward to Bob Seddon joining us early in 2024. Bob was a senior EOD leader in the British Army and an expert in international HMA.



Mr. Al Vosburgh  
CEO & President

In April we had an outstanding off-site meeting in Tirana, Albania that coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of Golden West and the roll-out

of our updated strategic plan. The gala Anniversary event in Tirana will always be remembered by those who attended as one great party!

Programmatically, we are doing very well with PSSM and EOD Training doing great things in USEUCOM, a resumption of EOD operations in the Marshall Islands, training in Fiji, and continuation of HDR&D sponsored training in Thailand. We have highly successful demilitarization and EHP operations continuing in Cambodia, as well as growing activity in support of the Defense POW/MIA Accountability Agency. We reestablished expat presence in Vietnam and continue to advocate for our friends at VNMAC and the PMCs.

Golden West's Swim for Life Vietnam program has expanded into Quang Tri Province, partnered with Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and the Global Health Advocacy Incubator for building drowning prevention capacity in Vietnam. We just attended a major Drowning Prevention Conference in Perth, Australia, attracting international recognition for our Vietnam program.

In the coming year, we will explore new opportunities in the Philippines, Africa and the Americas. All of these successes are due to your hard work and willingness to make Golden West the benchmark for technical expertise, training excellence, and innovation. I want to thank all of you and wish you happy holidays and a safe, healthy and happy 2024!

AI

## **PSSM TRAINING IN MOLDOVA**

We are very proud of Afifa Habbassi, (Country Manager for PSSM programs in Moldova), who just finished supporting the 1st UN Safer Guard Training for Women Ammunition Technical Experts on the Int. Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG).

As a leading female ATO, Afifa worked as one of two female technical instructors, in collaboration with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the Austrian Ministry of Defense.



Afifa Habbassi with Austrian Minister of Defense, Klaudia Tanner

In total, 10 female students from Pakistan, North Macedonia, Paraguay, Australia, Nigeria, Ecuador, Philippines, Kenya, Tanzania and St Lucia (Military & Police); strengthened their technical knowledge on safe and secure ammunition management to prevent unplanned explosions at munition sites and ammunition diversion.

Golden West remains committed to supporting the advocacy, training and practice of females in the world of ammunition management enhancing the safety and security of stockpiles to the civilian population and enhancing domestic and regional security as a confidence building measure.



1st UN Safer Guard Training for Women Ammunition Technical Experts, with members of the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the Austrian Ministry of Defense.

## INTERVIEW WITH CUONG LE

### Growing Up In Vietnam Surrounded by UXO, To A Career in EOD

In our continuing series of interviews, this month we meet Cuong Le, GWHF Vietnam Training Coordinator. Cuong shares his journey from the DMZ to a career in EOD, driven by his desire to protect his community from the dangers of UXO. Cuong's story is a testament to the power of perseverance, resilience, and dedication. His commitment to serving his community and making a difference in the lives of those impacted by UXO is truly inspiring.





GWHF: What motivated you to pursue a career as an EOD Tech?

CL: Hailing from the DMZ in Central Vietnam, I witnessed numerous explosive incidents that impacted our villagers, particularly children.

During my college years, I committed to protecting our community from these dangers.

Since 2013, I served as a field officer for an NGO, working closely with its EOD and BAC teams. This experience immersed me in the world of Explosive Ordnance Disposal and inspired me to enroll in the Golden West training program.

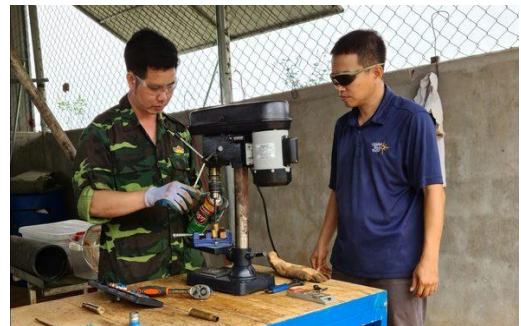
With this training I felt empowered to deploy my skills to ensure the safety of local villagers and my team mates.

