

Nando Parrado

My Hero

By Nat Baird

Could you imagine waking up in the middle of the snow covered Andes after being unconscious for three days? That is what happened to my hero Nando Parrado. Now let me tell you his story. He was on one of the best rugby teams in Uruguay. He had two sisters and no brothers.

As a child he lived in a two story house on the beach. His family owned a huge expanding farm down by the shore. And he grew up in a loving and caring family.

On Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1972 Nando and his rugby team were flying to Chili for an expedition match. They had to stop in Mendoza due to bad weather. The next morning, Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, they boarded the plane again to fly to Curico. Due to pilot error the plane dropped its altitude and clipped the top of the Andes which took off both of its wings and the back of the fuselage. It then hurled down the mountain at a raging speed of 240 miles per hour. During the crash, Nando was thrown to the front of the plane and knocked unconscious. He remained that way for three days. Sixteen passengers died in the crash.

After a week of eating tiny chocolates, sardines and sipping liquor they ran out of food. Nando said to his friend Carlitos, "I need to eat a human!". Carlitos said he was out of his mind and then his teammate came over and said "He's not crazy, me and my friends have been talking about it too". And after a day they had sharpened knives using an axe found in the pilots cabin, they were ready eat a pilot. Nando cut into the pilot and took out a piece of

flesh. He ate it. He then cut more for his friends, some didn't know whether to put it into their mouth or not, and some thought it was glory. The meat was often eaten raw but occasionally cooked.

After 62 days on the mountain, Nando felt he needed to get out of the Andes. So he, Roberto and Tintin set off to climb the mountain. Nando had it pictured in his head that after climbing that first mountain he would see a green valley filled with many people. What he thought would take a day to climb the mountain took three. At the third day Nando reached the top while struggling up he called to Roberto, "Look." Nando saw an endless range of snow covered mountains. There was a moment of silence. Then Nando said, "We've done so many things together, now let's die together and do one more". They then sent Tintin back to the fuselage to tell the others that there was more than just a mountain, there were many.

For seven more days they hiked over many peaks and finally saw a man. Suddenly they realized that there was a raging river between them. Luckily the man was very smart and wrapped a piece of paper around a rock and threw it across the river. Nando's hands were shaking as he began to write the note, but once the pencil hit the paper he knew exactly what to say. He wrote:

*I come from the plane that fell into the mountains. I am Uruguayan. We have been walking for ten days. I have a friend up there who is injured. In the plane there are still fourteen injured people. We have to get out of here quickly and we don't know how. We don't have any food. We are weak. When are you going to come and fetch us? Please. We can't even walk. Where are we?*

He then threw the rock with note attached back over the river. The man nodded, got on his horse and went for help. The next day Nando took the rescue team to the crash site and rescued half of

the men, the other half stayed another night because there were not enough helicopters to take them home. They were rescued the next day.

Nando was a risktaker because he risked his life to save the rest of the survivors. His undying feeling to survive never ended, even when they were flying back to get the others.

For weeks they were swarmed by photographers and from that day on their lives were changed forever.

Side note - AFTER CRASH:

At the Argentina Air Force Base the paramedics came to examine the survivors, when they got to Nando they offered to take him on a gurney to the ambulance. He said "No, I've walked across the Andes and I can walk a few more steps".

Now he has a loving family with his wife Veronique and their daughters Veronica and Cecelia. He still lives in the city of Montevideo.

THE END