



## Afghanistan Mission Report Year 2001-2002

The consequence of the fatal attack to the twin towers of Sept 11 2001 had an impact on our Food Aid Organization too. The first flight operated by WFP-UNHRD (United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot) in support of the Afghan region took place on 27 Sept 2001. A total of 24 operations ever since and year 2002 has signed the peak of the emergency airlift operations organized and carried out by WFP, of which two in particular have meant a lot to all of the WFP-UNHRD staff members. We, in fact, were called to activate and support the WFP Rapid Response project. Its goal is to support the WFP staff members on establishing mobile offices/housing to enable the Organization to activate and run its emergency relief aid to the Host Country. Bret Bestic the project manager and Giuseppe Colavita UNHRD senior-storekeeper left Brindisi on Sunday January 13 to Karachi to meet the colleagues that were scheduled to leave two days later. In fact the jumbo 747 with living/office accommodation units and all related equipment left the Brindisi based UNHRD premises for Karachi on Tuesday January 15. Three UNHRD staff members left with the 747 to accompany the cargo: Giuseppe Saba WFP-UNHRD Manager, Pino Semeraro Storekeeper and Nunzio Melacca storekeeper. The following day two more staff members left to join the rest of the team. Lorenzo Cosi storekeeper from Brindisi and Dario De Rosa from WFP Hq The operation had practically started. Karachi a huge city of about 15 million inhabitants and far from our world and cultural habits was our new home for over a week. A new experience there's no doubt. We all spent in fact more than a week to unload the aircraft, transfer the cargo to the clearing agent's warehouse and define the quantity of items that had been assigned to the locations previously identified. What a job! The game finally started off. The mission was rolling. Lorenzo Cosi and Bret Bestic left Karachi to Kabul with the first WFP C-130. The day after Giuseppe Saba with Nunzio Melacca and Pino Semeraro went to Mazar and finally Giuseppe Colavita with Dario De Rosa went to Herat. We knew from the very beginning that this was not going to be a vacation. Very difficult rules for aircraft approaching, limited landing and parking slots, limitations on security clearance, scarce sleeping facilities gave us a different vision of the real situation. Last but not least we had to revise all our original plans. The true story was that we had undergone a training course in Brindisi on the installation of the said equipment. Good Lord! We were suddenly facing a lot of difficulties due to the environment we were working in. All our certitudes were fading away. No levelled ground, extreme cold climate in some locations, snow and dry weather (e.g. Faizabad, Jalalabad). We went the extra mile and with the support of the local labours and the willing to do attitude serviced at our best the following locations: Heart, Mazar, Faizabad, Jalalabad, Kabul. The worst part had to come yet. After a couple of days spent in Islamabad to re-organize the new missions to Kandahar and Spinboldak, we flew down to Quetta. Then as the original, Camel Trophy, we jumped into two Land Cruisers and drove across the border towards Afghanistan. What a vision after the mountain peak. An endless valley leading to Kandahar. The scenes we saw were of extreme poverty and to remind us that the conflicts have devastated the country over the past 20 years, junky cars and rusty tanks along the road, thorn bridges and bombed roads. The trip was pretty nasty

due to the road condition. No asphalt at all for about 80 Km made us jump to the ceiling of the Land Cruisers like we were riding a crazy horse. The emotion and the fear of being in such a place was more than justified. A few weeks before we were just watching the news on TV and suddenly we were living this new experience. It is no secret that the taliban activity is still in place. The Security Officer once we arrived in Kandahar in fact explained during our briefing that daily night attacks were carried out by the talibans against the U.S. Army at the airport. No work could be done unless during daylight hours. The local police was against the government army, the government army against the smugglers and these ones against both. What a situation!!!! Pure anarchy. At night you could hear the explosions and the actions of the mythic AK47 well known as the KALASHNIKOV. After five days of hard work we left Kandahar to Spinboldak a small village close to border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pretty quite place compared to the previous one. Every place we went to we had to interact with new people, speaking different languages (e.g. Hurdu, Pashtun etc.) so we were learning the basic words that would enable us to accomplish our duty such as Chakush = hammer, Baloko = Lift and so on. Sometimes we tried to speak some English, sometimes some Italian but in the end it was amazing how we would get to the goal, understand and be understood.

After this we returned to Italy. But it was not over yet. We were actually organizing the second part of the operation.

The second airlift in fact was operated with an AN124 completed the deployment of the rest of the Rapid Response equipment and took place on Sunday 03 March. Giuseppe Saba, Pino Semeraro, Nunzio Melacca and Valerio Mariutti all from WFP-UNHRD were part of the team that accompanied the second airlift.

This time the team's goal was to install showers and field toilets in order to alleviate the physiological needs of the WFP members working at the above-mentioned locations. Nevertheless we also meant to support those locations that had not been serviced during our first mission. Among these locations one of an extraordinary cultural and religious importance was Bamyan where the Bhudda's statues were destroyed by the talibans late in year 2001 erasing forever the trace of civilization of the past centuries. After hours and hours of driving you would suddenly see the scenario of this unique valley opening right in front of you. A breathless experience. The teams have been involved in some serious hard working and uncomfortable journeys facing the same difficulties encountered during the first mission back in Jan/Feb 2002. We also met once again the local nationals we had to deal with and it was a pleasure indeed. In the end this has been a very positive experience. We all had a chance to grow and achieve an enormous goal. Be of help to someone. In fact by building these accommodation units and instructing the local nationals on the erecting procedures we were indirectly helping the Afghans that will receive support, such as food, medicines and shelter by our colleagues that will work in close touch with the war stricken population. We don't absolutely feel like heroes but just like normal workers that had a chance to deploy to the field and have a taste of the real hard life. Sometimes we don't realize and appreciate the living conditions of these people in need until you experience it personally.