Episode Book

EPISODE #5852

What "Free of Ordnance" Actually Means

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SYNOPSIS

Gary Toombs spent sixteen years as a Royal Engineer bomb disposal officer and now directs land release and EOD operations for Humanity and Inclusion. In September he was one of seven HI staff awarded the UK's Humanitarian Medal — the first EOD team ever to receive it. But the ceremony implies a finished job, and the ground truth is the opposite. This episode unpacks what "declaring an area free of ordnance" actually requires under the International Mine Action Standards, why 50 million tonnes of rubble and an unknown number of human remains make Gaza a different category of problem, and why this is a multi-generational undertaking rather than a reconstruction project with an end date.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A British bomb disposal expert gets a medal at Buckingham Palace, and by Monday he's on a plane to Ukraine.



Herman

Straight back into it.



Corn

That's the story Daniel's asking about. Gary Toombs, sixteen years as a Royal Engineer bomb disposal officer, joined Humanity and Inclusion in twenty sixteen. What Daniel wants to get into is the machinery behind the phrase "declaring an area free of ordnance." What the process actually involves, why a dense urban environment like Gaza makes it uniquely brutal, how human remains and demolished buildings complicate every step, and why this is going to be a multi generational problem rather than a reconstruction project with an end date.



Herman

The medal suggests a finished job. The actual job hasn't started.



Corn

So let's use Toombs as the window into it.



Herman

Gary Toombs is the Global Land Release and EOD Technical Operations Director at Humanity and Inclusion. Sixteen years in the British Army as a Royal Engineer bomb disposal officer, joined HI in twenty sixteen. Since then his career has run through Syria, Bosnia, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine, and Gaza. He was one of seven HI staff awarded the UK's Humanitarian Medal in September, approved by the King. First EOD team ever to receive it.



Corn

Seven people on one medal citation. That's not an individual award, that's an institutional one.



Herman

The whole Gaza deployment got recognised. HI ran in Gaza from October twenty twenty three to February twenty twenty six. And here's the part that matters for the discussion. What did that deployment actually deliver? A hundred and eighty six explosive hazard assessments of humanitarian sites. Hospitals, shelters, displacement camps. Plus convoy escorts. Plus fifty seven thousand risk education sessions reaching over seven hundred thousand people.



Corn

Notice what's not in that list. Clearance.



Herman

Correct. Assessment, marking, reporting, education. Not clearance. Because Israel hasn't permitted ordnance clearance in Gaza. So the team could look, could map, could tell people where not to walk. Couldn't remove anything.



Corn

Which means the headline number Daniel's probably reacting to, "declaring sites free," hasn't actually happened yet in the way it sounds.



Herman

Right. So the gap between what a medal ceremony implies and what the ground truth is... that's the episode.



Corn

Give me the scale first.



Herman

Fifty plus million tonnes of rubble. HI's comparison: four hundred Wembley Stadiums, in a strip forty one kilometres long. Sixty nine percent of buildings damaged or destroyed, including two hundred and forty five thousand homes. And roughly seventy thousand tonnes of explosives have hit Gaza since the conflict began.



Corn

So what does "declaring an area free" actually mean in formal terms? Because "free" isn't a vibe, it's a standard.



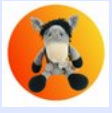
Herman

It's called Land Release. IMAS 07.11. The full definition is "the process of applying all reasonable effort to identify, define, and remove all presence and suspicion of mines and explosive remnants of war through non technical survey, technical survey, and or clearance."



Corn

Non technical survey first.



Herman

That's the interview stage. Talking to locals, looking at records, walking the ground without touching anything. You're trying to figure out which areas are definitely hazardous, which are definitely clear, and which are suspected. You do everything you can to avoid putting a deminer on a bayonet.



Corn

And clearance is the last resort.



Herman

Only in Confirmed Hazardous Areas. If you can prove the land is clean through survey, you release it without ever clearing it. That's the whole point of the framework. It exists because clearance is expensive, slow, and dangerous, and the standard is designed to make you spend that currency only where you have to.



