

# Steel Rain

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Author of the book DEMINER available from [Amazon](#)

If life were meant to be easy we could all spend each day swinging in hammocks while occasionally looking for the bottom of a cooler. In reality, quite often we regularly encounter obstacles or problems which test our strengths and challenge our life's purpose.

Perhaps you came into the UXO clean-up industry just looking for an interesting and reasonably paying job. Maybe it seemed to be a logical transition for you from a military life to the civilian world. Regardless of your initial motivation there may have been one particular moment that gave a special meaning to your days of laboring out in the field.

There it was right in front of you---a cluster bomb. You recognize the small ball shape of a BLU-26. You remember it from a project you did at the Kansas Army Ammunition Plant in Parsons, Kansas several years earlier. The vision of how large a blast was created from even a single BLU-26 demolition comes back to your mind. You think of the impact fuze in the center of it and how several small steel shrapnel balls are embedded into the outer aluminum casting. There is no doubt what it is with its' signature fins designed to make it rotate in flight to arm it. This cluster bomb was nearly a thousand miles from where it was manufactured; live and ready to kill. The entire team would soon be notified because cluster bombs are almost never found alone.

Your team leader, as seasoned and as unemotional as they come, looks over your shoulder with surprise and praise in his eyes. "Good find! Flag it!" he says as he begins the necessary reporting paper work for blowing it up in place (BIP) later that afternoon. "That's one that won't be tearing anybody apart." he adds with a rare smile. Like most cluster bombs it was never supposed to be found here. In the past it was generally accepted that cluster bomb encounters in the United States would be rare if not nearly impossible. The site safety plan for this project had a section of probable ordnance encounters. It never listed any cluster bombs nor any of the half dozen other munitions found at this site already. The reality is that finding this cluster bomb probably saved someone's life. People who fully understand these types of ordnance know that cluster bombs and landmines kill or maim more people accidentally then purposely. Promises from ordnance manufacturers of 1% failure rates verified during tests are nearly always proven unattainable in real world operations.

Cluster bombs are also called cluster munitions, submunitions, improved conventional munitions (ICM) or bomb live units (BLU) and are deployed in large numbers from a Cluster Bomb Unit (CBU) or Alternative Warhead Program (AWP) platform. Sizes range from the very small anti-personnel PFM-1 to larger anti-tank "skeet" systems such as the BLU-108. Some cluster bombs, which are not designed to function on impact or in flight are routinely fuzed for area denial purposes. Both military and civilian personnel as well as animal populations are severely affected by these. All of this type of weaponry is notorious for extremely high initial failure rates (averaging 30-60%) during deployment which result in extremely high civilian casualties even decades after armed conflicts or practice bombings are over.

In the civilian world cluster bombs are commonly referred to as bomblets, baby bombs, scattered

landmines, bombies, steel rain and many other labels which usually have profanity attached to them. The innocent looking size, shapes, colors and configurations of these bombs are interesting to the uninformed child or adult. Some look like toys, automotive parts, baseballs, lawn darts or a colorful can with a ribbon or parachute attached to it. These very often create a curiosity and an interest in 'playing' with the item. How does a civilian get the type of education needed to prevent them from investigating such a unique and dangerous object? Are there sufficient programs or groups who go out to various populations and give them the necessary information to keep them safe? Past and current casualty statistics suggest there is not.

If any munition type causes more harm to unintentional targets then to intentional ones, is it not in fact missing its' targeted purpose? Should such munitions be in our arsenals at all? Your letter to a congressman or your signature on a petition may save future lives from lethal cluster bombs and landmines. Clearing land of UXO is our job. An extension of this job is perhaps an obligation to ensure public safety by becoming involved in finding solutions that prevent unnecessary explosive casualties.

For more information please look up the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) on the internet.

To improve your overall knowledge of cluster munitions and landmines, the book *Jane's Mines and Mine Clearance* (2011) is highly recommended.