

Albania 2007 Report

Crew Members: Dave Hume, John Arnold, Durim Lepuri and Alan Hughes

The aim of this mission was to transport and drive a fully equipped Green Goddess fire appliance from Rosyth dockyard, across Europe to Albania. In Albania we were to train fire personnel in basic fire fighting and road traffic collision procedures. As this was our first visit to Albania our knowledge was limited of how little resources there Fire and Rescue service had and therefore became a fact finding mission also.

After leaving Rosyth on the ferry there were no major problems or hiccups as far as France other than a small leak of coolant which we managed to fix ourselves. We spent one night in France not far from Switzerland before tackling the mountains and tunnels of Switzerland. It was here that the appliance began to struggle. 20 or 30 miles per hour being the maximum speed downhill. Approximately two hours from the Italian border we decided to pull over due to the loss of power and requested the attendance of RAC. RAC sent out a local breakdown service known as "Mobile 24". They were successful in locating a problem with the carburettor which was adjusted and we were on our way again.

We managed around 15 miles before the appliance "blew up". Again we pulled over due to a loss of transmission, a loud rattling noise coming from the engine and a large amount of smoke billowing from the exhaust. "Mobile 24" were again in attendance and could not fix the problem at the roadside. We requested to be transported to Milan where John Arnold could investigate the problem. However due to the laws in Switzerland vehicles of this size are not permitted to operate on Sundays. So in turn we were towed to their garage in Lugano for investigation. The mechanics were not very helpful in providing a secure place to keep the fully equipped fire appliance. The accommodation was either a double bed for Dave and I or a hotel which could be politely described as extremely unsatisfactory. This was hard to believe where in the morning after a scour of the area we found Lugano to be a very well off city. We then moved to the "Holiday Inn" where we stayed for the next four days. Dave described Lugano as a "millionaire's playground" as the prices of food and drink were extortionate and the type of super cars driving around! A taxi driver took advantage of our situation and charged us 3 or 4 times what he should have. It took four days for the recovery company to take us back to where the appliance was being kept (road side petrol station car park) and to tell us it would not be drivable and would not be transported to Milan. John Arnold took the train from Milan to Lugano and it was then that we decided to hire a vehicle to transport as much equipment and our selves the rest of the way to Bari ferry port. At Bari we booked a ferry to Durris in Albania where dropped off the vehicle with hertz and the equipment was put on a pallet for transportation by ferry.

Now finally in Albania a day later than expected a van and car were arranged to transport ourselves and the equipment to the city of Lucnia where we then spent the rest of our trip.

Initially we arrived at the fire station where the personnel were extremely happy to see us and looked forward to the week ahead, even though we were unsuccessful with the arrival of a fire appliance.

As the mission entailed this was a fact finding mission and therefore had many meetings with senior fire personnel and found that the Albanian fire and rescue service was in urgent need of basic fire fighting and rescue equipment. Such as; cutting gear for road traffic collisions. During our stay we only came across one set of Lucas cutting gear which was located in the capital city of Tirana's fire station.

Fire appliances in Lucnia's station and one other fire station were very basic and not very well equipt. We described the appliances at the time as converted milk tankers. The appliance in Lucnia however did carry a 13.5m ladder which was in urgent of repair but did operate with some difficulties.

Equipment that Lucnia Fire Station received were; fire kit, one light portable pump, two lengths of hard suction, six lengths, six lengths of delivery hose, two branches, two fire helmets, three breathing apparatus sets and high-viz vests. With the listed equipment we managed to provide training in B.A. search procedures, the use of the portable pump by getting a length of hose with branch to operate from open water. We also provided some R.T.C. procedures such as glass management and stabilisation but due to a lack of equipment in this area there was no need to go any further. The use of High-Vis vests at road traffic collisions was emphasised.

Taking into consideration all that Dave, John, Durim and I have learnt about the Albanian Fire and Rescue Service, we stated that we would take home what we knew and try our best, without making any promises as it would be unfair for us to, to return with urgently needed fire and rescue equipment in the future.