Corn

So "declaring free" could mean something was actually dug up, or it could mean somebody did enough homework to be confident nothing was there.



Herman

Both are legitimate. Both release land. But the paperwork looks the same at the end.



Corn

That's where the public misreads it. The phrase sounds binary. It's a graded determination.



Herman

IMAS 09.10 is the clearance standard. Land is accepted as cleared only when the demining organisation has removed or destroyed all mine and ERW hazards from the specified area to the specified depth. Specified depth is the phrase to hold onto.



Corn

How deep?



Herman

Default minimum search depth is one hundred and thirty millimetres. That's basically the detection limit of a metal detector against a minimum metal mine. A plastic mine with almost no metal in it. That's your baseline.



Corn

And in a city?



Herman

Then the standard flexes. In urban areas, clearance may require the removal of many metres of rubble. And where large bombs or cluster munitions were used, the depth of clearance may be several metres. The standard acknowledges that the surface you're searching isn't the surface anymore. You're searching a thickness of material, and the thickness isn't uniform.



Corn

So there is no single depth.



Herman

There isn't. That's the honest answer. Clearance depth is defined case by case, based on the ordnance used, the ground conditions, and what the land is going to be used for. A football pitch and a hospital foundation get different specifications.



Corn

Herman, walk me through the two stage quality system, because that's the bit that makes "declared free" actually mean something.



Herman

Two separate functions. QA is quality assurance. It lives with the demining organisation. They have to be accredited, and they're monitored throughout the operation. Then after clearance is done, there's a post clearance QC inspection. Quality control. That's



Herman (continued)

independent verification that the specified area was actually cleared to the specified depth. Only then is the land formally released.



Corn

So a clearance certificate isn't self issued.



Herman

It should not be, no. The QC inspection is the third party that signs, and the accreditation scheme is what makes the certificate mean anything.



Corn

And what happens when the certificate is wrong?



Herman

Then you get a re clearance, and a trust problem, and a landmine injury in a schoolyard. That's why the depth specification is conservative. The standard assumes someone will eventually dig a foundation.



Corn

So now apply that framework to Gaza.



Herman

Standard EOD techniques are, in HI's phrasing, rendered ineffective due to large quantities of rubble. The technique assumes you can distinguish surface from subsurface and that ordnance is where you left it. In Gaza the ground has been reorganised.



Corn

Reorganised how?



Herman

A bomb hits a building. The upper floors come down. The foundations don't move, but the bomb may be below them. The rubble from three adjacent buildings piles on top. Now the ordnance is ten metres below the top of the pile and its original location marker is gone.



Corn

Toombs said some bombs go extremely deep into the ground.



Herman

His example. Shoring and shafting down to reach one can take up to a month just to get to the bomb. And then you have to render it safe.



Corn

A month per device.



Herman

For deep buried ones, yes. That's the extreme, but that's the category that exists in Gaza. And it exists in volume, because seventy thousand tonnes of munitions hit that strip.



Corn

What's the technique actually shaped like? Because "dig a shaft" sounds simple.



Herman

It isn't. You're shoring, which means putting in structural supports so the trench doesn't collapse. Around rubble, shoring is a live engineering problem, because the rubble isn't stable and it isn't uniform. And every metre you add, the structure gets bigger and the collapse risk grows. Plus, you don't know what else is in the material you're shoring through.



Corn

So the shaft becomes its own hazard.



Herman

It does. Which is why the standard lets you choose the depth and why in Gaza you can't reliably choose. If you stop at one hundred and thirty millimetres, you haven't addressed the deep ordnance. If you dig to the foundation, you've turned a clearance job into a construction job.



Corn

And there's the misconception Daniel's question is circling. "Declaring an area free" is not the same as the area being safe.



Herman

Right. If you clear to the specified depth, you have removed everything that the standard and the risk assessment say is present within that envelope. Underground ordnance below the specified depth may remain. HI's wording: underground bombs will remain for generations.