GWHF: Was there a specific moment or experience that inspired this change from NGO Admin to EOD?

CL: Moving from the administrative side to collaborating with an NGO was driven by my desire to bolstering Vietnamese security and the safety of villages like mine.

Seeing the tragic impact of explosive events on civilians motivated me to pivot towards a more active approach to threat management.

Serving as a field officer for the NGO gave me a unique perspective into the efforts of their EOD and BAC teams. This made me realize that I could make a real difference in the lives of those impacted by UXO.



GWHF: Can you share the most challenging experience you've had in HMA?

CL: We were working in the mountainous Vietnamese terrain, where, with limited resources, we had to remove a 500-pound US MK82 bomb. We were successful, but it was a stark reminder of the gravity and complexity inherent in our mission.

GWHF: Are there any initiatives that you're particularly proud of during your time with GWHF?

CL: I played a key role in bridging the language barrier by translating training material visuals from English to Vietnamese. This has greatly enhanced comprehension for students, significantly improving their learning process and ensuring they grasp vital information effectively.



GWHF: Are there any career milestones that stick out in your memory?

A major milestone occurred during my recent deployment to Fiji, where I led an IMAS EOD Level-2 mentoring session. I collaborated with an international cohort and witnessed firsthand the positive influence of accessible training materials. It not only broadened my professional horizons but also emphasized the crucial role of effective communication in ensuring safety and competence in EOD practices.

GWHF: What advice would you give to individuals who are interested in pursuing a career as an EOD in HMA?

CL: Firstly, focus on enrolling in accredited training programs to acquire vital technical skills. Prioritize safety and meticulousness in every EOD mission. Develop solid communication and people skills to work efficiently with diverse teams and local communities. Stay dedicated to continuous learning and adaptability, given the ever-changing nature of the field.

Above all, approach this role with a deep sense of responsibility and empathy towards the communities you would want to aid.

GWHF: Thank you so much for your time and service Cuong Le.

## **INAUGURAL SUPPORT FOR AFRICOM PSSM TRAINING IN ZAMBIA**

Our team recently completed the successful inaugural PSSM Program with members of the Zambian Defence Force (ZDF), in Lusaka and Livingstone, Zambia, supporting US AFRICOM.

We conducted briefings on international best practices and facilitated a workshop on the essential requirements for an effective thru-life ammunition program.

The ZDF personnel are eager to explore the potential of enhancing their PSSM capabilities through additional AFRICOM training and mentoring, coupled with equipment and infrastructure support.

Such initiatives will significantly contribute to the improvement of explosive safety and security not only for ZDF personnel but also for the people of Zambia.

Post-workshop, our team seized the opportunity to immerse themselves in the local culture by embarking on a safari to witness the extraordinary wildlife that Zambia has to offer.

This experience served as a fitting conclusion to our mission, allowing us to appreciate the natural beauty of the region and further strengthen the bonds formed during our collaboration with the Zambian Defence Force.

We are proud to be a key player supporting US commitments to Africa and remain dedicated to creating a safer and more secure world.







## PROGRAM UPDATE

The weather in Vietnam is turning cooler and the swimming season has transitioned into the season of providing drowning prevention presentations.

This month Swim for Life Vietnam, supported by Golden West and CTFK/GHAI, conducted drowning prevention training and education in 9 schools in Cam Lo and Vinh Linh Districts of Quang Tri Province, Vietnam.



November's educational support benefit total of 3,967 people, in which: 3,503 Children, 307 Teachers and 150 Parents.

Training included presentations, Q&A sessions as well as practice of drowning rescue skills through games and competition for the audience, like accurate rope throwing, and practicing how quickly & correctly the students could put on their lifejackets.

Children practiced on the ground self-rescue skills, first aid for people drowning and throwing a flotation device to hit the target. SFL technical staff shared keynote remarks reminding the children to keep safe during this typical rainy and stormy season, especially children living close to the low and flood prone areas.

