

# BURIED ALIVE!

When the earthquake struck Taichung, Taiwan, it sounded like thunder. The ground rolled like waves on the ocean, and every building shook.

TAICHUNG, TAIWAN  
SEPTEMBER 21, 1999



The powerful earthquake (7.6 on the Richter scale) shattered glass, heaved up streets, and burst water lines. It also collapsed buildings, turning them into mountains of broken concrete and steel.

Some of the buildings were high-rise apartment houses. Hsu Tse-kai was asleep in his bed in one of these high-rises. The bottom four floors of his twenty-story apartment building "pancaked," or fell down on top of one another. The remaining tower leaned over and came to rest on a neighboring building. Hsu Tse-kai ended up inside his rolled-up mattress, buried in a tangle of debris. But he was alive! Luckily, his head and part of his upper body were in an open space in the rubble. He began yelling for help.

Virginia Task Force 1's truck full of supplies is loaded onto the plane.

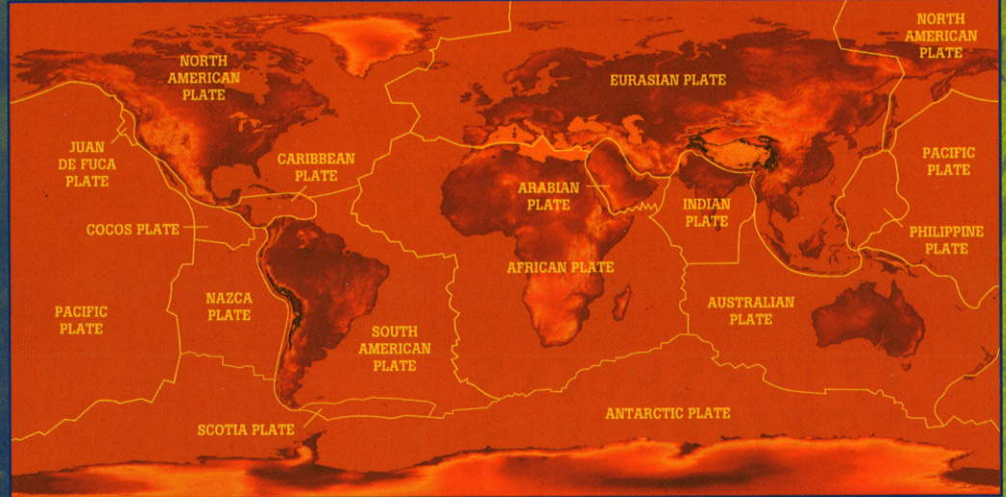
## VIRGINIA TASK FORCE 1 GOES TO WORK

As soon as word of the Taiwan earthquake reached the United States, Virginia Task Force 1 was ordered to report for duty. As quickly as they could load people and equipment into a C-5 aircraft, this trained rescue team was on its way. They took along



# earthquakes

The earth's crust is like the shell of an egg. The crust is cracked into pieces called plates. Under those plates, much of the earth's interior is believed to be rock melted to a fluid by the heat from the earth's hot central core. This molten rock moves and flows, and when it does, it carries the plates along with it. Sometimes two of the plates lock together. Then pressure builds up until, like a stretched rubber band snapping back, one of the plates breaks loose and suddenly moves. Everyone living on the plate that moves feels it. That's an earthquake. Places near the edges of the plates have the most earthquakes. For example, Alaska has more than five thousand earthquakes a year—more than the combined total for the entire rest of the United States.



about 70,000 pounds (31,750 kilograms) of supplies. These included every kind of hand tool imaginable, medical equipment, lightweight protective gear (similar to what firefighters wear), tents, and food. The team was prepared to be completely self-sufficient at the disaster site for as long as ten days.