Corn

Years of "we cleared it" followed by decades of "we told you the limit."



Herman

I want to be fair to the standard here. It's honest about its limits. IMAS 09.10 doesn't pretend clearance covers everything. It defines what is covered and how deep. The problem is that the public hears "free" and thinks "no explosive on this ground."



Corn

Nobody in the room is lying. The word is doing it.



Herman

The word is the problem.



Corn

Now — the part I think is underrated. Gaza is not a novel problem for this technique.



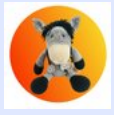
Herman

That's the angle I want to get to. The UN's Explosive Hazard Risk Assessment method, EHRA, was developed and field tested in Gaza. Two thousand nine, twenty thirteen, and twenty fourteen.



Corn

Gaza is where the method was born.



Herman

Specifically designed for assessing ordnance damaged buildings in densely populated areas where normal clearance is inefficient. That's the exact problem. And the twenty fourteen precedent gives you a sense of the tempo. Six hundred and forty eight assessments, five thousand four hundred and fifteen items destroyed, over eighteen months.



Corn

Which for one campaign of limited duration is a lot of items.



Herman

And that's a fraction of what's there now.



Corn

So this isn't new. It's the same problem at a much larger scale.



Herman

It's a recurring problem with a known and imperfect methodology. The UN has an IMAS technical note, Technical Note ten point ten point oh three, published in twenty eighteen, on Explosive Hazard Risk Assessment in Debris Management. That's the rubble removal doctrine written up. It exists because Gaza was the case study that produced it.



Corn

That's a useful thing for listeners to hold onto. The humanitarian community didn't invent the response after October twenty twenty three.



Herman

The response existed. The scale is what changed.



Corn

And that gets us to human remains.



Herman

This is the piece that makes the whole thing a different category of work rather than a harder version of the same work. Toombs names three hazards in the rubble. Unexploded ordnance. Hazardous materials. And human remains.



Corn

In that order of naming. Which is not a hierarchy, it's just the list.



Herman

HI's own statement uses the phrase "an unknown number of human cadavers" in the debris.



Corn

Unknown.



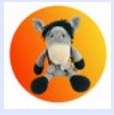
Herman

Unknown. That's the operative word. It's not just that they're there. It's that nobody has a count.



Corn

What does that do to the technique?



Herman

It changes the procedure at the point of contact. In a normal clearance, if you hit a metal signature, you investigate, you identify, you render safe, you move on. If the signature could be either a device or a person, the operation stops until someone qualified can tell you which. And you're doing this in a pile of rubble where the metal signature is fifty percent rebar.



Corn

So the uncertain cases slow everything down.



Herman

They slow it down, and they change the equipment. You become more cautious than the technique requires, because the cost of being wrong isn't just a deminer's life, it's a violation. There's a forensic dimension here. In many cultures, the handling of remains is not a technical question.



Corn

It's a religious obligation.



Herman

It's a religious obligation and a family's grief. Pulling a body out of a rubble pile with a backhoe isn't the same as pulling out a piece of steel.



Corn

And there's no protocol for it that the sources can point to.



Herman

I looked and couldn't find a specific one. HI confirms remains are present and complicate the work. The specific forensic coordination protocol between clearance teams, religious authorities, and hospitals isn't documented publicly that I could find. This is a real gap and I don't want to invent one.



Corn

So the practical answer is that on the ground, whoever's doing the work has to make that call in the field. And that's a human decision, not a standard.



Herman

The other thing that complicates it is the structures themselves. The EHRA framework classifies damaged buildings into categories. Damaged. Non functional stable. Non functional unstable. Destroyed. Rubble removed.



Corn

Unstable is the problem category.



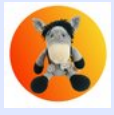
Herman

Unstable is the one that means a clearance team can't work the site until engineering work happens first. Because the partially collapsed building is a trap. You can't bring equipment onto the ground floor of a building whose upper floors are held up by a kitchen wall.



