

Convoy 31 Romania
Richard and Paulo's Memoirs

This Mission was to deliver a donated Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service appliance to the village of Pielesti in Romania. Here we see John Arnold NFRS and IFRA (L) with Davie Kay-IFRA Director being handed the keys by Brian Hessler CFO of NFRS with a rep from Dragger



The day finally arrived for us to start our adventure. Paulo and I checked in at 13.00 hours and told to make our way to gate 13, which did not mean much to us until we realised it was Friday 13th(could this be an omen).

Had a good flight and landed at Edinburgh airport on time. As we waited for our language both our phones went off "Welcome to Scotland boys, the adventure begins". Text message from Davey Hume. Davey took us to have a quick look at his station, then off to meet Davey Kay to have a look at his station.

Got our first glimpse of the truck and met some of the guys, it was then we knew there was going to be a language barrier. We would have to learn *Jock-n-niese* and quick. June came down to pick us up and take us to meet Brian who was still at work. After a very very quick spin round Knockhill race circuit it was then food and bed. Friday 13th has now passed without any mishaps at all.

Up at 7 o'clock for breakfast then back to Dunfermline Fire Station to pack our gear and finish off the truck. Just before lunch Davey Hume joined us along with Gus, the fourth member of the team. After a quick photo shoot with Willy Rennie we were on our way to the Docks. The sun was shining and the sea was calm. All four of us were getting on like a house on fire.



As we sailed out of Scotland Davey surprised us with his vast knowledge of the area, throwing in small amounts of history. His lesson's and wealth of knowledge was to become legendary. Food, sleep.

Woke up early, mainly due to Paulo's outrageous loud snoring,



Little did I know this was going to bother me for the next sixteen days. Poor Gus managed to see his breakfast twice that morning. At 2 o'clock we said goodbye to our new found mates The Truckers (we were also allowed to sit at their table). After filling up with fuel and getting a few tips from our new mates we were on our way. We travelled through Belgium, Luxembourg and France; Germany closes on a Sunday apparently! My French came in handy as we came to the tolls, but then spent the next three hours explaining to Davey that we were not French, nor English, but my *Jock-n-niese* was coming on in leaps and bounds. Strasbourg was a nice place to stop for the night, pizza and bed.

Germany is apparently now open, so we thought we'd grace them with our presence. Davey once again amazed us with his command of the German language. Just before we crossed over to Austria, Davey and I decided to have a well earned rest and let Paulo do some driving, what could possibly go wrong? "Davey, Davey, Davey the Police are pulling us over" Davey then spoke those mortal words "What have you done". We did as we were told and pulled over, only because they had guns. We stood on the hard shoulder. As the Policeman got closer we all looked at him, before he could say anything we pointed to Davey and said "He is in charge" Davey's face was a picture. We were soon on our way and into Austria. Then into Vienna where we stopped for the night, food and bed.

Crossed over into Hungary, sun is shining, traffic good and the truck is cruising at 70 mph, heading towards the Hungarian Romanian boarder. Then the fun starts. Just before the boarder we met up with the Chief Fire Officer and Yarn one of the fire-fighters, nervously we drove towards the border control. Davey had already warned us about what to expect, hassle and lots of it. With our passports in our hands we jumped off the truck. Leo walked towards us with a big smile on his face. The Romanian boarder guards said okay we can go through, but the Hungarian boarder guards wanted 1000 euros. Leo said no and all I wanted was my passport back, 15 minutes later Leo still had a smile on his face. We got our passports back and we were allowed through the boarder. Never did find out what Leo said to them, but it did the trick.

The all night drive through Romania to the village was quite a blur, twelve hours of hard driving trying to keep up with Leo. He did a great job of looking after us. How ever when we asked him how long he lulled us by saying almost there only another few hours. He even stopped to show us landmarks etc. My lasting memory of that drive was one of excitement and nervousness, it seemed like truck after truck was trying to run us off the road. We arrived in the village at about 10 am, unloaded and straight to bed. We had been up for over 24 hours. The road trip was over.

