

As I looked for another way to use my special skills to really help people, I was encouraged to join the U. S. Army Special Forces by some brave men I met in the border area. I joined the 3rd Battalion, 12th Special Forces Group (Airborne). After settling into the medical section, I was surrounded by tremendously resourceful soldiers with highly advanced medical combat skills. Most had been active in international medical work with a charity founded by ex-Special Forces medical people, and soon I was too.

It was Refugee Relief International, Inc., a small charity specializing in medical care in active combat zones. Staffed entirely by volunteers, they would only agree to help the good guys who were being hurt by bad guys. I loved their attitude, and their missions tended to be high-risk, short-duration, and high-return. The missions took advantage of our Special Forces military training to deliver medical care and instruction in areas too remote and too dangerous for regular charity relief organizations. We even had parachute capability, and all members were combat experienced with at least paramedic or nursing degrees.

About that time the military dictatorship of Burma was voted out of office. Refusing to go, they shot over 3000 people in the streets of Rangoon. Refugee Relief International began a sustained program of assistance to the Karen and the other Democratic Forces opposed to the dictatorship. We would send small medical teams to the contested areas with medical supplies and training aids. The Karen would save up their wounded, sick, and injured for our treatment teams, and we would evaluate and treat them with the help of local medical practitioners who had little or no formal training. By conducting intensive basic classes we were able to leave a legacy of learning behind to sustain them. After 10 years, some of our previous trainees have assumed significant positions in the Ministry of Health of the government in exile.



Dr. Mohler with a friend and fellow volunteer in their home base in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Sitting on the hillside in Burma, with my two American colleagues collapsed from heat exhaustion, I was able to answer the question that echoed in my head about why I was there. The last 15 years of my life had left me with a unique set of skills that enabled me to deliver aid and comfort to some of the most destitute and deserving people in the world. In so doing, I could help them confront tyrannical regimes whose evil nature conflicts with the goals of my own country.

After 9-11, Afghanistan came back to center stage. Refugee Relief International had been providing some assistance to Engineer Massoud and the Northern Alliance. Bin Laden agents assassinated Massoud the day before the Twin Towers were struck, eliminating their most moral and capable enemy. He was also our friend, and a beacon of hope for the people of Afghanistan.

Now as a member of the board of Refugee Relief International, and the Director of Operations for planning and executing missions, my course was clear. We quickly mounted two medical relief missions. The first was to help the Northern Alliance in their struggle against the Taliban. Entering through Tajikistan, the relief team had to run the gauntlet of numerous ex-Soviet bureaucrats trying to extract money from them every step of the way. Very little was accomplished.

On the next mission, we adjusted to the new realities. We called on old contacts and entered successfully through Pakistan. An elite medical team was able to deliver essential supplies to isolated medical facilities, treat patients, and purchase and distribute black-market food to starving villagers. Assessments were conducted for future assistance missions, concentrating on those areas that the United Nations and other conventional groups would be unable to reach.

Refugee Relief International is again looking to the future and planning several special missions. Our web site, www.RefugeeRelief.org, has been overwhelmed with volunteers.



In the jungles of Burma where the prostheses for which there is such great need are made of wood.

Since we are supported entirely by small donors, we will direct our limited resources to those areas where we can do the most good. For myself I hope for nothing more than to soon be sitting on hot sand with brave men, remembering again why I do this.