
Watch Your Step!

Mines and traps in the TOP SECRET® and TOP SECRET/S.I.™ games

By Thomas M. Kane

Edwin saw no guards. He could, however, see the crash site ahead under the predawn sky. The tilted tail fin pointing at the heavens, a twisted wing wrapped around a tree, the dull black fuselage - the wrecked plane was surprisingly intact. But no guards. Why?

Clutching his pistol, Edwin left the safety of the bush and started out into the tall grass, moving slowly and keeping low. You'd think that a crashed spy plane would draw all sorts of attention, he thought, but there wasn't --oops. He froze -- then saw the object ahead was just a sign. How'd I miss that? Edwin crept forward until he could translate what it said.

DANGER!
MIDPOINT OF MINEFIELD!

Edwin closed his eyes and gripped his pistol until his hand turned white. there was no point in turning back now. When he opened his eyes again, he crouched down and stared hard at the ground in the dim morning light. Then, with infinite caution, he continued his journey toward the plane wreck. He had come a long way. He had a long way to go.

Both the TOP SECRET® and TOP SECRET/S.I.™ games give general descriptions of land mines, but neither includes any details on them. This article describes the uses and effects of different land mines (as well as other traps) for either game system. Note that the TOP SECRET/S.I. game has rules on page 16 of the Administrators Guide which replaces part the "Finding them first" section herein; the rules on page 16 can also be used to see if a victim is caught by other traps.

For the most part, this article applies to campaigns using the TOP SECRET game. If you use the TOP SECRET/S.I. game, simply treat all of this article's references to Physical Strength as STR, Coordination as REF, and Deactivation or Military Science/ Weaponry AOKs as Demolitions skill.

Mines and fuses

Mines come ready for use with their own fuses, but fuses can be purchased for building custom-made traps. For example, a charge could be wired some distance from the fuse so that the mine simply scares its victim. A string of explosives can be linked to one fuse and laid in a line, so that the mines will destroy a column of troops behind the victim. A land mine is often anchored with an extra fuse so that the mine goes off when it is lifted. Demolitions experts prefer to make their own mines to get exactly the right charge and fuse for the job. A character with a Military Science/Weaponry AOK above 60 can attach a different fuse or triggering device to any standard mine.

The tables in this article describe assorted land mines and fuses. They measure damage based on the explosive equivalent in pounds of plastique, except where otherwise stated. An Administrator should use the Complexity score when agents attempt to disarm a mine. The Complexity score is added to or subtracted from the agent's Deactivation score. A mine triggered by "pull" uses tripwires; "pressure" mines are buried and go off when stepped on. When a range of triggering pressures is listed (for example, the M14 mine, which goes off under 20-35 lbs. pressure), the user simply chooses the degree of sensitivity he wants.

The United States and the Soviet Union make most land mines. Information on Soviet mines comes from the U.S. Army's "Mine Card Soviet." The GTA 5-10-10 mine card describes American mines.

Unless otherwise noted, one disarms a fuse by inserting a nail or rigid instrument into the safety hole, cutting any tripwires, and unscrewing the detonator. American mines (not fuses) usually contain dials which can be set to arm or disarm them.

Soviet fuses

MUV: This fuse appears to be a thin metal tube, with thinner appendages at each end and a ring to which tripwires are attached to keep the charge

from going off. A nearly identical fuse exists: the UV.

MV-5: The MV-5 is a metal pipe with a plunger. One can disarm it simply by lifting the MV-5 from its charge and unscrewing its cap. The Soviets make a plastic version of the MV-5, called the MV-5K.

VPF: This fuse works underwater. It is a tiny steel device with several clamps and a ring for tripwires.

American fuses

M1: The M1 is simply a metal tube with a tripwire ring.

M1A1: This tiny metal pipe contains several screw eyelets so it can be attached to an explosive. Its trap consists of a disc with three upward-pointing prongs. When something crushes these prongs, the fuse detonates.

M3: An M3 fuse detonates when pulled and released. It is very dangerous to disarm. The M3 is a steel pipe with one tapered end. The tripwire is attached to a small winch.

M5: The M5 appears to be a metal box. It goes off when lifted or jostled. The M5 can also be set to detonate when it is squeezed and released. This latter type is placed under a weight of 5 lbs. or more. When a victim lifts the weight, the mine blows up. This latter fuse type could also be used to make the mine arm itself when an enemy soldier steps on it, then go off when the victim lifts his foot.

Soviet mines

TM-38: Looking rather like a suitcase, the TM-38 is a metal box with an X cut in the top to weaken the metal. It is about 9" x 9" in size. Impact or pressure crushes the mine's lid, triggering the fuse. The TM-38 is usually booby-trapped; it often contains devices which detonate the mine if it is lifted, if the cover is removed, or if the fuse is taken out. TM-38s are never disarmed in the field.

