

Pakistan Prime Minister meets earthquake-relief troops at Downing Street

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Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was at Downing Street this morning to thank UK troops involved in the humanitarian relief effort following the devastating earthquake in Pakistan last year.



Troops meet the Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Tony Blair at Downing Street
Picture: MOD

Major Nigel Cribb, Commanding Officer of 59 Independent Commando Engineers Squadron, was accompanied by Captain Jim Lewis Royal Marines and Lance Corporal Guy Parkin. They were personally thanked by Prime Minister Aziz and Prime Minister Tony Blair who then chatted with the team, including RAF pilots Squadron Leader Mark Abrahams and Flight Lieutenant Dave Fryar, about the operation.

Secretary Of State John Reid said:

"The relief operation confirmed once again the ability of British forces to step up to the mark and do a fantastic job in the harshest of environments. I am tremendously proud of the work of our Armed Forces and delighted that Prime Ministers Blair and Aziz could formally recognise their contribution today."

Corporal Parkin said:

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Group Captain Sean Reynolds, Station Commander at Royal Air Force Odiham added:

"This was a stunning performance and I am immensely proud of the team from RAF Odiham and what they have achieved."

The Commando Engineers deployed to Bagh in November 2005 at very short notice. Against the huge challenges of the rocky terrain, extreme weather and the chaos caused by the earthquake, the elite lived up to their high reputation and completed, among many others, the following tasks:

- Building 30 large school shelters, including one to replace a girls' school destroyed by the quake in the village of Mukhdoom Kot at 6000 feet
- Building 17 health centres, including one for the World Health Organisation
- Putting out a house fire
- Rescuing an 11-vehicle aid convoy trapped in deep snow
- Distributing food and clothing to remote areas

The team comprised seventy six members of 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers and ten members of 42 Commando Royal Marines – all specialists in mountain and cold weather operations. The team worked under the command of NATO alongside the Pakistan Army and was co-located with a Dutch Army Field Hospital in Bagh. Bagh is on the southern edge of the earthquake epicentre, with approx 80% destruction within the town and the mountain villages on its north side. The Commando Engineers worked in an area measuring 100km by 60km and at between 5,500 to 7,000 feet, often living above the snowline.

The Department for International Development provided additional funding of up to £2.5 million for the deployment of the Commando Engineers. The Ministry of Defence, in support of DFID, also provided relief supplies, medical assistance, and three Chinook helicopters for the delivery of aid and casualty evacuation. 40 other nations have also provided support to Pakistan.