



Former Khmer Rouge soldier Aki-Ra has dedicated his life to ridding his country of landmines. Photos: Rodney Evans

STEALING A MARCH ON THE HIDDEN ENEMY

An inspiring journey to Cambodia led Sydney photographer Rodney Evans to wage his own war against a pitiless foe.

Rodney Evans, a professional photographer from Sydney, was an unlikely – even accidental – recruit to the forces ranged against ‘the hidden enemy’. But when he saw the devastating effects of this enemy’s cruel power, he was quick to join up.

‘The hidden enemy’ is landmines, which Evans first encountered in Cambodia when on a routine assignment to photograph landmarks such as the ruins of Angkor Wat.

As he travelled the Cambodian countryside, Evans met and photographed landmine victims – men, women and children who had lost limbs and suffered other hideous injuries.

While taking pictures of Angkor kingdom ruins in the Siem Reap area in the north of Cambodia, Evans met and befriended Aki-Ra, a 29-year-old former Khmer Rouge soldier who is engaged in a private crusade to clear landmines.

From Aki-Ra the Australian photographer learned first-hand of Cambodia’s recent turbulent past

including detailed accounts of major battles and the cruel excesses of the Pol Pot regime.

Aki-Ra’s intimate knowledge of the area, including the locations of minefields, was to prove invaluable to the demining teams that were brought in to begin the task of clearing the estimated four to six million lethal devices sown in the Cambodian countryside.

Evans accompanied Aki-Ra on landmine clearing expeditions and compiled a photographic record of Aki-Ra’s landmine detection and clearing skills.

Evans was so moved by his experiences that he resolved to mount his own campaign against landmines. This would be an exhibition of his Cambodian photographs at a Sydney gallery to



SPORT IN A BOX

Games are a source of joy for most children, promising hours of fun. But in Laos, some games can be lethal.

Many areas of Laos are heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance and mines from previous conflicts and the threat of being maimed or killed is very real for children. In very poor areas children have to forage in the forest for food and firewood. Too often, small, unexploded objects lying in fields or forests are picked up by children who think they are toys. The consequences are frightful.

UNICEF and AusAID have been working together in six provinces of Laos to provide safe play areas for children through games and sports. These games both entertain and warn of the dangers of unexploded ordnance such as 'bombies'.

Bombies are about the size and weight of a cricket ball and spray out a lethal dose of shrapnel if struck. If children crowd close to look, more than one is likely to die, and others may be maimed.

Trainers from the Lao Youth Union and village volunteers are working in 64 villages to provide

safe play alternatives for children. Villages receive a box containing skipping ropes, volleyballs, badminton sets, hoola hoops and basketballs. While trainers teach children new games they also teach them how to identify and be safe around unexploded ordnance.

The results are promising with more children now reporting suspicious objects to the village headman or teacher than picking them up. Their lives have become more secure thanks to 'Sport in a box' – a simple but effective project. EJ

raise funds for the 'Destroy-A-Minefield – Rebuild Lives' campaign, known as DAM.

An initiative of the Australian Government, DAM was launched in 1999 as a unique partnership between the Government, the Australian public and overseas development non-government organisations, initially Austcare and later World Vision.

Under the DAM initiative, Cambodian land is gradually being won back from landmines and returned to communities for their use – for schools and health care centres, orchards and farms.

World Vision has set its sights on raising \$800,000 for DAM over two years. Once this target is reached, the Australian Government, through AusAID, will provide matching funds of \$1 for every \$2 raised, striking yet another blow against the hidden enemy. GE

Find out more about Destroy-A-Minefield – Rebuild Lives (DAM) by visiting www.worldvision.com.au <www.worldvision.com.au> Rodney Evans <www.allangles.com.au>

NIVIO'S STORY



Nivio Magalhaes (right), an Australian scholarship holder, describing the scholarship program to Dursila Belo Ung at an interactive display set up by the Australian Government at the National Exhibition and Community Centre, Dili.

Nivio Leite Magalhaes is a quietly-spoken, 21-year-old East Timorese student at Victoria University.

His father, Manuel Magalhaes, was killed during the post-ballot violence in East Timor. But before he died he told his son to 'build a country of peace'.

Nivio is in Australia thanks to an Australian Government scholarship administered by AusAID and the EDUKA Scholarship program, supported by AusAID, the Department of Education, Science and Training, and 21 Australian universities.

He keeps in almost daily contact with his mother Regina and his siblings – three brothers and five sisters. They live in the town of Maliana, 20 km from the West Timor border, but had fled to Dili in April of 1999 when Manuel was arrested and their house destroyed.

When the waves of violence swept through East Timor following its vote for independence in August, Nivio and his family sought refuge in the hills outside Dili.

'We ate cassava roots and drank whatever clean water we could find,' recalled Nivio. 'We made shelter from the leaves of coconut trees.'

The family stayed in the hills until the arrival of UN forces in late September.

Nivio plans to return to East Timor when he completes his studies. 'I want to work for the people. My future ambition is to be a politician. My dream is for East Timor to be prosperous, to flourish. I know this is not easy, but it is not impossible.' Nivio is building a country of peace. VM

Source: Courtesy Nexus, June 2002, Victoria University