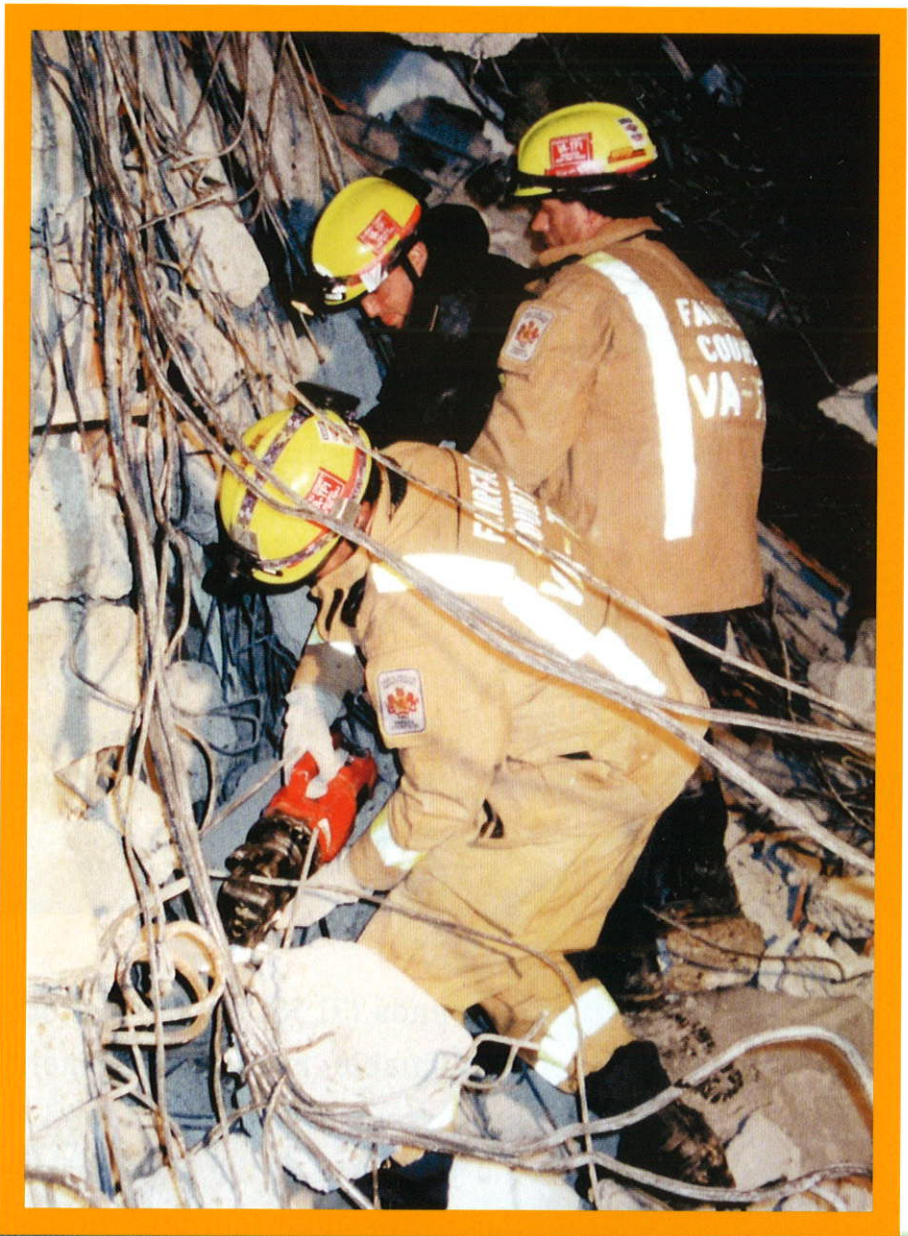
After a twenty-one-hour journey, the task force reached Taichung, and while they unloaded, advance teams went to survey the damage. Robert Dube was in charge of one of these teams. An interpreter told Robert about Hsu Tse-kai, and

when his team got to the site, they discovered local people already there, attempting to dig him out.

Robert said, "We got down in their tunnel, and we could hear him talking. So we started using the local people's hand tools and called back for equipment."

## AFTERSHOCKS STRIKE

Tunneling through rubble is like working a puzzle. But as a founding member of Task Force 1, Robert Dube was an experienced tunnel digger. With the help of Mike Istvan and Evan Lewis, he broke up the debris with hand tools and passed the chunks up to the surface. They were nearly 20 feet (6 meters) underground when the tunnel suddenly filled with dust. Robert said, "The next thing we know everything is shaking and



Members of Task Force 1 dig through the rubble.

falling. We start scrambling for the surface, and all the while the guy's screaming at us not to leave him."

By the time they reached the surface, the aftershock quake was over, and they went right back to work. When a second and then a third aftershock struck, they decided they couldn't make it out in time anyway, so they kept on digging.

rescue team finally reached Hsu Tse-kai after two days of digging.



## THE RESCUE

It took two days of nonstop effort to dig down into the wrecked building to reach Hsu Tse-kai. And it took eight more hours to free him from the rubble. Then the team strapped him to a Sked, a sturdy plastic stretcher, and hauled him to the surface. There, other rescuers took over. They rushed Hsu Tse-kai into an ambulance, and Robert Dube never saw him again.

Robert said, "When we got him out, he was happy, that's for sure. I know he survived. We heard that later." But by then, Robert Dube and his team were already busy searching for other survivors. They worked hard for eight more days, but Hsu Tse-kai was the only person they found alive.