Corn

So before the deminer arrives, someone has to decide whether the building itself is going to come down on them.



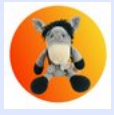
Herman

That's an engineering judgement, and it happens before the ordnance judgement. The sequence is inverted from a normal clearance. Usually you clear then you rebuild. Here, sometimes you demolish first so you can get in to clear.



Corn

And demolishing safely is its own problem when the building might have a device wedged in the load bearing column.



Herman

Exactly.



Corn

Here's the other thing I keep thinking about. The community itself.



Herman

The biggest risk window isn't during the war.



Corn

It's the return.



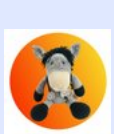
Herman

HI's Simon Elmont. "We know from other conflict zones like Mosul that this is when the risk is greatest. The number of injuries will increase as people try to return."



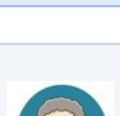
Corn

Why does the risk peak at the return?



Herman

Because during the war, people stay away from the rubble. When the ceasefire holds, they go back to find their house, to get their documents, to check whether their cousin is under the slab. The ordnance is sitting in exactly the place they need to walk.



Corn

So "declaring the area free" reaches a village and the villagers immediately test the declaration.



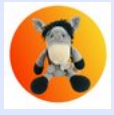
Herman

With their kids.



Corn

Fifty three confirmed killed by war remnants already.



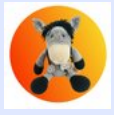
Herman

At least. Per the UN led database. That's the confirmed number, which is always the low number.



Corn

Now the timeline. Because this is where Daniel's question has the sharpest edge.



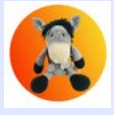
Herman

Two estimates, and they don't agree. UNMAS's Pehr Lodhammar, back in twenty twenty four, estimated around fourteen years for rubble clearance. Thirty seven million tonnes of debris.



Corn

And HI's number?



Herman

Twenty to thirty years to clear the surface alone. And HI's framing is worth hearing. Gaza is a "horrific, unmapped minefield."



Corn

Unmapped.



Herman

That's the distinction from a conventional minefield. A conventional minefield is a known area. You have a fence. You have a map somewhere, even if you've lost it. What Gaza has is a fifty million tonne pile of rubble whose contents are unknown, whose extent is enormous, and whose ordnance came in on a mix of air dropped munitions, artillery, drone delivered, and improvised devices. Unmapped means you're not looking for known objects in known places. You're looking for unknown objects in an unknown volume.



Corn

Which is why the twenty to thirty year estimate only covers the surface.



Herman

And neither one includes underground ordnance. HI says that will remain for generations. So both numbers are the optimistic version even on their own terms.



Corn

That's the thing that should sit with people. The estimate is for the easy part.



Herman

Then you have the reconstruction. Toombs says the physical reconstruction will take years and the explosive ordnance legacy will affect communities for a very long time. That's a guy who has been there and who has seen Mosul and Raqqa.



Corn

His comparison is stark. "I've operated in Mosul, in Raqqa, but I have not seen a level of destruction and humanitarian need like I have in Gaza."



Herman

That's a man with the reference points to compare.



Corn

Now — Ukraine.



Herman

Toombs is going for the seventh time since twenty twenty two. He's going on Monday. Britain's got a bomb disposal expert who has just come back from one of the hardest clearance environments on earth, and next week he's back in another one.



Corn

What's the contamination picture in Ukraine?



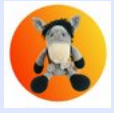
Herman

A hundred and thirty two thousand square kilometres potentially contaminated. That's nearly a quarter of the country. Forty one thousand nine hundred and twenty four square kilometres have already been returned to safe use. Recovery needs for explosive hazard management are estimated at twenty seven point six billion dollars for twenty twenty six to twenty thirty five.



Corn

Nearly a quarter of the country.



