

- * THE REGION: What You Need To Know About Asia's Killer Bug
- * CHINA: Fighting The Power OF Tycoons
- * INNOVATION: Electronics—Will Bigger Be Better?
- * MONEY: India—General Electric's New R&D Hub
- * CURRENTS: Caste And Politics—A Deadly Mix



Top Features

- [Home](#)
- [Issue Index](#)
- [This Week](#)
 - [The Region](#)
 - [China](#)
 - [Innovation](#)
 - [Money](#)
 - [Currents](#)
- [Top Interviews](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Site Map](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Regular Features

- [Intelligence](#)
- [Regional Briefs](#)
- [China Briefing](#)
- [The 5th Column](#)
- [Shroff](#)
- [Economic Monitor](#)
- [Loose Wire](#)
- [Travellers' Tales](#)
- [CEO Call](#)
- **Other Features**
 - [Editorials](#)
 - [Letters](#)
 - [Prices & Trends](#)
 - [Corrections](#)

To Subscribe

- [Far Eastern Economic Review](#)
- [Feer.com Archive](#)
- [Review E-Newsletter](#)

Other Dow Jones Products:
[The Asian Wall](#)

Have your say: [Write a letter](#) to the REVIEW

CEO CALL: FOOK KIONG LEE, BFR HOLDINGS

Confidence in His Step

With more than 100 million landmines laid across the world's battlefields, there surely must be a market for landmine-resistant boots--or so Lee thinks

By [Trish Saywell](#) and [Alkman Granitsas](#)
Issue cover-dated March 27, 2003

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE of BfR Holdings is trying to make your next step safer with novel landmine-resistant boots. But Fook Kiong Lee might himself be walking into a minefield. Two and a half years ago, Lee invested \$4.5 million to manufacture the boots. Now he's discovering that a good idea isn't always what sells.

The blast-and-fragment-resistant, or BfR, boots weigh no more than a kilogram, less than some top-of-the-line hiking boots on the market. The key is an almost impregnable and flame-retardant Aramid-fibre fabric plus a corrugated stainless steel and aluminum plate embedded in the sole of the boot. Both are stitched into the boot between the leather uppers and the rubber sole.

That creates a boot that looks, feels and weighs about the same as any other standard-issue infantryman's boot. Tests at Britain's Royal Military College of Science, one of Cranfield University's three faculties, in July 2001 demonstrated that the heel of the boot could withstand the blast of a landmine with up to a 70-gram explosive charge--and the ball of the foot, a 50-gram explosive charge.

More than a dozen armies around the world including those of Egypt, Sri Lanka and Colombia

Feer.com archive

Search feer.com's new archive and access articles published in Far Eastern Economic Review from the past 56 years. Free to Review subscribers.

Search feer.com

Type in keywords

Search

[Advanced](#) [Search Tips](#)

- [Street Journal](#)
- [WSJ.com](#)
- [Dow Jones](#)
- [Conferences](#)

have purchased the boots for testing but have yet to place a big order. Nevertheless, the 44-year-old former merchant banker remains hopeful that two or three large orders will come through by the year's end.



He's getting inquiries from army personnel as far afield as India, Greece, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania and the United Arab Emirates. Earlier this month, Lee received an order from personnel in the United States Special Forces stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The boots retail at \$198, compared with most standard-issue combat boots that can range from \$50-300.



So far he's sold more than 500 pairs. Earlier this month he shipped more than 20 pairs to television journalists and producers at networks such as CBS, NBC and ABC that are covering the Iraq crisis. Other buyers have included the father of a woman based in Kuwait in the 101st Airborne Division. Lee argues the boots also can be used by other civilians who require hardy footwear--everyone from firefighters and police to aid workers and even outdoor enthusiasts. Two Catholic missionaries have bought the boots for a posting in Vietnam, he notes.



To be sure, the boots do not give complete protection. Some critics even argue that anti-landmine boots can do more harm than good depending on a variety of conditions such as the size and type of explosive, the position of the foot or limb and even the type of ground. What's more, there are many kinds of anti-personnel mines and many pack a much bigger explosive charge than 70 grams. There are also so-called "bounding" landmines, which jump 1.5 metres into the air after being tripped and explode at chest level, not underfoot.



Still, Lee argues that the boots give some peace of mind and a measure of protection that you don't have with a standard-issue combat boot. "Surely some protection is better than no protection," he says. "With a normal combat boot, puff, your boot is gone. With our boot, puff, something may still be there . . . It's almost a no-brainer."

Lee's investment in BfR Boots says as much about a change in life plans as about a moneymaking proposition. Lee is not poor; his family owns a "smallish" 1,000-acre palm-oil estate in Malaysia's





state of Sabah. Five years ago Lee was managing director of Hambro Pacific, the Hong Kong subsidiary of Hambros Bank, a British merchant bank. He left in 1998 after 13 years in the business. Says Lee: "I thought it was time to get off the conveyor belt and do something different."

For two years he fended off headhunters and spent much of his time on the golf course or with his four children. But then he was ready for the next challenge. "I guess I was at a stage in my life to try crazy ideas. And I really believe in what I'm trying to do here. There's humanitarian value." By some estimates more than 100 million landmines are buried in over 90 countries--killing or maiming someone every 22 minutes. For each pair of boots sold, Lee donates \$1 to charities involved in the rehabilitation of landmine victims.

 [Email to Friend](#)

 [Print-friendly](#)

For more articles from past issues of Far Eastern Economic Review, search [feer.com](#)'s 56-year archive. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Something to say? Click [here](#) to send a letter to the REVIEW

[Home](#) | [This Week](#) | [Site Map](#)
[Subscribe to Far Eastern Economic Review](#)
[Subscribe to feer.com archive](#)
[Subscribe to Review E-Newsletter](#)
[About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

[Copyright](#) ©2003 Review Publishing Company Limited, Hong Kong. All rights reserved. Please direct all queries about the copyright of articles in the feer.com archive to webmaster@feer.com