

Convoy 11 Kashmir

Story by William (Rocky) Graham ex-BAA Fire Service and instructor with IFRA. Rocky was lent to EDA for this mission, his story is below

The earthquake which took place over a year ago in Kashmir is the forgotten disaster.

It was a horrendous act of god leaving thousands dead.

The United Nations initially with outside agencies such as Edinburgh Direct Aid swung into action.

However in January of last year the UN started to cut down its relief effort basically leaving remote villages to fend for themselves without adequate shelter and heating.

There was plenty of food however unfortunately though in order for remote villages to receive food the villagers had to journey to base camps set up in larger villages which had Helicopter landing facilities such as Bherri the village where I with Chris and Maggie set up our tents and got to work.

EDA approached Davie Kay (IFRA Director) and he sent out an e-mail to request volunteers for this mission. I volunteered right away and the arrangements were started. Soon I was in the air heading to the unknown.

We arrived in Islamabad and we could not get a flight for 3 days due to heavy fog and even heavier rain further up the mountains but it gave us time to get things organized.

It should be noted that we were in a neutral zone in an area which is disputed between Pakistan, India and Afghanistan and as such we could not move into the hills without an escort.

The Pakistan soldiers incidentally are the salt of the earth

We eventually managed to get into the hills about 6000 feet which was the height above sea level where we set up base camp in Bherri. The highest I reached was about 8750 feet age catching up on me I am afraid (temp fell as low as -17 C)

The weather had cleared and we set up camp in swamp like conditions.

We achieved our aims whilst I was there we distributed over 1000 stoves and we charted over 250 shelters using GPS we also surveyed the area and offered assistance to the villagers in how to build their temporary shelters. Even money says they are still using them.

Mostly I acted as load master on the helipad unloading the helos and making sure the locals Did not lose their heads and by the end of my stint managed to unload about 16000 sheets of GI sheeting. We offloaded as many as 12 Chinooks in one day but mostly we worked with Russians who used smaller Helos MI 8's I think.

The sheeting was uplifted by the local population of the surrounding village's young kid's old men and women in flip-flops trudging down mountain paths in treacherous conditions. Starting off early in the morning to reach our camp and often not leaving until darkness fell about 1500/1600 hrs I hold my hat out to these people and felt truly humbled by the hospitality they offered us and to Ahmed who carried my pack in my journeys up the hill.

Rocky