Herman

And the character of the contamination is different from Gaza. Toombs calls it "much denser emplacement." Anti vehicle mines laid much closer together than we'd normally expect. And it's a complex mix of older munitions combined with very modern systems, including technologies that have not previously been encountered in humanitarian clearance contexts.



Corn

"Not previously encountered."



Herman

That's the sentence that should worry people. That's a demining professional saying there are things on that ground he hasn't seen before. Drone dropped mines are part of it. Booby trap techniques that weren't in the humanitarian textbook.



Corn

And this is with a professional staff that has decades of experience across Iraq, Syria, Bosnia.



Herman

Which means every doctrine is being revised in real time.



Corn

Toombs's framing is that it's not just a wartime issue, it's a generational one.



Herman

He says explicitly: the decisions taken today will shape civilian safety, reconstruction, and economic recovery for decades.



Corn

So Ukraine and Gaza are two different flavours of the same multi decade problem.



Herman

Scale and novelty on both sides. Gaza is denser and more destroyed. Ukraine is more contaminated in terms of total area, with newer devices, and a mix of legacy and modern systems in the same ground.



Corn

And neither one has a shortcut.



Herman

There is no shortcut in demining. There's technique, there's time, there's money, and there's people walking slowly in front of everything else.



Corn

Ukraine's money number is helpful here. Twenty seven point six billion dollars over ten years.



Herman

For Ukraine alone. That's the figure the RDNA assessment puts on it. Which tells you the scale of operation required if you wanted to accelerate, and how much of the total is going to depend on who's willing to write the cheque.



Corn

And the cost of not paying it.



Herman

Land that can't be farmed. Villages that can't be reoccupied. Kids who can't walk to school. Which is why the number matters more than it sounds like it should.



Corn

Speaking of walking slowly in front of everything else — I want to talk about the difference between what people think demining looks like and what it is.



Herman

You're thinking of the man with the detector and the red stick.



Corn

I am.



Herman

That's actually the smallest part of the operation. The detector's only useful on ground that has been prepared. In Gaza, you can't prepare the ground without removing rubble. And you can't remove the rubble safely until you know what's in it. So you're doing survey and education work that produces no visible change on the ground.



Corn

So HI's hundred and eighty six assessments in Gaza — those had zero clearance outcomes?



Herman

Zero visible clearance outcomes. But they produced risk education material for seven hundred thousand people. That's seven hundred thousand people being told which streets to avoid, which buildings to stay out of, which signs of an unexploded device to report.



Corn

Herman, that's not nothing.



Herman

It's the difference between one man dying and thirty people dying. That's the scale of what risk education does. And it's what's actually possible in Gaza, given the constraints.



Corn

So the assessment work is real work. It's just not the work the medal wording makes people picture.



Herman

It's also the work that has to happen before any future clearance. You can't clear a city you have no map of; you build the map first. And HI built the preliminary map.



Corn

And that map goes into the next operation, whoever runs it, whenever they're allowed to.



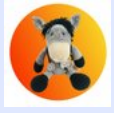
Herman

Which is why the twenty twenty six medal was given for work that already existed. That's the recognition. The Gaza mission is closed. The problem hasn't been touched.



Corn

So what does the future look like for Gaza?



Herman

Short answer. Somebody eventually clears that strip. It's a multi decade project. Surface clearance alone could be twenty to thirty years. The remaining underground ordnance could be with the community into the next century.



Corn

That's what "for generations" means in practice. It means a kid born in Gaza this year, in twenty twenty six, is going to be told at some point in his life, "don't dig there, we don't know what's under that."



Herman

That's an actual generational boundary. The contamination outlives the current population.



Corn

And Ukraine is heading to the same place at a different speed.



Herman

Yes. Ukraine is not caught up to that yet, but the direction is the same. Some parts of the country are less contaminated than others. Forty one thousand square kilometres have been returned to safe use. That number is real and it's growing. But the total is over a hundred and thirty thousand, so the gap is far bigger than the progress.



