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The latest news on your adopted HeroRAT.

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Dear Mayaguez Memorial VFW,

It's been another busy month for **Imeldo**, who continues his work with the **MDR04 Mine Detection Rat team in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia**. Working alongside his handler and the wider demining team, Imeldo is helping clear land affected by landmines and other explosive remnants of war.

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Over **15 operational days**, Imeldo helped clear **5,850 square meters of land**, detecting **one landmine and one explosive remnant of war (ERW)**. Each indication he makes is carefully investigated by a manual deminer, who determines exactly what is beneath the ground before the explosive item is safely dealt with.

Imeldo's work is one part of a much wider clearance process involving HeroRATs, manual deminers, machines and other specialist detection animals. Each brings different capabilities to the task, allowing teams to combine methods to clear contaminated land as safely and efficiently as possible.

WHY SCRAP METAL DOESN'T FOOL IMELDO

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Here's something that can seem surprising: **Imeldo isn't actually looking for the explosive devices themselves. He's looking for the smell of the explosive inside them.** That distinction is one of the reasons landmine detection rats can speed up land release.

A manual deminer using a metal detector must investigate every signal because the detector cannot tell the difference between the metal in a landmine and harmless objects such as old coins, nails or pieces of scrap. In places affected by decades of human activity and conflict, there can be a lot of metal in the ground. Imeldo, however, has been trained to ignore those objects and respond to the scent associated with explosives.

This also means a landmine does not need a large metal casing for a HeroRAT to find it. APOPO's rats can detect landmines with **metal, wood or plastic casings**, as well as very small amounts of TNT in other buried objects. It is one reason the HeroRATs and people complement each other so effectively: Imeldo can rapidly identify places where explosive scent is present, while skilled manual deminers carry out the painstaking work of investigating his indications and dealing safely with whatever is found.

WHAT EXACTLY CAN A HERORAT FIND?

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We often talk about Imeldo finding both landmines and **explosive remnants of war**, but what is the difference? Landmines are deliberately placed explosive devices designed to be triggered by a person or vehicle. They can include both metal and plastic-cased mines, and HeroRATs can detect both because they are searching for the **scent of explosives rather than the material surrounding them**.

Explosive remnants of war, or ERW, is a broader term for explosive weapons left behind by conflict. These can include unexploded artillery shells, grenades, mortars, rockets and air-dropped bombs. **Cluster munition remnants** can also remain hazardous long after fighting has ended. Cluster munitions release numerous smaller submunitions, sometimes called bomblets, across a wide area, and those that fail to explode as intended can remain dangerous for decades.

Cambodia has significant contamination from several of these types of explosives as a result of successive periods of conflict. APOPO's Cambodia teams have consequently encountered not only anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, but also unexploded ordnance and cluster munition remnants. In 2025 alone, APOPO's Cambodia program reported finding **327 landmines, 66 cluster munitions and 270 other ERW**, illustrating just how varied the explosive contamination can be.

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Thank you for continuing to support Imeldo and the team working

alongside him in Cambodia. His latest finds are also a reminder that the hazards left behind by conflict come in many different forms, and that clearing them safely depends on people, animals and different methods working together.

Your adoption helps provide the specialist care, training and operational support Imeldo needs to continue playing his part in that team. We look forward to sharing more news from him next month.

With thanks,

The APOPO Team ❤️



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