

Army Museum Makes an Unusual UXO Discover Amid Artifacts

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Fort Belvoir, Virginia The 55th Ordnance Company (EOD) has received calls from museums before, but they are usually to verify that Civil War relics such as cannonballs or WWII shells are inert and safe to display. Recently, however, Staff Sgt. Robert Torbush received a different type of "UXO" call when he was alerted by Fort Belvoir Fire and Emergency Services about an explosive threat found in the Army Museum Support Center, which works with the new Museum of the U.S. Army located on the installation.

"The call was initially reported to me as a vial of picric acid, which is a sensitive explosive that, when dried, becomes quite unstable," Torbush said. The fire department cleared the building, and Torbush entered using a bomb suit. What he found was a WWI-era amber glass jar with gauze inside, soaked in an acid which was used to treat burns at that time.

"When it sits for that long, it has a tendency to form unstable salts," Torbush said. "That made it hazardous to even open the jar, and it was determined that the best course of action was to move it to a safe area. We didn't want to load it into a vehicle, because those explosive salts can be very sensitive."

With Fort Belvoir Military Police escorting him, Torbush used an extendable pole to provide some distance between him and the jar, and walked down the road to the nearest safe distance from any nearby building, where his team used an explosive charge to dispose of it.

Capt. Rafael Polo, commander of the 55th, said that Torbush and Private 1st Class Shayne Lanni did an outstanding job handling the disposal. Polo praised the EOD team's response, "Torbush rapidly assessed the situation and realized that this was a very unique response call that required research and study regarding the hazard. The team properly identified the substances they were dealing with, and then calculated every move and action so as to make it the safest possible approach to eliminate the current threat."