Corn

What's the deal with the underground in Gaza specifically?



Herman

The reason underground is worse than surface is because surface clearance makes the ground usable, and underground clearance is about protecting people from what happens when the ground is used. A surface cleared area looks clear. A farmer ploughs it. A kid digs a foot. That's when the deep ordnance becomes a surface problem.



Corn

Which means the certificate is upstream of the risk.



Herman

It's a certificate to a specified depth. Everyone in the trade understands this. The public does not. That's the gap.



Corn

Okay. Let's give the medal story its due, then. Seven people got an award for work that wasn't clearance.



Herman

The medal is recognising the assessment, marking, and reporting work. And the education work, which is what saved most of the lives that were saved.



Corn

Not the bombs they pulled out.



Herman

They didn't pull many bombs out. They told people where the bombs were.



Corn

Which is the entire story of that mission in one sentence, I think.



Herman

Corn, that's the sentence.



Corn

What do we owe the listeners in terms of a takeaway here?



Herman

That the humanitarians are doing the part of the job that's actually possible, and the moral weight falls on whoever is keeping the full job off the table. And that the bombing phase of any of these conflicts is short compared to the clearing phase. Bombs fall in eighteen months. The consequences are measured in decades.



Corn

That's the piece I keep coming back to. Every war has an end date. The ordnance doesn't.



Herman

Which is the case for taking the humanitarian clearance seriously as a peace time function rather than a war time afterthought.



Corn

Before we get to our producer, one thing Daniel's prompt gets at that I want to name. He asks about Toombs's role and the fact that he's going to Ukraine. And what's interesting is that the job is continuous. There's no separation between the Gaza guy and the Ukraine guy. It's the same person, the same skillset, the same kit, the same doctrine.



Herman

Which is why the expertise is so concentrated. There might be a few thousand people globally with the deep experience on that exact kind of urban rubble ordnance problem. And you can only move them between conflicts one at a time.



Corn

So Ukraine is getting a guy who just spent two years watching Gaza.



Herman

And Ukraine's contamination is bigger. So what he learned in Gaza is going to be useful.



Corn

The knowledge transfer only happens when the expert transfers.



Hilbert

Correct.



Hilbert

I had one in the garden. Nineteen eighty six, that was. A grenade, half under the patio slab. I put a bucket over it and called the council.



Corn

You called the council.



Hilbert

Rang the number in the book. Man came out, looked at it for about four seconds, told me it was probably fine and to leave the bucket there for a few weeks.



Corn

Probably fine.



Hilbert

I left the bucket there. Kept a note in a green exercise book. What day it went down, what day I rang, what the man said. Still have the book.



Herman

You kept a log of the bucket.



Hilbert

One line per day for the first year. Then one a week. Then I stopped. It's a garden bucket now, the one that's under there. I use it for birdseed in the shed.



Corn

The bucket.



Hilbert

It's fine.



Herman

You kept a bucket that sat over a live grenade for forty years.



Hilbert

It sat over a grenade for two weeks, then it was fine, so I moved it. It's been over the birdseed bin for thirty nine years.



Herman

And you use it for birdseed.



Hilbert

Sunflower hearts. That's what I put in it. The bucket doesn't hold them, exactly, I decant into the feed tub, but the bucket's the scoop.



Corn

And you're saying that's the same as what Toombs does.



Hilbert

Basically the same. Marking, recording, reporting. I marked it, I recorded it, I reported it. Less paperwork.



Corn

I want to go back to the log for a second.



Hilbert

Two columns. Date on the left. What I observed on the right. First six months mostly says the same thing.



Corn

What does it say.



Hilbert

"No change."



Corn

Forty years of no change, in a green book.



Hilbert

Then my brother in law came round with a spaniel and the spaniel wouldn't go near that corner. Which I put in the log as well.



Herman

What did you put.



Hilbert

"Dog refused. Non conclusive."



Corn

Non conclusive is the phrase.