Later that day we went to meet the Mayor and the villagers, what a turn out, they were genuinely pleased to see us. We had photographs taken and given gifts. We meet the fire fighters that we would be training and with the help of Dan and Corrina the interrupters we expressed our pleasure to finally be with them. Over the next few weeks Dan and Corrina were to be worth their weight in gold. Not only were they brilliant interrupters they were also friendly, helpful and a real pleasure to be with not only on the drill ground but in our down time as well. They were both enthusiastic and professional with a real passion for what they were doing which is what you need when you are along way from home. I found myself feeling home sick at times but having people like Dan, Corrina, Leo and Gill with us made a big difference.

Over the next 2 weeks all four of us got to teach the lads as much as we could, cramming in Ladder Drills, RTC, First Aid, Fireman-ship, BA, Pump operating and we even got to put a couple of fires out. It was not all work; during our time there we were treated so well, being taken to different houses for BBQ, s we even went to a christening and a wedding.



Paulo, Gus, Davey and I decided it would be good to demonstrate the pitch. We found a suitable building with no windows. Just as we were about to under run the ladder, in front of 30 + people Davey said be gentle with me I have only done this once before or words to that effect. What a team it went up perfectly first time. We split up into groups to tackle all the different things. It took a bit of time but in the end, they could slip and pitch the ladder with confidence. Enthusiasm, cigarette brakes and a pep talk from Corrina seemed to do the trick.

Hose running in 38 deg heat up and down a dirt track seemed to take its toll on us all. Up and down we went. Knock off make up. Start again. We split up into groups and made a bit of a competition of it. When my group wasn't running hose I was under a tree trying to cool down. At the same time Gus was away sorting the pump out and teaching the drivers to pump from open water. Yarn and the other drivers seemed to pick this up very quickly. The guys made all the same mistakes we did at training school; it was called hose Tuesday in our day.



First aid started off with resuscitation, all was going well, but we had no mannequin so Paulo had to improvise with a pillow to show the compressions. The lads were doing well until they decided they wanted to do the compressions on each other. It was at this point we had to stop them before they killed each other. They picked this up very quick so we moved on to treating fractures, bleeding, burns and spinal injuries. All in all everybody got a new skill, even Dan and Corrina.

Gus and Paulo took the lads for RTC training. The Romanian fire-fighters are very practical people and picked up the operation of the tools very quickly. We then talked through safety at RTC's before we demonstrated stabilization and door opening. Once we had shown them how to do it they each had a go on the tools and we were very pleased with their performance. We were given four vehicles for the training, three of these vehicles had laminated front screens and the fourth vehicle, which we kept for displaying to the villagers and the mayor, Paulo did not check the front screen to see if it was laminated!!! So, to Paulo's surprise the fire-fighters tasked to break and cut the screen of the fourth vehicle, when he put the axe straight through the screen and nearly took the casualties head off as the glass shattered. This is a lesson for us all...check the screen before you hit it!



The day soon came round for us all to put our training to the test. We would be doing a display for the entire village, the Mayor and Full time Fire -Fighters from the city. The lads got split up into teams, ladder drill, RTC and fire fighting team. Davey got us all to attention and detailed the drill; I think I was just as nervous as the guys. All the drills went very well the lads were so proud of themselves. The hard work had all paid off. The job of starting a small fire was left to Gus and me, famous last words "do you think we need a bit more petrol Gus "Woooooofff. We just managed to jump out the way. Well it made all the villages laugh! Sorry Davey ...

Not long after the display had finished we got a call to go to a fire on some open land. Davey took five of us in the truck and the rest of the guys went in a car, all nine of them in full gear with beaters hanging out the back. We soon named them the ANT HILL MOB. The guys worked so hard that night, but still put on a BBQ for us when we got back. It turned out that the fire was on grazing land. To say the farmer was pleased would be an understatement. A job well done!

It was time for us to say our goodbyes we had both made some great friends, and had the most fantastic time. With a real sense of achievement, Paulo and I were on the flight back to sunny Jersey a round trip of 18 days, I did tell my wife it would be 10 days max... not sure why she didn't pick me up at the airport.



Same time next year Davey and Gus??????????????