TM-41: This is a metal can about 1' wide. The two handles on a TM-41 make it look like an old-fashioned chamber pot. A TM-41 has a pressure cap that can be loosened by twisting; then the fuse can be pulled out. However, TM-41 fuses often stick - and pulling can set off the mine. Two similar models exist, the TM-44 and TM-46.

TMB-2: This thick, round mine often rots in moist soil. For game purposes, there is a cumulative 10% chance per week that a TMB-2

will disintegrate. The TMB-2 is made of asphalt-impregnated cardboard. Its fuse can be screwed out. Another Soviet mine, the TMB-1, is nearly identical.

TMB-8: Except as noted in Table 2, this mine can be treated as a TMB-2.

YaM-5: The YaM-5 is a wooden, box-shaped mine that explodes when its lid is crushed. To disarm it, an agent removes the nail or wooden peg from the striker, opens the lid, and takes out the fuse. The Soviet use many similar mines with different explosive charges.

American mines

M14: Turning the arming dial frequently on an M14 may cause the dial to wear out and become stuck in an armed position. Each time an agent adjusts the dial, there is a cumulative 5% chance that it will stick. This mine is a steel disc with several tabs.

M15: The M15 looks like a smooth, steel disc.

M16: The M16 mine bounds into the air and explodes, firing steel shrapnel in all directions. No arming dial is used with the M16; its fuse is simply screwed in. The M16 looks like a soup can and can be set to explode from pressure of 8-20 lbs. or from a pull of 3-10 lbs. on a tripwire. An M16 inflicts damage as a fragmentation grenade.

M18A1: The M18A1 is often called a claymore mine, and it is usually detonated by remote control with an M1 or M3 fuse. Claymores are placed in a triangular pattern, with a row of three mines closest to the enemy, two more mines behind them, and one beyond that. The mines are 150' apart. An operator sits in a foxhole behind the minefield, detonating each row of mines as the enemy approaches it. Characters can set unmanned traps with the M18A1, using tripwires and fuses. This mine sprays 700 steel balls over a range of 820', across a 60° arc. Anybody within range suffers the effect of 1-10 gunshot wounds. Claymores are rectangular, metallic, and appear slightly bent. Most are painted blue and labeled "front towards enemy." Each stands on four wire legs. In Vietnam, the Viet Cong were known to reverse M18A1 mines so that they sprayed the operator.

M19: An M19 cannot be armed or disarmed without a special safety fork. The U.S. Army packages M19 devices with the fork attached. If an agent attempts to operate an M19 without a fork, its Complexity score is -40%. This mine is plastic and shaped like a square box.

M21: This round mine has no arming dial; a fuse is simply screwed into the metallic mine itself. Two fuses are available, one which goes off under 290

lbs. of pressure, and the other (an upright rod) which fires the mine when brushed. The latter tilt-rod fuse will also detonate if the mine tilts 20°, which makes it perilous to disarm the mine. When the tilt-rod is employed, use the second Complexity figure in Table 2.

M-23: The M-23 is a highly restricted chemical-warfare device. It and its cousin, the M1, can be set for pressure detonation or remote control. Any of the poisons in the TOP SECRET rules can be used with an M-23. The M-23 is a round disc of thin metal with a raised lid in the center, having three stripes on one side.

M24: An M24 does not explode; it fires a missile. To use it, one camouflages a missile launcher near the area to be trapped and places a discriminator where the victim will pass. The discriminator looks like a loop of wire and is attached to the missile launcher by a cable. It can be set to fire at either tracked or wheeled vehicles. The effects of the missile are as per the descriptions of personal missile launchers in the TOP SECRET/S.I. game's Equipment Inventory (page 5), in the TOP SECRET Companion (page 61), or in Desmond P. Varaday's article, "Now, That's Firepower!" in DRAGON® issue #102. The missile always hits. It is simple to dismantle an M-24, the act requiring no Deactivation check.

M25: These mines are sometimes nicknamed "Elsies". They cause 1 point of damage when stepped on and can penetrate a tire. An Elsie is a pointed metal device with a wire handle and no arming dial. One simply pushes the M25 into the ground to set it. The wire handle makes it easy to pull up.

M49A1: This is an automatic flare, not a weapon. It is attached to a post. The M49A1 illuminates an area 330 yards in radius. Characters who look directly at the flare will be blinded for 1-10 seconds. Anybody within 20' of the M49A1 must roll below his Willpower score to avoid looking at it.