Hilbert

I did wonder.



Corn

What did you do about the dog.



Hilbert

Nothing. The dog was right, in my view. I moved the birdseed to the other shed.



Herman

Hilbert, this is the part where a man with a lifetime of clearance experience would tell you to call somebody.



Hilbert

I did call somebody. The council.



Corn

Once. In nineteen eighty six.



Hilbert

They said probably fine. Which they don't say unless they've thought about it.



Corn

I want that on the record. The council said probably fine.



Hilbert

The man from the council said it. He was leaning on his van at the time.



Herman

Has the shed ever exploded.



Hilbert

No. The shed has not exploded. I checked every year, that's what the log is for.



Corn

You can't actually check, though. That's the point of all this.



Hilbert

You can check the shed. If the shed is still there, the bucket's probably fine.



Corn

I'd like to introduce you to the concept of a delayed fuze.



Hilbert

Forty years delayed. That's a long fuze, Corn. I'd say I got it right.



Corn

What was the tax thing.



Hilbert

I tried to claim the bucket as a business expense. Sixty four pounds. Buckets, garden equipment.



Corn

What business.



Hilbert

Freelance.



Herman

Did it work.



Hilbert

The accountant wrote back with a question mark. I dropped it after that.



Corn

Which is the closest thing to a clearance certificate you ever got.



Hilbert

The question mark was from the accountant. Not the council. Both were fine.



Herman

So if Daniel were asking you whether his village is safe. Sorry. If a friend asked you whether it's safe, your answer would be.



Hilbert

Probably fine. Which is the short answer, which is what the man said, and what the log has been saying for forty years.



Corn

Have you ever considered just getting a professional to look at it.



Hilbert

I did. The council. Nineteen eighty six.



Corn

The man leaning on his van.



Herman

And you mentioned a cousin.



Hilbert

Distant. My mother's side. Said he worked in ordnance disposal. Turned out it was a fireworks factory in the West Midlands. He made rockets for a fireworks show. Which is technically ordnance, in my view.



Corn

Rockets.



Hilbert

Rockets. In a shed. He was very good at it. He had all his fingers.



Corn

Your entire family operates in the bucket economy.



Hilbert

We do what we can. And that's the last I'll say about the bucket.



Herman

Corn, here's the thing that's actually interesting.



Corn

That Hilbert's bucket method is a one person version of what Toombs does, minus the standards, minus the QA, minus the second pair of eyes, minus the depth specification, minus the risk education.



Herman

Yes. And it works approximately up to the point where it doesn't, and the entire discipline exists to shorten the window between those two things.



Corn

And the cost of that window, in Gaza, is fifty three people.



Herman

And in Ukraine, unknown, because the country hasn't finished counting.



Corn

The open question I want to leave with listeners on this one. The sources confirm human remains are present in the Gaza rubble and that they complicate the work, but none of them spell out what the protocol is. How do you actually do it. Who has the authority. Where does forensics stop and clearance start. Because at some point a deminer has to decide whether the metal signature under his probe is a piece of a device or a piece of a person.



Herman

And that decision is made from the field manual outward. The manual's silent.



Corn

Which means every operator carries it.



Herman

Toombs's phrase on the legacy is the one I'd leave this on. The physical reconstruction will take years and the explosive ordnance legacy will affect communities for a very long time.



Corn

He means the clearing outlives the war. Both wars. Gaza and Ukraine.



Herman

And the medal recognises a piece of it, not the whole of it.



Corn

If you have any curiosity about this kind of thing, or you want to send us a prompt, our producer Hilbert Flumingtop would love to hear from you at t dot me slash MWP listener bot. We also have everything at my weird prompts dot com.



Herman

Please leave us a review. It helps.



Corn

If this was your kind of episode, go back for episode fourteen oh eight, Israel Wartime Readiness Field Guide; and episode eighteen sixty-one, Emergency Prep You Can Sing To. This has been My Weird Prompts.



Herman

See you soon.

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