

The Road to Revival

Immediate Aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake

By Rob McNeil

One thing I'm extremely proud of is that the family of emergency service workers and firefighters across the world, no matter where they are from, have an amazing ability to come together with professionalism, empathy, friendship, and trust during the worst of times to deliver humanitarian aid to those who need it most. Obstacles such as language, cultural differences, policy, procedures, and equipment differences are never an issue. During the deployment of the Australian Urban Search and Rescue Team to Miyagi Prefecture, the Australian Task Force worked hand in hand with the Kyoto City Fire Department and the Japan Self-Defense Forces, with a liaison officer from the Self-Defense Forces assisting in finding locations to search and communicating with the Japanese coordinators of the rescue effort.



Rob McNeil
An Australian firefighter who led a rescue team after the Great East Japan Earthquake

We carried out our searches with the Japanese emergency services, and I was awed by the tenacity of the teams, pushing on despite the extremely trying conditions. The teams were compassionate and tireless in carrying out their duty of delivering humanitarian aid to the communities of Shizugawa and Rikuzentogura. The Japanese emergency services, police, and Self-Defense Forces displayed incredible courage and selflessness in performing their duties, especially considering that they were working in their own devastated communities and many had lost their homes and family members.

The Japanese and Australian teams worked side by side in the town of Shizugawa to search about two square kilometers, including 18 buildings and numerous cars. When we completed our work with the Kyoto City Fire Department, we parted with a ceremony paying our respects to our fellow emergency service workers. During the minute of silence in respect for the fallen men, women, and children of Shizugawa and Rikuzentogura, I looked into the proud fire commander's eyes and thought how he must feel, knowing that thousands of his country's families and homes had been destroyed and lost forever. When the minute of silence ended, we hugged each other in support. This epitomized to me the bravery, professionalism, and resilient nature of not just the commander and his team but all the Japanese people.

I believe that when we face difficult times together and show that we care for each other, strong bonds are formed. If all countries helped each other regardless of culture, color, or creed, the world would be a much more peaceful place. I have returned to Japan twice since then and have visited Minamisanriku both times. I see the same courage and resilience in all the Japanese people, so I'm sure you will recover and grow from this tragedy to be stronger in the future. My friends in Australia are constantly thinking about you and praying that you will be stronger and happier than before. I hope to visit next year on the fourth anniversary.



1	2
3	4

1. McNeil's team searching for survivors in buildings and cars in Minamisanriku. 2. Rescue dogs from McNeil's team conduct a search. 3. In late March 2011, when the search was over, McNeil returned to Australia and was met at Sydney Airport by Masahiro Kohara, Consul General of Japan in Sydney. 4. Working with Kyoto firefighters during rescue activities quickly built up a relationship of trust.

