

For weeks Central Europe anxiously awaited its first snow. The snow that brings winter sports. The same snow that has now brought death and destruction to Blons - a little village in Western Austria.

When news that two dreaded avalanches had completely engulfed this ~~small~~ ^{small} village - rescue teams ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{rushed} to the scene. ~~of the disaster.~~

They found over twenty houses submerged and many people missing. But help was at hand. The American and Swiss authorities organised ~~helicopter aid,~~ ^{aid from the air-} and supplies of all kinds were dropped by parachute.

Back at Blons, the rescuers began the heart-breaking task of digging out the entombed villagers. And specially-trained dogs were used in the race against time.

Progress reports were radioed back to central control-points - and requests, too, for more volunteers, digging-equipment, ^{restoring} life-~~saving~~ stimulants - and medical supplies to comfort frozen survivors.

As each house was uncovered - the tragic story was pieced together. The story of how thousands of tons of snow, released by the sudden rise in temperatures - had poured in on the hapless victims.

~~Many of the survivors owe their lives to the unceasing efforts of the rescue teams, many of whom have since been killed in Blons, by the threatening masses of snow.~~

Cattle, too, have been saved from a frozen tomb and brought along trenches, dug in the snow, to safety.

Few of the survivors will forget those hours of terror as they waited for the welcome sounds of rescue operations.

Further avalanches had struck at Switzerland and Germany. ~~Unusually,~~ The deathroll in Austria alone - has run well into three figures.

Still the work of rescue goes on. Helicopters bring in much-needed supplies - and fly out injured survivors for hospital treatment. (3)

Two years ago, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Austria suffered a similar catastrophe, ^{Since} then, a programme of defence works has been put into operation. This alone may have saved many lives in the country's worst avalanche disaster.