



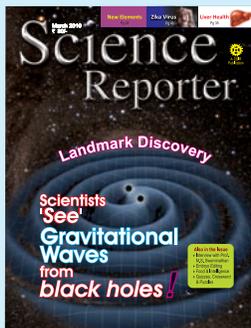
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TRAGEDY ON THE ICY HEIGHTS

Lance Naik Hanumanthappa, the last surviving brave Indian soldier, finally breathed his last on 11th February 2016 after battling for his life for almost eight days.

An avalanche had buried the soldier's camp along with nine of his colleagues on the icy heights of the Siachen Glacier on February 3. While the lives of his camp colleagues were snuffed out before rescuers reached them, soldier Hanumanthappa was rescued alive after being buried under 35 feet of snow for six days. However, the soldier lost the struggle for his life two days later.

Surviving at a height of around 19000 feet on the Siachen glacier is all about braving the odds and fighting the elements of nature. It is physically and medically not possible to live in those conditions beyond three months. Our brave soldiers stationed on the icy heights have to battle the extreme cold, in which a bath means a sponge bath and as simple a task as walking is a torture. Snow blizzards further reduce the temperature to as low as 60 degrees below zero. Snowstorms on the Siachen glacier can last for as long as three weeks and winds here can touch speeds of 100 mph in no time. Avalanches are like death from the skies. The avalanches at Siachen are more dangerous as they are solid blocks of ice.

The extreme cold means the food intake is drastically reduced which means soldiers end up losing body weight drastically. With the lack of oxygen at those heights breathing is a big problem. Only 10% of the oxygen is available at those heights as compared to the plains.

Frostbite and high-altitude pulmonary edema are other real dangers. Pulmonary edema is a condition where fluid gets accumulated in the lungs, making it difficult to breathe, and may also lead to coughing up blood. High-altitude cerebral edema (HACE) is another medical condition in which the brain swells with fluid because of the physiological effects of travelling to a high altitude. It involves disorientation, lethargy, and nausea among other symptoms. Soldiers are also at the risk of getting frostbite if their bare skin touches any metal object, such as the gun trigger, for more than 15 seconds. Fainting spells and pounding headaches are frequent.

Siachen is not for ordinary mortals. It is a place that only a few brave Indian soldiers can dare to venture. Our hearts go out to these brave souls who patrol the country's borders at such great heights.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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