

Mount Pinatubo Volcano Story

April 2nd 1991, Javier Nunez and Pablo Pinto were playing a friendly game of football on the outskirts of the town Angeles, where they lived, in the Philippines. All of a sudden hordes of tribesmen came running towards them. 'What is all that about' said Javier to Pablo, 'why on earth is everyone running from the mountain?' Pablo pointed to the sky with a look of horror on his face 'LOOK!' he shouted. As they both looked up into the clear blue sky a large cloud of grey smoke was beginning to rise from the summit of Mount Pinatubo.

Meanwhile, Professor Kelly Brooklyn, a scientist at the Volcano Institute in Manila was looking extremely worried. In the last hour over 400 volcanic quakes had been recorded. Panic began to set in. Mount Pinatubo had remained dormant for the last 600 years and today it had been awoken.

Javier and Pablo had rushed home as fast as their legs could carry them and burst through the doors of Pablo's grandfather's house. 'Grandfather Mount Pinatubo has started to release grey clouds and ash into the sky. It's going to erupt, it's going to erupt, what shall we do?' Pablo's grandfather continued to swing in his old wooden rocking chair in the corner of the room by the hot coal fire. 'I don't know what you're worrying about. That old mountain is sleeping, nothing has woke it up for the last 600 years and it's certainly not going to be woken up today!' Pablo's grandfather said with confidence. 'But look!' Pablo and Javier shouted together pointing to Pinatubo through the old wooden window. Pablo's grandfather rose slowly out of his chair, took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes 'I can't believe it, you're right, what's happening?'

Brad Johnson and Charlotte Smith were sitting in their Land Rover at the American Clarke Air Force Base playing cards. 'Black Jack' shouted Charlotte in her proudest voice, 'I won again, that's another pack of chewing gum you owe me Brad' but Brad was not concerned that he lost yet another game of cards to Charlotte. 'What's the matter?' Charlotte asked wondering what could possibly be distracting Brad from the card game. 'Look up there' Brad pointed to the large cloud of gas and ash that was pouring from Mount Pinatubo, blocking sunlight and making Clark Air Force Base look extremely dark. Charlotte turned, reached for her seatbelt and drove at speed to the commander's office to inform him of the eruption.

Monitoring at the volcano institute reveals that volcanic activity from Mount Pinatubo is increasing daily. Professor Brooklyn begins to worry and raises the alert that Pinatubo will have a major volcanic eruption within just 2 weeks. Swarms of earthquakes hit Angeles on June 5th and Professor Brooklyn orders the government to start the evacuation.

'Hurry' cried Javier's mother while ordering him to pack up his belongings ready for the evacuation. 'We need to gather up as much as we can because if the volcano erupts our house could be destroyed, go and help your father load the truck up outside'. Javier's family was lucky; his father had a good job on a large farm near Pinatubo and was able to borrow the farm's truck to help them move to the temporary shelters in Manila. Pablo lived next door and was not so lucky but Javier convinced his father to help Pablo's family too. Javier and Pablo were unhappy because they had to leave a lot of their possessions behind as there was no room in the truck. 'Why do we have to leave' Pablo moaned, 'I like it here and I bet that the volcano's not going to blow anyway because it's been puffing out gas for two months now'. Javier agreed but over 20,000 people who lived within 6 miles of the volcano had to relocate to temporary shelters. At least they would be able to take some of their belongings with them unlike most of the people in their town when the time comes for them to leave their homes.

Brad and Charlotte were watching the news report on the TV at Clark Air Force Base. 'I feel so sorry for all these people that have had to leave their homes. I can't imagine what that would feel like' Charlotte said. 'Yeah' said Brad 'it makes me realise how fortunate we are because some of these people are so poor that they have to carry their belongings down the long dusty road to Manila'. Suddenly there was a large deep rumbling noise coming from the direction of the volcano. Brad and Charlotte shot up from their comfy seats and gasped when they saw what was happening outside the window. With an almighty roar Mount Pinatubo had released the largest, darkest ash cloud to date.

