Convoy 7 Paraguay

19th Feb – 7th March 2005

This was a mission which was to have been based around our 11th donated vehicle a Meteor Airport Light Foam Tender (we have called SPIRIT OF EDINBURGH)The team consisted of Myself (Davie Kay -Fife Fire And Rescue Service) ,David Hume-(BAA Fire Service) and William (Rocky)Graham –(BAA Fire Service-retired.)

We arrived at Asuncion Airport to the usual heat wave and were met by a delegation from the yellows (CBVP) and the Blues (CBVA) we had been in the air for over a day and we were exhausted so straight to the hotel and sleep. We started training on the Monday at the Special Forces base near the airport and covered subjects such as Aircraft Firefighting and Tactics how to drive and operate the Meteor and HAZMAT and Decontamination.

We had been asked to attend the Municipality Headquarters to speak to the Senators who were responsible for the Fire Legislation in the country, I was asked some questions about how things worked in Scotland and answered as best as I could. I was then asked to follow one of the representatives into a room where I was given a great honor I was awarded a Medal for helping the people of Paraguay, and to top it all we were given a police escort to and from the hotel (Davie Hume says it's the only time he has had a police escort in both directions- don't know what that means)

We also taught basic safety tactics such as door entry and flashover and back draught and finalized with a big exercise with about 35 firefighters in all and 5 Special Forces, exercise 1 did not go well but after a little chat between the officers and the firefighters (lots of press-ups) exercise 2 went 100% better and everyone enjoyed it and we all learnt things from it. We also gave a fire safety talk to staff from a shopping mall and the press which went down very well. People are still very scared by the August 1st fire and this helped make them aware of some simple precautions they could take to stay safe.

We had one final thing to do and that was to present the certificates to the 150 firefighters we had helped train this time, so we arrived at company 1 to meet the president (Rafael) and we had a few more surprises I was presented a book by one of the captains who founded the fire service in Paraguay (Ruis) he had stayed in Scotland and England and had also tried to swim the English Channel and a braver man I have never met (over eighty years old and full of energy) . I had a Scottish flag with me and I presented it to him and I thought he was going to cry it was a very emotional time for him. But it did not end there we were all called to attention and the President read out a special order naming us all Firefighter Protectors (A BIG HONOUR) We all felt choked up after that and we all felt as if the trip was worthwhile.

We completed our mission which was to train the personnel in tactics and firefighting and to raise the profile of IFRA. I can say hand on heart that this was a hard trip, tiring, hot and mentally draining but I had a good team and the guys worked their hearts out. Every time I asked something from them it was done. On returning we did find out one bad thing the day after we got back in Scotland one of the firefighters we helped train was shot and killed by a drunk driver he was trying

to help save. We send our condolences and best wishes to his family and friends, this is a country that needs a lot of help and IFRA will do all it can to make things better, at least for the Firefighters.