



# WELCOME TO “A WALK WITH THE 35TH”



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**Humanitarian assistance coordinated through work of many forward assets**  
**By Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl 17th Public Affairs Det.**



**Photo(s) by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl**

Spc. Jorge Cuevas of 2nd Bn. 35th Inf. Rgt. and an Afghan man carry a bag of beans to distribute to the citizens of Southern Afghanistan's Khak Afghan. The extreme winter has left many of the villagers with little or no food.

**FIREBASE LAGMAN, Afghanistan -** in February, the “Cacti” Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, distributed tons of food to the citizens of Southern Afghanistan, helping them survive one of the country’s worst winters in recent history.

While Operation Bear’s Paw might have seemed simple to the casual observer, many Soldiers spent as many as 16 hours a day ensuring the mission went off without a hitch.

“There are so many different moving parts to this operation,” said Maj. Eric Barker, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., civil affairs officer. “The entire task force is really working toward getting the Afghans food.”

The operation began in early February, when the Soldiers started noticing traffic jams -- one lasting three days, said Barker.

Soon, reports came in about problems throughout the region. Many Afghans were snowed in, unable to get the food they needed to survive.

"The weather has been really bad," said Barker. "This is the most precipitation this region has had in seven years."

As a result, vehicles were unable to pass in or out of certain areas to deliver food. One "vehicle" able to get to many of the stranded vehicles, however, is the CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

Nearly every day, teams of Soldiers at Kandahar Airfield and Firebase Lagman loaded pallets of food -- rice, beans, flour and peanut oil -- into the back of helicopters and distributed them to Afghans in need.

This required coordination for receiving the food, coordination for the aircraft and coordination with the village elders.

"Every day one of us is meeting trucks at the gate," said Spc. Kyle C. Clanton, a civil affairs Soldier with 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt. "Then, myself and a team of Soldiers download the food from the truck into a conex."

The trucks carried food that was either purchased in Kandahar or donated by World Food Program, a non-profit organization that helps people in need.

The next step was for the Soldiers to build the pallets. About 10 pallets were built each day. Each pallet contained enough food to feed several families of 10 for 30 days -- enough to get them through the worst of the winter conditions.

The pallets were loaded onto the helicopters with a forklift. Four pallets fit on one helicopter, enabling the pilots to make multiple rounds. As the helicopter emptied, they continued to pick up full pallets and the infantrymen who distributed them.

"The line Soldiers are the ones who actually help download the pallets at the villages and distribute the supplies," said Clanton.

The teams visited about six villages each day. With the day's deliveries complete, they returned to either Kandahar or Firebase Lagman, where the process began again. It will continue until the weather has improved enough for the Afghans to reach their own food sources.