Alarms started sounding at the Volcano Institute in Manila. Recording equipment revealed that Pinatubo had released a massive amount of gas and fumes from its summit. Measurements of ash were off the scale. Professor Brooklyn panicked. A massive eruption was now predicted to happen within 24 hours.

3 days passed and Pinatubo was releasing more and more gas and ash. June 10th, Clark Air Force Base was ordered to evacuate. The threat from the volcano was now real. 14,000 Americans were to leave for a Navy base 14 miles away. Brad and Charlotte now realised the danger they were actually in. 'I can't believe this is happening, what are all the people going to do when they lose their homes? Where are they going to live? How will they survive?' Brad worried. 'I wish there was something we could do to stop the volcano but nothing can stop a natural hazard. At least most people have been evacuated and sent to a place where they will be safe' Charlotte replied. They packed up their belongings and started their journey to the Navy base.

June 12th, the wait is over. At 8.51 am Pinatubo blows ash 12 miles into the sky. The blast lit up the sky with red hot lava spurting from the crater of the volcano. For miles around hot ash piled up on the fields, cars and buildings. Animals were killed in the fields and people buried in their homes as roofs collapsed under the weight of the ash. There was panic in Angeles. Javier and Pablo's families were one of the last to leave their homes. Javier's father knew it was time to leave when the volcano began to project lava down its flanks. They fled with their belongings and livestock over roads made slippery by the falling ash. People wore cardboard boxes with air and peepholes to protect themselves from the ash. The ash was so thick in the air at noon; Javier's father had to drive with headlights on and wipers operating rapidly to clear the debris. There was panic everywhere, children were crying, people were grabbing whatever possessions they could. Javier's father found it hard to control the truck and kept swerving side to side to avoid large pieces of rock that showered down from the sky. Pablo and Javier were scared; they had never been so scared before in their entire lives. They wished they had left for the shelters a long time ago now as they didn't realise how dangerous a volcanic eruption was. Buildings were collapsing with the weight of the hot ash and rocks that were flying in the air from the volcano. Javier's father was following the stream of trucks and people trying to get away from the death and destruction of Pinatubo.

The eruptions continued for 2 days, 80,000 people had now left their homes and had to relocate to temporary shelters. Professor Kelly Brooklyn at the Volcano Institute had not seen an eruption of this size for half a century. Weather predictions showed that a typhoon was heading for the Philippines which made the situation even worse.

June 15th, the finale begins. 2am the largest ash cloud so far projected from Pinatubo, streams down the volcano. The typhoon mixes with the ash cloud and makes rain like wet concrete. The mixture makes 10am look like midnight. It is pitch black, the only light is from car headlights. Monitoring stations are knocked out, everything is destroyed. By midnight the eruption is over.

Brad and Charlotte watched the death and destruction of the volcano unfold on the small TV in the Navy base. Clark Air Force Base was destroyed. They had only been there two days previous. 'The volcano could have blown at any time' Brad said, 'we were so lucky, look at all those people on the TV that have lost their homes and even been killed'. Charlotte watched in horror as she realised that it could easily have been her in the path of the hot ash cloud, or trapped beneath a collapsed building.

Professor Kelly Brooklyn could not believe what had unfolded before her eyes. Even though she had saved the lives of tens of thousands of people by evacuating them from danger, she still could not believe how nature could cause such devastation in such a short space of time.

Javier and Pablo awake. Their nightmare was real. The families returned to their village the following month. Their home was destroyed; everything in their village was ruined. Mudflows had swept through the village and washed their house away. All they had left was the few belongings they had in the truck. Everyone knew of someone that was killed during the eruption. Even though they were now homeless, they were the lucky ones. They were alive.

Questions

1. How was it known that the volcano was going to erupt?
2. Describe what it was like during the volcanic eruption.
3. What damage did the volcano cause?
4. Describe how you would feel if you were a villager like Javier or Pablo.
5. Describe how you would feel if you were an American soldier like Brad or Charlotte.
6. Describe how you would feel if you were a scientist like Professor Kelly Brooklyn.