Finding them first

Avoiding traps and mines is the name of the game here. Whether driving or walking, an agent can detect mines by rolling his Observation score or lower on 1d100; this check must be made every 100'. Observation is incorrectly described on page 3 of the TOP SECRET Companion - it equals one-half the sum of the agent's Willpower and Knowledge traits. A mine detector always detects metallic

mines. Any other metal detector adds 30% to the user's Observation score when hunting for metal mines. To look for mines, an agent must move at one-quarter normal speed. An agent who is unaware of the presence of mines or moves faster through a minefield than he should must roll his Coordination or below on 1d100 every 10'; failure means he triggers a mine. Sometimes, of course, these rules will not apply. For example, if an agent attaches a tripwire to a door, opening the door detonates the mine - no dice need to be rolled.

To disarm a mine, a character must roll his Deactivation score or below on 1d100. If the roll is above the Deactivation score, the mine stays armed, and the agent must check his Deactivation again to keep the charge from firing. An agent may make only one attempt to disarm a given mine.

When U.S. Army personnel breach a minefield, 35 enlisted men, one noncommissioned officer, and one officer are required. The lead man operates a mine detector or probes with a stick. A soldier crawls behind him, laying tape to mark a safe path and covering mines with a small dome. The NCO comes next. Two soldiers follow him and dispose of any mines; they also probe for mines the mine detector missed. A few mines are disarmed, but most are set off from safe ranges with a grappling hook.

Sometimes the Army uses a powerful explosive to detonate a discovered mine. A back-up mine-detector operator comes next, then a radioman. The rest of the unit follows to replace any casualties suffered.

Other traps

Land mines are only one way to entrap an area. Wooden punjee stakes are treated as caltrops, described on page 60 of the TOP SECRET Companion. The Viet Cong often poisoned punjee stakes with excrement and filth. A wound caused by such a device festers unless treated with antibiotics, and the victim loses 2-20 points of Physical Strength and Coordination. Medical treatment restores this damage at a rate of 1 point per day. Without treatment, 1-10 points in each ability will be regained, at a rate of 1 point per week.

Another trap-type weapon of the Vietnam War is tanglefoot. This is a mesh of barbed wire with gaps about as large as a human foot, strung along the ground and hidden in mud or water. A victim's feet will slide between the wires and be caught. An agent may escape tanglefoot by spending 1-10 seconds carefully removing each foot. If the victim is running when captured, the barbs inflict 1 point of damage.

The Geneva Convention banned razor wire for use in warfare, but prisons use razor wire extensively, and secret installations might employ it. An agent takes 1 point of damage each time he brushes against razor wire. When cutting through razor wire, an agent must roll his Coordination or lower on 1d100. Otherwise, the wire lashes the agent as it springs away, inflicting 2 points of damage.

Secret agents are not issued military weapons, and that includes land mines. This is why no prices are listed for the individual traps and mines described herein. However, these weapons are not much deadlier than standard explosives. On a special mission, the Administrator may release these devices to agents, and enemy NPCs can be expected to use them. So, watch your step!

Table 1 -- Types of Mine Fuses

Fuse	Length	Complexity	Triggered by
<i>Soviet</i>			
MUV	5"	0%	2-lb. pull*
MV-5	3.5"	10%	26-lb. pressure
VPF	3"	25%	2.5-lb. pull
<i>American</i>			
M1	3'	0%	3- to 5-lb. pull
M1A1	3"	0%	10-lb. pressure
M3	5"	+25%**	6- to 10-lb. pull
M5	6" / 6"	+15%**	special

* The tripwire pulls off a cap, releasing the striker. It is possible to remove this cap and attach the fuse to a line so that relaxing the pressure detonates the mine.

** A character needs tools, such as a lockpick set, to disarm this type of fuse.

Table 2 - Types of Land Mines

Mine	Weight (lbs.)	Explosive equivalent (lbs. plastique)	Complexity	Triggered by
<i>Soviet</i>				
TM-38	11.4	6.5	-50%	500-lb. pressure
TM-41	12	8.6	-20%	400-lb. pressure
TMB-2	15.4	11	0%	26-lb. pressure
TMB-8	17.6	13	0%	26-lb. pressure
YaM-5	14.5	11	-10%	300-lb. pressure
<i>American</i>				
M14	3.5	1oz.	0%	D20- to 35-lb. pressure
M15	30	22	25%	300- to 400-lb. pressure
M16	8.25	special	10%	special
M18A1	3.5	special	--	remote control
M19	28	21	20%	350- to 500-lb. pressure
M21	18	10.5	0% / 30%	special
M-23	11	special	0%	special
M24	special	special	special	special
M25	3.5	special	0%	14- to 26-lb. pressure
M49A1	3.5	special	10%	1-lb. pull